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# School Counselors' Professional Development Needs for Preparing Diverse Learners for College

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Natalie White

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

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College

by

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MS, Texas A&M University-Commerce, 2008

BS, Texas A&M University-Commerce, 2002

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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October 2019

## Abstract

Prevalent literature about school counselors' professional development (PD) needs to prepare diverse learners for college is in short supply. Simultaneously, school counselors oftentimes encounter role confusion due to misperceptions of their job responsibilities by educational leaders. This discrepancy has led to the completion of noncounseling assignments, thus prohibiting counselors in this study from appropriate training and adhering to college readiness mandates for all students. This study explored high school counselors' attitudes about their PD needs to prepare diverse students for college in an urban populated school district located in southern Texas. The conceptual framework that guided this study defines school counselors' motivation to improve college access for diverse students when counselors learn information that is practical to their job activities. A qualitative case study was used to answer the question of how counselors perceive their PD needs to prepare diverse learners for college. Data were collected from 8 high school counselors through semistructured interviews and documents of counselors' PD profiles that were analyzed and coded to develop themes. Results established that participants had not received PD about college readiness, and they had not taken the initiative to advocate this need for themselves. Notably, counselors in the study indicated that developing a professional learning community with local colleges would be an effective approach to their professional growth. Although this study immediately benefits counselors in the participating school district, this study also provides information that may expand college enrollment for diverse students. Findings from this study not only will help close the gap between diverse students and their counterparts, but findings from this study may also help enhance PD for school counselors in surrounding school districts.

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## Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; you are the one who gave me the strength and courage to keep going. Without you Lord, this study would not have been possible.

This study is also dedicated to the memory of my father, the late Reverend James C. White, a prayer warrior who exemplified the word “fighter”. My father fought a good fight, finished his course, and he kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). By my father’s example, I was empowered to fight through long hours of research and finish this study. It is my desire to stay driven and strive for excellence through continuous learning.

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I would also like to thank my mother, Mae Lois White, for instilling in me the importance of education. You have modeled what it means to love education through 48 years of teaching. I cannot believe you are still in the classroom shining your light. You are a true example of what it means to be an educator, one who has no fear of learning or teaching because you set high expectations for yourself and your students.

I am grateful to work with supportive school counselors, and to have a supervisor, Valerie Mayad, who understood the importance of this study. I knew all of you were rooting for me. Thank you for your wiliness to contribute to this study with enthusiasm.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Professional development (PD) for high school counselors is mandatory to meet the 5-year renewal requirement as a certified counselor (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2016). According to the ASCA (2016), counselors are mandated to complete 200 hours of PD every 5 years from either of the following entities: workshops, staff development, institutes, seminars, or conferences. Although PD is available to high school counselors, additional evidence on what PD training counselors need to prepare diverse learners for college is necessary (Morgan, Greenwalt, & Gosselin, 2014). Evidence on what PD training counselors need is important due to recent concerns about increasing inequities in postsecondary education that has questioned the quality of college readiness counseling received among diverse students in high school (Savitz-Romer, 2012). According to Engberg and Gilbert (2014), counselors are prepared for training all of their students for college; however, counselors have minimal preparation in career counseling strategies that guide students through complex college choices (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014). Morgan et al. (2014) reported that school counselors across the world have little to no training on college readiness for diverse learners. This information indicates capturing the opinions of high school counselors about what training they need to equip diverse students for postsecondary education may help to improve college access for underrepresented students.

In this study, I addressed a problem in an urban populated school district referred as Hunt ISD (pseudonym) about PD training high school counselors need regarding college readiness for the diverse learners, an omission that can influence counselor value

and student achievement (Bryan, Day-Vines, Holcomb-McCoy, & Moore-Thomas, 2011). My purpose in this study was to understand what PD training high school counselors in Hunt ISD need to guide and support diverse learners with reaching their college readiness goals. I also sought to discover any resources that would benefit counselors with future growth, development, and efficacy as counseling professionals. I used a case study design by conducting interviews with high school counselors at the study site to examine if counselors needed more PD training on college readiness for diverse learners through the eyes of high school counselors in Hunt ISD.

Hunt ISD has implemented a significant amount of campus PD sessions to improve academic achievement for disadvantaged students in recent years due to accountability measures set by state officials. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 initiated this current push for college readiness that placed pressure on schools to focus solely on teachers and enforcing the following mandates: use standardized tests to improve student performance, publicize schools' average performance, and reward schools based on their students' execution on standardized exams (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2010). Due to the NCLB act, the Obama administration reformed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with orders that include the following: enhance teacher and principal effectiveness, help families refine schools, apply college readiness guidelines, and upgrade student intellect in low achieving schools (USDE, 2010).

Although efforts have been made to meliorate student achievement, Dahir, Burham, and Stone (2009) mentioned that the majority of these opportunities have placed much attention on teachers, not school counselors. The same is true for high school counselors in Hunt ISD where campus PD is strictly teacher related, and high school

counselors work in isolation catching up on 504 paperwork, returning parent phone calls, and completing any other deadline that is deemed necessary (Hunt ISD school counselor, personal communication, October 15, 2016).

In this study, I produced insight on what PD training high school counselors in Hunt ISD perceived they need to increase college readiness among diverse learners. In this study, I sought to determine whether high school counselors' perceptions of their knowledge with regard to preparing diverse students for college had been met through available PD courses. Finally, my work will add to the body of knowledge by demonstrating how PD can be supported in efforts to assist high school counselors with future growth, development, and efficacy as counseling professionals.

### **Definition of the Problem**

School counselors in an urban school district have little to no college readiness training to prepare diverse learners for college (Hunt ISD school counselor, personal communication, October 15, 2016). According to Gilfillan (2018), 37% of high school counselors who are accountable for their students' postsecondary education are required to attend PD. This is an important gap in practice because PD for school counselors has the potential to influence counselor quality and student attainment (ASCA, 2012). I found that providing PD on ways to increase college access for diverse learners may be an effective strategy to help school counselors with adequate knowledge and skills (Bryan, Young, Griffin & Henry, 2015). I specified what counselors need by gathering their perceptions on training that could benefit their profession.

The school district where the study took place has five high schools that are urban populated. The five high schools house 2,100 to 3,000 students. The two largest high

schools have six academic counselors, one career and technical education counselor, and five assistant principals. The remaining high schools have four academic counselors and one career and technical education counselor. Although counselors at the smaller high schools are responsible for guiding an assigned caseload of 400 students each, counselors at the larger two high schools are responsible for guiding an assigned caseload of at least 500 students each. With large caseloads and the rising number of culturally diverse schools, school counselors are in need of training that specifically meets their needs (Patterson, 2015).

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of Problem at the Local Level**

School counselors in Hunt ISD typically attend campus PD that is designed for teachers (Hunt ISD school counselor, personal communication, April 22, 2017).

Moreover, counselors in Hunt ISD have not attended campus PD that specifically addresses college readiness for diverse learners (Hunt ISD school counselor, personal communication, April 22, 2017). According to Brown et al. (2016), a need exists for school counselor education programs and PD to address the gap in counselor training and support.

Brown et al. (2016) mentioned the need for uniformed counselor instruction and guidance on college readiness practices that directly affect underrepresented students. However, information on how counselors can implement college readiness practices is limited (Turner et al., 2019). The state of school counselor college readiness training is reflective in Hunt ISD where counselors receive little to no training and data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2015) indicated only 35% of students in Hunt ISD are

college ready in two or more subject areas. The lack of college training for counselors in this study may reflect the low college readiness rate among diverse students in Hunt ISD.

The following percentages represent the number of college ready students in Hunt ISD for the 2015 school year according to standardized assessment: 75% Asian, 45% White, 45% American Indian, 29% Pacific Islander, 38% two or more races, 35% Hispanic, 31% economically disadvantaged, 26% African American, 18% English language learners, and 5% special education (TEA, 2016). TEA's (2016) data suggested that students in Hunt ISD do not leave high school prepared for postsecondary education. Information collected from Hunt ISD's executive summary recognized two of the many challenges counselors face is helping students with postsecondary education and inconsistent counselor duties ("District Effectiveness," 2015). Although Hunt ISD suggested a goal in the executive summary to improve PD for counselors in upcoming years, the goal mentioned training in the areas of mental health and overall job effectiveness ("District Effectiveness," 2015). Identifying specific tools school counselors need to ready diverse learners for college has yet to be known in Hunt ISD.

The gap between the PD that school counselors believe they need to improve college readiness for diverse learners, and the significance of how counselors will help their students use this advice was demonstrated in this study. As reported by the National Survey of School Counselors, 71% of school counselors claimed that academic guidance related to college readiness was critical; however, 31% of counselors stated that their school was successful in making this desire a reality (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) suggested that administrators and counselor educators need to be aware of what is important to school counselors in regards to helping students with

college readiness. According to an administrator in Hunt ISD, many principals are unaware that the educational component that addresses college readiness is missing from school counselor graduate programs (district administrator, personal communication, May 6, 2016). In addition to being unaware of preservice training for counselors, principals are also unaware of in-service training for counselors because Hunt ISD assigns someone other than building principals to oversee district PD for school counselors (Hunt ISD school counselor, personal communication, May 6, 2016). A Hunt ISD school counselor suggested that administrators assume school counselors have extensive knowledge about the college planning process for all students and expect counselors to execute this task along with other administrative duties (personal communication, May 6, 2016). According to Savitz-Romer (2012), incongruence exists between counselor graduate training and career expectations of school counselors. Furthermore, Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) noted a rising amount of research suggested diverse students, particularly African American and Latino, are more likely to have less well-trained counselors who are required to give up college counseling for other obligations.

### **Evidence of the Problem in the Larger Educational Setting**

By 2020, more than half of all jobs in the United States will have need of training beyond a secondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Currently, a shortage exists of a skilled workforce for the 21st century throughout the United States (Neumark, Johnson, & Mejia, 2013). Neumark et al. (2013) stated this skill shortage may be due to states with high levels of undereducated citizens, primarily from minority populations. Neumark et al. suggested implementing ways to educate diverse individuals to meet the

21st-century workforce demands. According to Carnevale et al. (2010), the demand for an educated workforce has outpaced the production of college graduates in the United States by almost 3 million graduates. Achieve Inc., the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2012), added that there has not been any improvement in college completion rates among students in the United States in more than 3 decades. Currently, almost half of all students in the United States do not complete college within 6 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These findings suggest students do not leave high school prepared for postsecondary education.

College readiness for diverse learners stem from recent accountability standards that suggest all schools must prepare students for college and/or career readiness. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), the Obama administration developed a blueprint for revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESCA) due to the United States' decline in college participation and completion rate. The blueprint suggested that the United States was once first in leading all countries in college participation and it is now ranked 13th among all nations (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This information encouraged the federal government to place much attention on school reform with the objective of ensuring students from all backgrounds graduate from high school equipped for college. President Obama added to this initiative by stating, "By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). Because school counselors are responsible for preparing students for life after high school, this mandate poses questions as to how administrators and counselor educators will know what school counselors need

to be successful at preparing all students for college regardless of the following factors: income, race, language, and disability status. The U.S. Department of Education's new development infers counselors will need to create abilities to break barriers that may hinder student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). To better understand what school counselors need to meet college readiness standards for serving diverse learners, it was important to explore how counselors perceive their competencies and PD needs for guiding diverse learners toward college readiness goals.

PD for counselors that addresses college readiness for all learners is not only a concern to practicing school counselors, but it has also become a concern for former First Lady Michelle Obama. Michelle Obama (2014) stated in her declaration at the ACA Annual Conference, "Our secretary of education knows that every school counselor in this country should have quality, relevant PD opportunities, end of story" (para. 24). Mrs. Obama's statement highlighted her Reach Higher initiative that encourages every student in America to receive an education past high school. Mrs. Obama added to this statement by acknowledging the critical role school counselors play in making this vision happen with challenging demands placed on their time. In addition to acknowledging the need for valuable PD for school counselors, Mrs. Obama urged all school officials to offer PD courses applicable to counselors' job responsibilities. This statement suggested that school counselors have not been trained on what they are expected to carry out on a daily basis. Perera and Mason (2012) stated that research has shown school counselors to use in supervision geared toward organizational roles in lieu of improving counselor proficiency. Although PD for practicing school counselors is a key factor to improving college access for all learners, insufficient evidence shows school counselors have been

given the opportunity to voice their opinions about what training they need to prepare underrepresented students for college (National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, 2011). My purpose in this study was to identify what school counselors need to ready diverse learners for post-secondary education.

### **Definition of Terms**

*American School Counseling Association (ASCA) national model:* The ASCA National Model is the structure that guides a complete school counseling program that is solely driven by data (ASCA, 2012). The following systems are embedded in this prototype: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. This template was modified in 2012 to assist school counselors with their school counseling programs.

*College readiness:* A term that signifies a student can enter college right out of high school without repeating a course and strongly complete basic college courses (Achieve, 2013).

*Diverse learners:* A term used to describe a group of students that include the following: students with disabilities, English language learners, students who live in rural areas, students who are homeless, students who are migrant, students who are neglected, students who are delinquent, students who are American Indian, students who are Native Hawaiian, students who are Alaska Natives, or students who attend schools that receive aid for diverse learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

*Professional school counselor:* A professional school counselor holds either a master's degree in school counseling or a master's degree in an affiliated field along with a school counseling certificate. A school counselor is certified to adhere to all students' educational, personal, and vocational needs. "The school counselor serves as a leader as

well as an effective team member working with each other, teachers, administrators, other school personnel, and community members to help each student succeed” (The Education Trust, 2013, p.1).

### **Significance of the Study**

A PD need exists for high school counselors who are called to help all students plan for postsecondary education (Hilling, 2017). This information is significant to public schools and partnering colleges in Hunt ISD because in this study, I provided data to potentially aid in improving PD for school counselors as well as help increase college enrollment for diverse learners. Counselors have reported that their school counselor education programs do not train counselors on college planning for students (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Therefore, results from this study addressed an opportunity for in-service high school counselors to participate in campus PD sessions that are geared toward diversity and college readiness. By collecting data, I also attempted to show how PD for high school counselors can strengthen counselors’ self-assurance when working with students who come from different backgrounds than their own, and increase college access for underrepresented learners.

This study is also significant because in it, I addressed the United States’ low college completion rate and the state’s future need for highly skilled workers. Belesco (2013) stated that although the number students who attend college have increased, a gap still exists in the number of students who complete college in addition to inequities in college access. Belesco (2013) further noted that this gap is due to inaccurate information diverse students acquired with regard to financial aid and college admissions. Results from this study affect social change through the enhancements in PD programs to better

educate counselors, college recruiters, and teachers about college preparation for learners who have been underrepresented. This, in turn, may affect how college opportunities for distinct learners are disseminated to parents and future students. After all, Bryan et al. (2011) stated that social capital associated with college processes may be directly given to students through parental involvement with school personnel, such as school counselors and has shown to increase college enrollment among diverse students.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that I addressed are related to school counselors' knowledge about college readiness. The following is the primary research question: How do school counselors perceive their PD needs in the area of college readiness for diverse students? To answer the research question, two areas of counselors' competence addressed multicultural awareness and career development. Secondary research questions will include the following:

1. What are the challenges faced by school counselors in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college?
2. How do school counselors in Hunt ISD describe the PD they receive for preparing diverse learners for college?
3. What are the PD needs of school counselors in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

Knox's (1980) proficiency theory of adult learning served as the framework to guide this study given its ability to demonstrate PD needs for school counselors in Hunt ISD. Proficiency theory is used as "a unified concept to describe the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improved performance, which motivates adult learning" (Knox, 1980, p. 378). Knox's statement suggested that adult learners are fulfilled by how well they can produce outcomes as a result of learning new information that is useful to their daily roles. Although the ASCA (2012) has clearly defined best practices for school counselors, counselors often find themselves a part of organizations where their role is incongruent with their educational training. Therefore, the proficiency theory framework is important to this study to understand school counselors' attitudes towards their PD requirements. This information is useful to help build confidence in high school counselors' ability to increase college access for diverse learners. Knox argued that adults can satisfactorily perform if given the opportunity. However, high school counselors in the district under study lack meaningful knowledge that is current with the expectations of today's education system. Proficiency theory informed the nature of the study by providing valuable feedback regarding counselors' desired competence about higher education for diverse students.

According to Green (2002), the basis of Knox's theory is the idea that an inconsistency exists between present and aspired levels of proficiency. The ASCA (2012) stated that school counselors should demonstrate proficiency in the following areas: classroom guidance, individual planning, responsive services, and systems support.

Within these domains, school counselors are responsible for career planning and multicultural awareness (ASCA, 2012). These factors not only illustrate the many roles of school counselors, but these factors also illustrate the need for continuous PD to meet student competencies within the school setting. Gysber and Henderson (2000) suggested that school counselors who lack any skills related to the comprehensive school counseling model may be at a disadvantage. Therefore, school officials should know and understand what professional tools and skills school counselors will need to adroitly serve diverse populations. When counseling professionals convey their growth and development needs, they are able to reveal topics in which they seek proficiency while communicating their preferred job responsibilities that will help strengthen these areas. Counselors in this study were able to convey their desired proficiency by participating in individual interviews and given research questions that helped answer what school counselors need to feel secure about college readiness for diverse learners.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

My pursuit of literature included current journal articles to identify present-day perspectives on PD needs for school counselors and how this need is imperative to the development of college readiness for diverse learners. I used the following databases through Walden University's Library: ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, SAGE, and Academic Search Complete. Information also came from ASCA, NCES, and NACAC's websites. The research essentially focused on perceptions of school counselors, college readiness, PD, diverse learners, and career counseling. The search for PD based on school counselors' perceptions reflects what authors have already found by conducting their own research. The following topics are in the literature review section: (a) college readiness

for diverse learners, (b) training school counselors about college readiness, (c) career counseling for diverse students, (d) PD for school counselors, (e) continuing education for school counselors, (f) college access for diverse learners, (g) career development and school counselors.

I also examined the influence that school counselors have on their students' career choices and the role counselors play in college access (Adams, 2014). My review attempted to collectively show, when school counselors receive college readiness training for diverse learners, that they can begin to include college readiness practices into their job responsibilities that will assist students with college completion (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). New counseling strategies for reaching diverse students are critical for future skills required in tomorrow's workforce (Neumark et al., 2013).

AACU and Hart Research Associate (2013) agreed that a growing need exists for industry workers with problem solving and critical thinking skills and claimed that school counselors' need for PD has become increasingly recognized because of this omission. According to Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, and Eder (2011), researchers have not concluded that counselors in general positively influence students' career choices. However, the researchers found that career counseling activities have positively affected students by improving their problem solving abilities. Whiston et al. (2011) suggested that visiting with a counselor about postsecondary options alone does not have a significant effect on a student's ability to critically think. Rather, the skills counselors give students while participating in career exercises are more meaningful with regard to career selection. Knowledge of career activities that would benefit school counselors' while interacting with students may produce undeniable outcomes with regard to postsecondary choice.

Mabula and Edna (2015) indicated in their study that PD could be used to keep counselors current with activities that may impact students' postsecondary choices.

Although Mabula et al. (2015) determined that PD keeps counselors current with postsecondary options for students, Young and Kefferburger (2015) mentioned in their study to measure the effects of PD for school counselors to improve college and career readiness that teaching counselors accountability strategies is a method to validate ways in which counselors improve college readiness for all students. However, Young and Kefferburger stated that teaching accountability measures in PD classes remains a challenge for counselor educators. PD is most effective when the training goals match the needs of the participants and when it involves review and practice and reinforcement through ongoing coaching.

President Barack Obama (2011) mentioned the move toward science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to meet 21st-century workforce standards in his State of the Union Address. School counselors should become more knowledgeable about STEM programs due to their role in career planning. Schmidt, Hardinge, and Rokutani (2012) examined three focus groups conducted in 2006 and 2010 with counselors involving the addition of STEM into their school counseling programs. Themes from these studies indicated counselors had little to no time to address career opportunities with students. In fact, Clinedinst and Koranteng, (2017) discovered public school counselors spend 21% of their time communicating with students about college and careers. When careers were discussed, counselors placed less attention on STEM opportunities. According to Schmidt (2012), counselors dealt with more common careers, namely those careers that seemed more familiar to them. These findings suggest school

counselors are occupied with other duties and lack current knowledge about 21st-century workforce standards that can be addressed during PD.

School counselors are obligated to serve all students. Therefore, their knowledge of diverse backgrounds is imperative with regard to college access. According to Dodson (2013), “Counselors are unsure if they are prepared for multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial students” (p. 18). Therefore, Dodson (2013) explored counselors’ self-perceived multicultural competence through a demographic survey as well as the multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness scale. The demographics survey was used to discover the following: counseling experience, age, gender, race, highest level of education, population of the school, number of acquired multicultural classes, number of multicultural workshops visited, and program accreditation. On the other hand, the MCKAS was used to assess multicultural knowledge as well as multicultural awareness. Dodson (2013) found a difference between awareness and knowledge of diverse students and he suggested these findings can be used to improve multicultural courses and to advocate for PD opportunities.

In addition to Dodson (2013), Mayorga, Furgerson, Cook, and Wardle (2013) also sought to understand school counselors’ perceptions of their multicultural competence by using the Multicultural Counseling and Training Survey. Counselors’ multicultural training, their personal cultural development, and their competence with other cultures were examined. Although many researchers have found that counselors perceive themselves to be culturally competent, Mayorga et al. (2013) found that less than half of counselors had not attended any multicultural training in the course of 2 years and knew nothing about the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD).

In addition, half of counselors in Mayorga's et al. (2013) study claimed to be relatively competent in ten areas on the multicultural counseling and training survey, which indicated counselors need more training to meet the demands of today's educational environment.

In another study, Chao (2013) measured the relationship between race/ethnicity, color-blind racial attitudes, and multicultural counseling competence. Chao found counselors who worked with minority groups had limited multicultural training and high levels of multicultural awareness. However, Caucasian counselors received extensive multicultural training and had low levels of multicultural awareness. When Caucasian counselors received more training, their multicultural awareness improved as opposed to counselors of minority groups. Although Caucasian counselors received more training than counselors of minority groups, Chao discovered that counselors of minority groups administered more multicultural counseling to help their diverse students become successful than Caucasian counselors due to multicultural awareness. Chao stated that when Caucasian counselors alter their attitudes of color blindness, their time spent completing multicultural counseling is much greater than counselors of minority students. These findings not only signify a difference between awareness and knowledge, but also signify counselors' success with diverse students is based various levels of training within distinct cultures. Results from Chao's study justify Packer-Williams, Jay, and Evan's (2010) qualitative research that determined that not all counselors incorporate multicultural counseling into their programs due to finite training and support. This information is of significant value to my research because it conveys counselors need training to help diverse students academically succeed.

Bryan et al. (2011) argued that frequent contact with counselors about college can affect college application rates. The study suggested that counselors' availability to their students is a vital connection to college counseling that involves college enrollment, college choice, and college information as a whole. However, although college counseling is deemed important, Bryan et al. added that college counseling has not been a part of school counselor training, yet counselors have been criticized for the counseling services given to Black and Latino students. In addition to no college training, Bryan et al. stated that counselors who predominately have Black and Latino students are more likely to be forced to put noncounselor duties before college counseling.

Similar to the current issue that prompted this study, Stone-Johnson (2015) orchestrated interviews with school counselors and teachers to understand a college readiness challenge in a suburban high school. Like Stone-Johnson's (2015) study, Hunt High School is located in the suburbs; however, 75% of its student body is made up urban learners. Results from Stone-Johnson's (2015) study indicated that counselors are marginalized from meaningful college readiness participation and suggested the need for preservice preparation and PD for improvement. Although Savitz-Romer (2012) conducted a study directly located in an urban high school, this study illustrated how relevant Stone-Johnson's more recent findings were to counselors' preservice and PD improvement. Eleven counselors were interviewed about their graduate level work in relation to career development counseling for low income and first-generation learners who plan to go to college. Findings revealed deliberate strategies to implement college readiness curriculum into counselor education programs are needed to prepare counselors to boost college access for at-risk students.

Owens, Pernice-Duca, and Thomas (2009) investigated counselors' training needs in an area in the United States where only 25% of the students graduated from high school. The investigators wanted to know the training needs of high school counselors after counselors had been working in the field with hopes of changing the coursework that is given to school counselors and provide a way for counselors to receive future training. Based on the findings of this study, school counselors rated post-training workshops as most important. Counselors in this urban school district felt the following topics were important to changing the educational environment and the future of their students: Dropout prevention, helping unmotivated students, violence prevention, and conducting needs assessments. Counselors felt if they could find ways to address these areas, they could later focus on future career goals of these low performing students. These topics demonstrated student issues while addressing counselors' training needs.

Unlike Stone-Johnson (2015), Savitz-Romer (2012), and Owens (2009), who examined counselors' training needs who worked with urban populations, Alger and Luke (2015) dissected high school counselors' exposure to working with students on college and career readiness goals in a school with an exemplary status. Four counselors and one counselor coordinator were interviewed based on the occurrence of precollege counseling for students at an ideal school. In addition to interviews, a focus group was conducted. While each counselor had different experiences, all counselors revealed they had little to no training about Common Core Standards. Common Core Standards is a set of criteria that determines what learners should know by the time they receive their secondary education (Core Standards, 2015). This information suggested it is important

for counselors to be trained on college readiness standards to help their students succeed in higher education.

Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman's (2012) study addressed public school counselors' caseloads in regards to college planning and revealed the following: (a) counselors with smaller caseloads had students with fewer discipline problems and low suspension rates, (b) counselors who provide extensive amounts of college and career counseling demonstrated low levels of discipline and suspension concerns and, (c) attendance and graduation rates were higher when students received college and career counseling. This information not only suggests that school counselors with lighter caseloads have more time to focus to college and career planning, but this information also suggests students who develop their career goals are less likely to have discipline as well as attendance issues. Although the ASCA (2012) stated the school counselor to student ratio should be 1 to 250, many counselors have reported more than 500 students on their caseloads. Moyer (2011) stated some counselors have reported they are responsible for 1,000 students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported the average student to counselor ratio was 457 students per counselor in 2008-2009. In addition to this average, it was reported that there are only 13 states where counselors have less than 350 students (NCES, 2011).

While counselors play a key role in helping students pursue their career goals, research fails to clarify what this role requires. In a study by Burkard, Gillen, and Martinez (2012), the comprehensive school counseling model was examined to better understand counselors' training needs. The results from this study indicated school counselors are not using all of the components of the comprehensive school counseling

model. Counselors reported little to no use of guidance curriculum or individual planning. Although one of the competencies listed by the American School Counseling Association states, “School counselors should articulate and illustrate an understanding of the principles of career planning and college admissions, including financial aid and athletic eligibility,” these duties are not specified and are often times disregarded (School Counselor Competencies, 2016). Failure to specify counselor duties may limit the experiences of preservice counselors graduating from counselor education programs as well as place in-service counselors in a position where they are unwilling to fulfill college readiness obligations.

Gysber and Henderson (2012) echoed Burkard et al. in their research that noted the significance of a comprehensive school counseling program in high schools is to guide students for postsecondary education and identify career opportunities that can have an impact on their lives. In other words, the comprehensive school counseling model was put in place for students to experience the full benefit of each component. These components are designed to holistically develop students for future careers. Findings from this study revealed students received inconsistent access to career planning while parents received inconsistent information about college and career planning for their children. Schenck, Anctil, Smith, and Dahir (2012) stated counselors’ inability to provide quality career counseling may be associated with federal mandates to schools that focus on specific requirements for academic achievement. This attention restricts time spent on college planning and may further leave school counselors unprepared for their position to equip all students for college (O’Connor, 2012).

In a study conducted by Goodman-Scott (2015), a national survey was given to 1,052 counselors in regards to their academic groundwork and actual job activities. In other words, Goodman-Scott (2015) wanted to know if school counselors' academic programs prepared them for their work related duties. A revised form of the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) was used to discover school counselors' perceptions of their academic training and expected job activities. Based on the results of the SCARS, school counselors reported moderate levels academic instruction and implementation aligned with the recommended American School Counseling Association Model. Lara, Kline, and Paulson's (2011) study demonstrated this notion to be true when they conducted research on participants in school counselor education programs. Participants from CACREP accredited programs were interviewed about their attitudes toward career counseling based on their experiences with faculty, peers, and curriculum. Results revealed participants knew basic skills and concepts about career counseling, but felt disinclined to perform career counseling. Participants expressed aspirations for more learning and doable occurrences. This information is significant to this study because it shows the need for more training in the area of career counseling before school counselors are officially assigned to a school. This information also supports previous research that suggests practicing school counselors were not trained in career counseling while attending their counselor education programs.

Solmonson, Roaten, and Sawyers (2011) not only reiterated Lara et al's. (2011) notion of career training before preservice counselors are assigned to a school, but Solmonson et al.'s. (2011) study also suggested counselors in Texas may need sufficient credentials to practice school counseling all together. Solmonson et al. (2011) conducted

a Delphi study of 21 counselors and five directors of counselors regarding their opinions about the hiring practices of school counselors in Texas. According to Solmonson et al. (2011), many counselors in Texas are hired without necessary training or credentials. This statement demonstrates the state of the counseling profession in a time where college readiness is at the forefront. After three rounds of dialogue where participants had the opportunity to evaluate their original responses, knowledge, skills, and training were identified as common themes.

Morgan et al. (2014) reflected Solmonson et al.'s and Lara et al.'s inclination that school counselors do not leave their graduate level programs ready for their job responsibilities. Morgan et al. (2014) conducted a study to understand school counselors' beliefs about their ability to counsel students about careers. Eighteen secondary school counselors were previewed from suburban, rural, and urban schools who were both CACREP and non CACREP certified to keep the sample diverse. The following themes emerged from the study: the use of technology, difficulty with delivery, relying on help from colleagues, self-doubt, and opportunity. The results indicated school counselors felt underprepared when it came to helping students with postsecondary and career choices. Morgan et al. (2014) also discovered counselors did not feel ready to go into the industry after completing their counselor education programs. The authors recommended the implementation of career development courses in graduate level programs.

Howell et al. (2007) studied PD demands, inclinations, and daily procedures among 226 high school counselors in Utah. Subjects were given a 20 question survey that revealed counselors did attend continuing education courses to stay in compliance with their counselor certification. While Howell et al. (2007) mentioned 62% of the counselors

in their study paid for more than half of the cost to attend courses that were not relevant to their job, McDonough (2005) indicated 21% of all counselors in public schools had the full cost of continuing education covered by their school district. What is interesting about Howell's et al.'s (2007) study is the fact that counselors not only mentioned paying for their own continuing education courses, but 178 counselors also mentioned taking PD courses with intentions to improve their knowledge and skills. This statement demonstrates how eager counselors want to stay current with information related to their role and the minimal support counselors receive to make this desire happen. If counselors are not receiving the kind of training that is pertinent to their expected duties, there is a strong indication that college readiness instruction is not a part of Utah's PD for school counselors.

In a study conducted by Konstam, Cook, Tomek, Mahdavi, Garcia, and Bayne (2015), the relationships between self-reported knowledge, organizational support of evidenced based practice, and professional growth among 85 constituents of the ASCA was explored. Desired results of this study were to understand the professional growth received by counselors after completing their official training. Surveys using three subscales of the professional expertise and organizational support survey were mailed to 600 participants. Konstam et al. (2015) found counselors with high self-reported expertise and counselors who supervised less experienced counselors were more liable to enhance their knowledge and skills. No linear relationship was found between organizational support of evidenced based practice and perceived professional knowledge. Konstam et al. (2015) suggested these findings may be caused by the lack of school support. The absence of

school support may be due to administrators' lack of knowledge about the role of a school counselor (Dodson, 2009).

The National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC, 2011) conducted a survey of counseling trends in relation to counselors' roles in helping students prepare for college. This annual survey was distributed to 10,000 secondary counselors in the U.S. through random sampling. A total of 1,846 participants responded to this survey. Based on the survey results, 20% of public school counselors were required to attend PD regarding college counseling opposed to 44% of private school counselors. In addition to PD, the survey indicated that public school counselors are more likely to have larger caseloads than private school counselors that hinder time spent with students on college planning. It is also important to note the survey discovered counselors' goals were to help students achieve personal growth, postsecondary education, and job responsibilities after high school. Similar to Konstam et al. (2015), these findings demonstrate counselors' eagerness to ensure the success of their students' future with the absence of needed support.

As with NACAC's (2011) survey discovery and Komstam et al.'s (2015) indication of no school support, Anctil, Smith, Schenck, and Dahir (2012) found career counseling to be an unaccomplished desire for counselors. Anctil et al. (2012) designed a 29 item survey to gather data in relation to school counselors' beliefs as well as counselors' roles in providing career counseling to all students. Three items on this survey were related to continuing education practices and needs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and/or a chi-square analysis. Seventy percent of counselors reported career counseling was a moderate to low priority on their campuses. However,

results from the Chi-square analysis suggested counselors who adhered to their state's guidelines placed more attention on career development. The study discovered that counselors' priority levels were much higher than their activity levels in relation to career development. Counselors demonstrated a need for continuing education by ranking topics that would be most useful on a Likert scaled survey. Classroom guidance about career development ranked the highest.

Curry and Bickmore (2012) studied in-service for school counselors' personal and professional needs in regards to ways in which they felt like they were significant. Researchers investigated the ways in which counselors' needs were met as well as ways in which counselors' needs were not met. Using qualitative research methods, seven counselors from three different school districts participated in two interview sessions. Counselors were interviewed twice during the year. Three themes of mattering were found that included the following: interacting with administrators, connecting to students, and relationships with stakeholders. On the other hand, a 4<sup>th</sup> theme emerged that retracted counselors' feelings of mattering. The following subthemes were identified from mattering needs not met: "Professional development, lack of orientation, ineffective transitional processes, lack of a formal mentor and administrator issues" (Curry & Bickmore, p. 117). Based on the findings, all counselors expressed the absence of valuable training to improve their work. Counselors mentioned most of their training is geared towards teachers or focused on duties that were not aligned with the ASCA. In addition to PD, Curry and Bickmore (2012) found counselors did not receive the following: Meaningful orientations, assigned mentors, effective transitional processes to

complete tasks, and meeting times with their principals. These issues have further led to role confusion because counselors do not have a clear understanding of their duties.

### **Implications**

This study promotes social change by distributing the study's findings to Hunt ISD's Department of Education, counselor educators, high school counselors, campus administrators, PD coordinators, and leaders in higher education. The study provides further revelation to high school counselors' PD needs in relation to college readiness for diverse learners. In doing so, the study not only revealed the abundance of counselor duties, but this study also revealed the importance of knowing high school counselors' roles in preparing diverse learners for college in efforts to eliminate inappropriate counselor activities to meet this obligation. An increased understanding of high school counselors' training needs paired with understanding high school counselors' roles may assist school officials with adjusting PD opportunities and counselor responsibilities.

According to The White House (2010), the top barriers to college access is income and little support about the application process. Due to current mandates that suggest all students will graduate from high school college ready, (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) it is anticipated that this study will encourage school administrators to allow college admissions officers to aid high school counselors in accommodating diverse students with postsecondary aspirations. This juncture can be accomplished by forming better relationships between high school counselors and college recruiters through increased campus visits. These visits may increase counselors' knowledge about college access by fostering interaction that allows counselors to ask questions pertaining to college readiness. The study aimed to show the more information high school

counselors receive from college recruiters about college admissions and financial resources, the more high school counselors can begin to help close barriers associated with college access. This step can be another form of training that may be utilized during PD sessions for counselors to improve college readiness for diverse students.

Counselor educators and PD coordinators may be able to use this study to compose activities and course assignments pertaining to college admissions and financial aid requirements. These professionals may also be inspired to invite representatives from various colleges as guest speakers to share facts about recent trends in higher education that may affect diverse students' enrollment. In addition to course assignments and guest speakers, counselor educators may be inclined to add career counseling to the practicum and internship phase of counselor education programs. This idea may equip aspiring high school counselors for what will be a part of their job responsibilities while establishing competency in college admissions and financial assistance. Unlike many high school counselors, this move may also create positive attitudes and job confidence among preservice counselors because this information would be given to counselors as a part of counseling curriculum before entering the workplace.

### **Summary**

In the literature review, I showed that high school counselors are notable for developing college ready students from all walks of life. This idea has proven to be more prominent because the United States is currently under pressure to create not only a higher skilled workforce, but the United States is also under pressure to increase college opportunities for diverse students due to a decline in college enrollment and completion rate in America (USDE, 2010). Although high school counselors are typically viewed as

experts to guiding students toward their career goals, the literature review clearly illustrated counselors' lack of precollege training from graduate level course work and PD offerings. These findings indicated a need for additional training for counselors in the area of college readiness.

There are multiple areas to precollege readiness that high school counselors can use to improve college access for all learners. However, no information exists on perceptions held by high school counselors on what they need in regards to specific college readiness components that will help prepare diverse students for college. Furthermore, the literature review did not specify what this duty would like and how counselors would carry out this agenda with other administrative roles. The gap in literature supported the need for this study to explore high school counselors perceived PD needs for preparing diverse learners for college.

Section 2 includes an exploration of the methodology intended for this qualitative case study. The following topics were discussed: Research design and approach, participants, data collection, data analysis, and limitations. Section 3 includes the following: an introduction of the actual project study, the project rationale, a review of the literature, the project description, the project evaluation, and the projection implications. Section 4 includes the reflections and conclusions.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The circumstance that motivated this study is the most recent policy change that emphasizes that all high school students will graduate with knowledge and skills to successfully transition to college or a career (Cumpton & Giani, 2014). As a result of this mandate, school counselors have been required to be the primary executor of this new policy. However, administrators and counselor educators in Hunt ISD are not vigilant of what school counselors need to prepare diverse learners for college. The literature identified the omission of career development training for school counselors in graduate level courses as well as PD workshops. Although the literature demonstrated counselors' need for college readiness training, it failed to specify those needs and how counselors will carry out college preparation for their students. There was a need to interpret the perceptions of high school counselors on what they need to prepare diverse learners for college

### **Research Design and Approach**

My purpose of this inquiry was to analyze the perceptions of high school counselors about their PD needs to prepare diverse learners for college. A qualitative, case study design was used to explore this phenomenon. Creswell (2009) stated, "Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals" (p. 13). I focused on an issue within a high school counseling program that suggests counselors necessitate more PD training on college readiness for diverse learners through the eyes of high school counselors in Hunt ISD. According to Hunt (2011), the investigative makeup of qualitative research enables

professionals to grasp lived experiences of individuals and to comprehend circumstances in a relaxed atmosphere. A qualitative case study may help administrators in Hunt ISD make sense of current instruction counselors have in career development as well as their knowledge of diverse populations.

Creswell (2012) mentioned that qualitative purpose statements and research questions are answered effectively when researchers digest what comes from the participants. Because the purpose and research questions focused on perceptions held by contributors to the study, a qualitative method is used. Rather than aim toward cause and effect, I uncovered specific knowledge and skills counselors feel they need with regard to college preparedness for diverse learners as a means for PD, making a qualitative approach the most appropriate selection (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, quantitative research tests the extent to which the null hypothesis holds true, excluding the depth needed to defend the research question. In addition, one of the weaknesses of quantitative research concerning this study is this design may have led to missed phenomena because attention is on hypothesis testing, using surveys, and statistical examination rather than on hypothesis development.

Narrative research is a qualitative method that is considered but discarded because much attention is on gathering life stories, whereas I spotlighted counselors' precollege PD needs and not counselors' life experiences through storytelling (Merriam, 2009). In addition to narrative inquiry, ethnography is another qualitative strategy that places emphasis on specific culture groups in a setting that is not manipulated over a period of time (Merriam, 2009). I dismissed this approach because I centered on counselors' college readiness needs, an issue that may be rectified through PD. A case study was a

significant approach used with intentions to improve high school counselors' college readiness proficiency for the advancement of diverse learners.

### **Participants**

The selection of participants was based on purposeful sampling criteria. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to pinpoint cases that are rich with information. Creswell (2011) concurred to this notion by suggesting that purposeful sampling entails recognizing and appointing individuals or groups who are well informed about the circumstance of interest. In this study, I was interested in high school counselors' perceptions about their PD needs. Merriam (2009) stated purposeful sampling is based on the notion of understanding from a population where the greatest amount of information can be learned. I purposely chose school counselors in Hunt ISD as they were the best positioned to provide the data to answer the research questions. The director of counselors in Hunt ISD is fully aware of this study and personally expressed her apprehensiveness about counselors' training needs and the challenges of demonstrating to campus administrators counselors' roles in order to make college counseling a part of counselors' daily assignments (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

The case in this study was PD for high school counselors in an urban populated school district located in the southern part of Texas. Just as purposeful sampling is used to select a case, Merriam (2009) mentioned purposeful sampling used a process by which a sample is selected within a case. The sample within this case, PD for high school counselors, was counselors from five high schools in Hunt ISD. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), case study research requires observing a bounded system

where there is a limited amount of persons associated with the study who can be interviewed. There are 35 counselors representing five high schools in Hunt ISD. Because of the large representation, not all school counselors were engaged in this study. However, these individuals were invited to participate with anticipation that at least 11 high school counselors would partake in this study during an extended time frame, making a case study a suitable strategy.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

Merriam (2009) elaborated on the significance of the including samples that illustrate a notable size, and have the possibility to give insight to the phenomenon. The sample reflected Hunt ISD's high school counselors who are diverse in age, ethnicity, and experience with the potential to be information-rich informants. Information from 11 high school counselors in Hunt ISD who are distinct in years of experience and cultural tradition added understanding to the problem of the lack of PD. Furthermore, Stake (2005) disclosed a characteristic of a case study is the collection of data from more than one perspective. The focal research question concerning high school counselors' perceptions of PD needs for the improvement of college readiness for diverse learners was best answered by participants who are positioned to exemplify the counseling program in Hunt ISD.

### **Justification for the Number of Participants**

To justify the number of participants, Mason (2010) suggested samples in qualitative research are smaller than samples in quantitative research because a qualitative study can reach a place where added data may not lead to more information. This statement suggested asking more than 11 high school counselors in Hunt ISD to

participate in this study could have led to repetition, dismissing the need for information-rich enlightenment. Additionally, frequency is not as important in qualitative research as finding meaning and understanding of a phenomenon (Mason, 2010). I was interested in understanding high school counselors' perceptions of their professional needs; therefore, I ensured the guidelines of saturation were followed. Saturation is determined when new data is formulated enough to repeat the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Merriam (2009) suggested the use of a large enough sample size to attain saturation. Therefore, all high school counselors in Hunt ISD were asked to participate in this study to obtain the needed sample size for assured saturation. According to Charmaz (2006), a small sample size with moderate assertions may be the fastest way to achieve saturation.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

When I received acceptance from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contact the director of counselors in Hunt ISD who works side by side with the assistant superintendent and asked for permission to contact counselors via e-mail regarding their involvement in this study. Upon approval from the director of counselors and the assistant superintendent, all high school counselors were contacted through my assigned e-mail account from Walden University to explain the purpose of this study while asking them to participate. A consent form was sent and participants were asked to respond to my e-mail within a week. I was prepared to send a reminder e-mail to potential contributors if this action was warranted.

### **Researcher-Participant Relationship**

I have been a high school counselor adjacent to the study site for 10 years and have established relationships with some of the prospective participants. Therefore, I

have an absolute interest in the counseling profession and will make sure that I am heedful when collecting and analyzing data. According to Merriam (2009), caution is essential when the researcher is the main source of data collection and data analysis. I was the primary data collector who was vigilant in reporting data that was biased. Yin (2013) stated researchers who are familiar with issues involving the case are more likely to utilize their study to form opinions before any evidence is found. I used member checking to help guarantee my own biases are not included in the study's results. Member checking is a task by which participants in the study will review summary findings (Merriam, 2009). I also used peer debriefing to check research questions, interpretation of participants' responses, and data analysis.

### **Protection of Participant's Rights**

Once the institutional review board gave consent to move forward with conducting this study, I ensured informed consent encompassed the following: detailed specifications as to what the study was about, probable risks, a confidentiality agreement, and the voluntary makeup of the study (Lodico et al., 2010). School counselors were notified through their district e-mail accounts about the date, time, and location for the individual interviews. Counselors' e-mail addresses were obtained from Hunt ISD's website. To assure privacy and elevate participants' comfort levels, I offered to conduct individual interviews either in my office, a conference room located in each participant's school or in the participant's personal office. The interviews took place during after school hours when schools are typically cleared of students, parents, and other employees. Each interview lasted 30 to 60 minutes in order to respect participants'

personal time. Pseudonyms were used during the translation process to protect the identification of the participants.

I used a constructivist approach where I sought to interpret high school counselors' perceptions of their PD needs to ready diverse learners for college through the eyes counselors' lived experiences with this issue. Glesne (2011) indicated the ways in which researchers know entails the paradigm of *interpretivism*, a term that can also be identified as constructivism. Constructivists believe reality is based on an individual's perspective of a particular situation where meaning can be coconstructed between participants and the researcher (Baxter, 2008). This paradigm is deemed compatible for this study because it allowed me to explore feedback from high school counselors in the natural setting of their workplace while helping counselors establish meaning of their PD needs. According to VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007), case studies are administered in their natural settings, bounded by time or spatial factors that can be beneficial when the environment is complex.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected from multiple sources where interviews were the primary procedure. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), interviews can be the main source of data in qualitative research or interviews can be combined with document analysis. The interview sample came from a population of 35 high school counselors in Hunt ISD. Of this sample, eight individual interviews from high school counselors were conducted. In addition to interviews, I examined documents of PD that six participants attended during the school year to see if trainings were geared towards helping high school counselors with their expected college readiness role. I kept a reflective journal to track data and to check my understanding of transpiring information.

### **Individual Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the essential data collection tool. Merriam (2009) indicated semi structured interviews fall between structured and unstructured interviews, creating the opportunity for planned research questions that are flexible in regards to structured questions and open-ended questions. Eight school counselors were interviewed using this method. The interview protocol for this study included open-ended questions designed to gather information about how high school counselors perceive their PD needs to prepare diverse learners for college. Merriam (2009) noted open-ended questions are useful to the interview process because these categories of questions may lead to descriptive responses. Probes were used when responses to interview questions were not clear or lack richness. Interview questions were developed based on the following research question: How do school counselors perceive their PD needs in the area of college readiness for diverse students? Interview questions were reviewed by a peer who

works as a counselor consultant at an educational service center that provides services for schools in a particular geographical region. She has a master's degree in counseling and has worked for Hunt ISD in previous years. In addition to the counselor consultant, I submitted my proposed study to a panel of experts to determine accuracy of the interview design. Anney (2014) stated "a qualitative researcher should look for support from professionals who are willing to offer scholarly direction, such as dissertation committees and academic staff. Support from research experts helps improve trustworthiness as it relates to research findings" (p. 276).

Interviews were arranged at the convenience of counselors who agreed to contribute to this study. Interview contributions were audio recorded and transcribed for coding and thematic building according to the research questions that were asked of each participant. After the completion of all interviews, a copy of the results from recorded and analyzed transcriptions were e-mailed to participating members of this study. This step helped contribute to the validity of this study, a process called member checking (Merriam, 2009). I organized interview data by date, time, and interviewees' name, which was replaced by a pseudonym for the participants' protection. Transcribed interviews were labeled with the letter P and a number paralleled to each participant's name for identity purposes. Initial transcriptions were typed and saved to my personal Dropbox that has an assigned username and password to which I only have access. All data are stored on my personal laptop that will be in my presence at all times. Files will be destroyed after five years.

### **Document Collection**

Stake (2005) indicated a review of documents within a qualitative case study is to give information about the case that the researcher could not personally observe. School counselors in this study represented five high schools; therefore, I was not aware of their accumulated PD trainings. Hunt ISD personnel office is responsible for maintaining all employees' PD records for the purpose of certification renewal every 5 years. Because building principals and district administrative officers in Hunt ISD host their own staff development sessions throughout the year school, sign-in sheets are given to the personnel office to keep track of who attended. This database contains PD activities held on school campuses, sponsored by district administrative officers, and activities that educators have initiated on their own. Proof of attendance is typically shown by providing the personnel office a document that states *certificate of completion*. To gain access to each participant's PD records, I asked each member if they would agree to request a copy of their PD portfolio from the district's personnel office. I reiterated to participants that it was their discretion to request these records. Information from PD records helped answer the following secondary research question: What are the PD experiences of practicing school counselors in Hunt ISD related to preparing diverse students for college and career entry? Of the eight participants, six high school counselors provided me a copy of their PD profile. A review of six PD profiles displayed PD sessions that positioned well within data found in the interviews.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Yin (2013) stated the researcher is the main collector of data while conducting a case study. Therefore, there was potential for researcher bias to occur. The ways in which

I avoided researcher bias are discussed in the evidence of quality section that addressed reliability and validity of this study. I was also accountable for the creation of the data collection instrument that derived from the research questions. I followed the guidelines of Merriam (2009) for organizing advantageous interviews.

I have fulfilled the role of a high school counselor working with diverse students on college readiness. Of my time as a counselor, I have spent 10 years serving as a career and technical education counselor where one of my duties is to enroll students into dual credit courses to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. Before I become a school counselor, I taught students with disabilities neighboring the local setting for 5 years. My involvement with diverse students, as well as my interactions with school counselors on a daily basis, is what motivated my attraction to the perceptions of school counselors regarding what they need to ensure diverse students are ready for college.

My association with counselors could have resulted in dishonest responses to interview questions. Because of my long history in the counseling profession, I realize that I could have been biased towards what school counselors need to prepare diverse learners for college. According to Yin (2013), case study researchers have the ability to use the study to sort out predetermined ideas. It is more likely for researchers who are familiar with matters concerning the local problem to develop preconceived notions than researchers who are not familiar with matters concerning the local problem (Yin, 2013). Therefore, I was cautious about presumptions in reference to what counselors need to satisfy PD in terms of college readiness for diverse learners

## **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2009) stated qualitative researchers make sense of participants' views and opinions about a particular situation based on their own personal experiences. While there are many ways to interpret qualitative data, the outcome involved the researcher's interpretation of corresponding patterns, themes, and categories. Strategies for managing data collected in this study depended on how successful the data were interpreted and presented in a way that a descriptive narrative rich with information was formulated. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), qualitative researchers typically devise interpretive narratives that use the participants' own words to capture the intricacy of the circumstance under study. In this study, I used Creswell's six step guide to data analysis. The following steps describe Creswell's (2012) procedures for analyzing and interpreting data:

- (a) Preparing and organizing the data for analysis, (b) Engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it, (c) Using the codes to develop a more general picture of the data-descriptions and themes, (d) Representing the findings through narratives and visuals, (e) Making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and on the literature that might inform the findings, and (f) Conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings. (p. 237)

## **Data Analysis of Documents**

A document review is made up of records that qualitative researchers gather about an organization or the participant in a study (Creswell, 2012). Documents may provide relevant data that the researcher is unable to observe (Stake, 2005). I requested

participants' personal PD profile in hopes that these profiles would demonstrate what was covered in each session as well as how many sessions each participant attended throughout their counseling career. This information was used to show if participants received any college readiness training in Hunt ISD.

I began analyzing document data by methodically arranging information from six counselors' PD profiles. To analyze counselors' PD profiles, I used a systematic process, described as content analysis, to describe the contents in counselors' profiles (Merriam, 2009). Content analysis is a process of analyzing qualitative data through organizing, coding, and developing categories (Bengtsson, 2016). Creswell (2012) mentioned an advantage to using documents is their readiness for analysis, free from transcription that is needed with interviews. I used an electronic journal to record notes about each counselor's PD profile. I also used a table to organize the text of the documents by using my notes from counselors' PD profiles. These notes were later categorized according to specific descriptors for coding purposes.

A review of six participants' PD profile revealed that, while Hunt ISD offered an array of PD sessions throughout each counselor's educational career, these sessions were specialized for classroom teachers with the exception of mental health trainings offered to all K-12 school counselors. During the 2013-2014 school year, Participant 1 (P1) attended the following PD trainings offered by Hunt ISD: Self-Injury, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, and Facts about Depression. Although at different school year than P1, Participant 2 (P2) and Participant 3 (P3) attended the same trainings in 2016. In addition to those PD sessions, P2 and P3 also received after school training on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Boys in Crisis, and Suicide Prevention. Participant 7's

(P7's) PD profile disclosed instruction not only about ADHD, but this counselor's profile also disclosed instruction on depression and nonviolent crisis intervention taken in 1998. Whereas P1, P2, and P3's PD profile illustrated at least three mental health trainings, Participant 8's (P8's) PD profile represented eight mental health trainings. When asked about participating in numerous mental health presentations, P8 explained their role not only as a school counselor, but also their role as a licensed professional counselor (LPC). These sessions served as a way for P8 to obtain LPC continuing education hours. Participant 4's (P4's) profile showed one nonviolent crisis intervention workshop representing the only mental health seminar during the 2014-2015 school year. It was noted that each profile represented additional trainings offered at the end of the workday. Guidance about college readiness was not present in all six PD documents. Because each participant's PD profiles portrayed only classroom and mental health learning, the findings from viewing this data would reflect the history of other school counselors' PD. After I analyzed document data and saved the information to my personal Dropbox, I read and organized interview data to secure an understanding of the material (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data Analysis of Interviews**

According to Creswell (2012), data analysis begins with organizing the majority of information and transferring verbal or written communication to a typed file. This process also entails deciding to manually analyze data or by using a computer (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I used a computer file to ensure large amounts of data were organized by sources of evidence that included interviews and documents. I generated codes and categories based on transcribed text for the purpose of data analysis. For

individual interviews, audio recorded data were transcribed and organized by each research question and unidentified participant. As recommended by Merriam (2009), I used open coding to read through interview data several times to help summarize what I saw happening in the study. After I open coded interview data, I identified connections among the open codes by highlighting data that appeared to be vital to the research questions. Following the open code process, I bracketed common codes and words through a process called axial coding (Merriam, 2009). I assigned each code a name and color using a table for category tracking in order to give a final summary of the analyzed data. (See attached Appendix D.)

Axial coding allowed me to initiate the process suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) of scripting themes from individualized data. Following the coding and category technique, I explored each component once more in search for discrepant cases. There was no recognizable information that would suggest any discrepancies through the use of member checking, peer debriefing, and the analysis I conducted.

In the ultimate stage of the data analysis, I condensed the findings using appropriate diagrams, such as tables. Although computer assisted programs were made available to assist me with analyzing data, I systemized and hand coded facts by using dissimilar colors to highlight words and phrases. This activity helped identify the following four themes: *existing professional development*, *multiple counselor roles*, *competing training needs*, and *delivery methods*. Themes are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
1. Existing PD	1.1 District PD
	1.2 Campus PD
	1.3 External PD
	1.4 Lack of Support
2. Multiple Counselor Roles	
3. Competing Training	
4. Needs	
5. Delivery Methods	

**Evidence of Quality**

Merriam (2009) mentioned an assortment of methods for undertaking the internal validity of qualitative research in a case study. Data in this study were collected through individual interviews with high school counselors and document review of counselors' PD profiles. I used member checking to ensure internal validity after completing interviews. Creswell (2009) stated member checking is best administered after themes or patterns have been concluded. Member checking took place immediately following transcription and analysis of data. Themes and findings were shared with participants through e-mail. Participants were asked to review the results and supply feedback on the accuracy of this information and to ensure my own biases as a counselor were not reflected in the results. In addition to collecting data from more than one source and

member checking, I used a peer debriefer to discuss research questions, interpretation of participants' responses, and data analysis.

### **Reliability**

To ensure data in this study are accurate in terms of comprehensiveness I recorded the specifics of the data collection process and the strategies I used for data interpretation. I used direct quotes from the participants to make sure their voices were heard. To verify this information, I asked participants to review the results for accuracy. According to Lodico et al. (2010), exercising direct quotes from participants is a valid way to assure reliability in qualitative studies. I also searched for any discrepant data to see if any of the respondents' viewpoints conflicted with the primary body of evidence to determine the need to either keep or adjust the findings (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) suggested asking others for feedback is a useful way to check for flaws and the researcher's own biases. Discrepant data were not found; therefore, there was no need to report this information in the findings section of this study in order for the reader to draw their own conclusion (Maxwell, 2005). For readers to decide whether or not this study can be transferred to another context, I thoroughly explained my research methods and findings to the best of my ability

## **Results**

Eight high school counselors in Hunt ISD participated in this qualitative case study. The purpose of this study was to determine how high school counselors perceive their PD needs for preparing diverse learners for college. The primary method of data collection used was face to face semi structured interviews with each participant. Interviews took place at each individual school counselor's office. Additionally, I examined six high school counselors' PD profiles that were willingly shared with me to discover the amount of college readiness training offered to the counselors throughout their professional counseling career. The counselors' feedback to interview questions demonstrated lived occurrences as high school counselors that related to the research phenomena. The interviews uncovered explanatory meaning of their role in helping diverse students with college and or career entry. With reference to the interpretation of the transcripts, the following themes unfolded: existing PD, multiple counselor roles, competing training needs, and delivery methods.

### **Theme 1: Existing Professional Development**

The existing PD theme not only signifies ways in which the participants received PD, but it also signifies topics that are covered during this time. Participants spoke of the following three classes of PD: PD given by the director of counseling in the school district, PD provided by individual campuses on scheduled staff development days, and external PD provided outside the school district. Insight was provided about the depth of their PD experiences in relation to college readiness competencies in response to the following interview question: How do school counselors in Hunt ISD describe the PD they receive for preparing diverse learners for college?

**Professional development provided by the director of school counseling.** PD

provided by the director of school counseling in Hunt ISD incorporated the acquisition of knowledge and skills during the school day. Participants indicated that these opportunities were mandatory, given to all counselors in the district. High school counselors' responses to the description of PD they receive for preparing diverse learners for college demonstrated that Hunt ISD had not given high school counselors any training that addressed both college readiness in general and college readiness specifically for diverse learners. Participants explained how often they met with the director of counseling as well as what took place when counselors met.

P1 stated, "Most of our PD is done in counseling meetings, district wide that we usually do once a quarter." She also made me aware that district counselors meetings were not high school focused because elementary and middle school counselors are in attendance. P1 continued, "When we have those meetings with just the high school level counselors, we discuss mental health, and we also discuss again endorsements, what's changing for the year, and how we're changing pathways." Although P1 mentioned other PD topics, P1 sustained that mental health was deemed more important than college readiness for diverse learners in the eyes of the counseling director. P1 indicated,

Mental health has been a very, very big push in these last 2 years in most of our meetings. We spend a lot of time doing that, as opposed to talking about some of these different avenues, different strategies that we can use to really, really get these kids where they need to be.

P1 furthered her explanation and indicated that PD was on the topic of mental health 80% of the time, on just policy and procedures 10% of the time, and on the topic of

endorsement programs for the remaining 10%. In addition to P1's belief about the mental health aspect of high school counselors' PD, P3 recalled a visit to an advocacy center with counselors in Hunt ISD that was centered on helping abused children. P3 stated, "I guess you could consider that PD, because I didn't know that existed. We talked about what to do if a kid is suicidal." She continued to say, "I don't think that had anything to do with the college. I think that most of our PD is geared toward the mental health aspect of our job, and not necessarily the college-bound aspect of our job."

P2, P3, and P5 felt PD in Hunt ISD was more like a meeting than actual training. P2 stated, "It is mandatory that we are supposed to attend the meetings, the trainings. They are counselor meetings. I never kind of thought of them as trainings. I guess they are meetings to update us on information." P3 remarked,

I consider PD like a big meeting in what's going on with Hunt ISD. I have not had the opportunity to have any outside of Hunt ISD that I can think of, as far as counseling, as far as helping diverse learners, unfortunately.

P5 asserted, "Once a month we have short meetings that talk about our responsibilities. I feel like a lot of it's just procedural as far as what their expectations are for things that we need to be doing." Like P1, both P2 and P3 lamented on the fact that if they had any training, the training was focused on mental health. P2 stated, "This year, we've gone once month for a meeting, and we kind of learned a little bit but most of it is 504 and mental health."

P4 revealed that she could not think of any PD that had been solely dedicated to college readiness. However, P4 did recall hearing more about the topic within the last 6 months of the 2017-2018 school year. Although the topic had been discussed, P4 and P5

reiterated ways to help counselors assist their students had not existed. P4 stated, “Not to say that college the topic doesn't come up, but the implementation of how counselors prepare, how are counselors supposed to be involved in college readiness hasn't.” P5 added, “I don't feel like there's a ton of help on actually living that out. How do we actually make that happen and be effective without just feeling like we're treading water?” While P5 did mention that planning a college fair was the most college readiness training she had received in Hunt ISD, P4 was aware of a training that had to do with counselors and the school's accountability ratings. P4 stated, “It was the counselors' role in accountability. So, what counselors need to be doing, but there wasn't necessarily a how.”

P7 mentioned her position as a career and technical education counselor whose duties are the same as all high school counselors, serving students who are in a career and technical education program. For example, this counselor oversees students in the following programs: automotive, cosmetology, workforce, law enforcement, health science, audio video technology, and education. When asked about the description of PD training received for diverse learners, P7 agreed with other participants' experiences with mental health and 504. P7 conveyed, “It is focused on 504 or mental health. And when I go to my CTE [career and technical education] meetings, it's focused on the CTE classes.” P7 also agreed that no one had given counselors any specifics about college readiness and felt unsupported concerning this matter. She stated, “It's like we don't really have a good advocate even though it's pushed by the district.”

Like P4, P8 did recall having some conversations about college readiness during meetings with the district's counseling director. She indicated, “College readiness has

definitely been discussed in some of our district counselor meetings. But just as a passing conversation, not as, this is what we're going to focus on, and this is what we're going to learn about today.” She felt these conversations were not trainings and further stated, “Not trainings, no need-to-know information is discussed. Just a lot of, this is the takeaway that when you put this into practice, this could be helpful.”

**Campus professional development.** Participants noted, while they were offered mandatory PD by the director of school counseling in the district, they were also offered scheduled PD by each participant’s high school campus throughout the school year. These training are considered staff development days. Below are school counselors’ responses about their campus PD.

P1, P2, and P5 mentioned that campus staff development was used for counselors to work on student schedules and other administrative tasks. P1 stated, “On our campus, we really only talk about credit checks, schedule changes, registration, and things like that. Other than that, we usually get sent back to our offices.” P2 added, “On campus, we never did anything [laughter], not about counseling. It might be about what's going on in the building. I don't think we get anything college or career wise at all on campus. We're usually working on schedules.” P5 intensified the question about PD school counselor received on campus and stated, “We don't go to that training unless we're leading it. Otherwise, we're required to do registration or work in our offices.” Whereas P1, P2, and P5 acknowledged there had not been staff development about college and or career entry for diverse students, P3, P4, and P7 concurred but also discussed the fact that classroom interests were more important on the campus level. P3 stated,

I feel they have more opportunities and more staff development geared toward gaining things that are useful in the classroom and gaining information that helps children. I mean, we have staff development for teachers. I don't think that their emphasis is on staff development when you become a counselor.

P4 added, "On-campus staff development doesn't really have anything to do with counselors, unless we're presenting something on 504, but it's 100% geared towards teachers." P4 continued to divulge her experiences with staff development and stated,

There's an entire department for staff development for teachers, but there's one person that's supposed to be responsible for staff development of all counselors which [pause] the job of an elementary counselor is completely different from the job of a high school counselor.

P7 followed P3 and P4 stating that, "Even when we have staff development, they don't really address college readiness. They're addressing a lot of the classroom instruction, so, a lot of it doesn't really even apply to us."

**External professional development.** A number of participants reported there are opportunities to attend PD in relation to college readiness for diverse learners outside of Hunt ISD. However, funding or the ability to leave campus due to their workload made it difficult to visit those trainings. P2 expressed, "It hasn't felt like, 'Hey, guys, here we've got these admission meetings we need to go to. They've invited us, UT, A&M. Who can go and bring back information?' or, 'Can we all go or no?'" P2 continued to add thoughts about having time to leave for outside training and mentioned, "I feel like, with all the work I have, honestly, it would be hard to get away to go. I feel like the time out could be bad." While P2 discussed the inability to leave and attend external training, P1 stated, "I

think if I were to pay for it, I don't think it would be as big of an issue.” Financial circumstances and the inability to leave campus were both important for P5. P5 stated, “They don't really like when we're gone, so they don't like when we go to anything outside either or have the finances. They don't want us to take off, and they don't want to pay for it.”

P1, P2, and P5 referred to money and time away from their campuses; however, P6 and P8 mentioned PD they had attended outside of school. P6 revealed a more recent training she was released to attend. The participant made me aware that, although she was allowed to attend this training, she sought out this PD on her own free will. P6 indicated the following:

I just attended something not too long ago that looked at some STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] areas that the state is now no longer wanting a part of a 4-year plan. But I would not have known this had I not gone out into the industry and networked and researched. They were not opportunities that were brought to the district.

P8 divulged relevant information to the findings in which she expressed that she holds another credential that prompted her to seek external PD. Not only is P8 a high school counselor, but P8 is also a licensed professional counselor (LPC) and stated the requirement of maintaining her license by securing a required amount of continuing education hours. When asked about external PD, P8 disclosed that she tries to go to a conference at least once a year and stated, “I try to sign up for some of the ones that the district offers outside of school as often as I can to not only keep up state requirements and the district, but also for my LPC credential.” Although P8 did not state whether or

not the external PD was about college readiness for diverse learners, it could be determined that these trainings were not helpful in assisting counselors with college for diverse students.

P4 did not disclose money or time away from the job as a matter regarding external PD. However, P4 communicated she did register for an online conference when she began her career as a high school counselor. P4 stated, “I do remember registering for one on my own through College Board. It was a free conference. I wanted to understand SAT and ACT better.” P4 remained expressive about this topic and added, “I didn't have a whole lot of high school experience before this job. I wanted to know how SAT and ACT [pause]--what was a good and bad score, [and] how do they compare to each other?”

The lack of specified college readiness training for high school counselors to help diverse learners for college in Hunt ISD was verified through the data gathered from discussions with the participants. As previously mentioned in Section 1, research distinctly showed the absence and necessity of PD for school counselors in order to remain effective in preparing all students for postsecondary education. High school counselors in this study had received little to no PD corresponding to this matter. PD that high school counselors had received particularly involved mental health training and teacher instruction with little support for counselors from school administrators.

**Lack of support.** When asked about the participants' time as a high school counselor, if had they been a part of any PD training that has assisted counselors with helping diverse learners prepare for college, participants felt they were not supported. After I reviewed comments about external PD, I noticed that some of the participants'

responses to external training connected with lack of support. P1 stated, “I don't feel that we're highly encouraged to do that. It's just not something that's truly offered. What training we do receive, as I said, is more on the aspect of endorsements.” To secure a sense of what P1 meant by the word endorsement, I asked P1 to explain that term as it related to PD for high school counselors. P1 stated the following:

State of Texas approved this a couple of years ago, where... [students have] to kind of tunnel their interest with a certain specific area whether it be arts and humanities, it might be business and industry, whatever, and they have to take that elective every year for 4 years. They have to receive an endorsement to graduate. And the reason for this was to prepare students for what they might want to do in the future, whether it be in a 4-year university or maybe a tech school, something to that effect.

In regards to P1's explanation of the term endorsement, P1 also mentioned that she felt she was only scheduling students into elective courses to earn an endorsement to graduate, not preparing students for college.

P2 answered the question about participating in PD that has assisted counselors with helping diverse learners prepare for college by stating she had not gone to anything on her own in 5 years. P2 stated, “I haven't felt like, if I did, it would be, I don't know. I haven't felt like they'd be supportive in a way.” P2 went to say that when she was in another school district, she went to all of the college admissions meetings. She stated, “In Cook ISD (pseudonym), I could go to all of what the admission's people were saying from all the universities. I got to go to all the training on the financial aid.” P2 went on to state that,

Every year, we would go to an update, a College Board update for SAT, and we went to an ACT update; and since I've been at Hunt, I haven't been to any. There does not seem to be urgency, or they don't realize actually how helpful it would be.

P4 replied, "Throughout the time I've had this job, we haven't had a person dedicated to training counselors until the last 2 or 3 years, maybe. So, there's still so much to be ironed out that hadn't been ironed out before."

P5, P6, and P7 responded to this question and recalled sporadic opportunities to hear about college readiness. P5 indicated that she could not remember any training that was specifically for college readiness provided by the district. She expressed the district had not presented counselors with guest speakers who spoke about how to prepare kids for college. P5 stated, "It's mentioned here or there. And I think when I collaborate with others, we talk about it. But as far as training, there hasn't been any." P6 commented, "I've had a few opportunities, but none within the district. They've all been at my own initiative, and I had to sometimes use a personal day to attend, not always even a district-approved day to attend." When asked to clarify district approved day, P6 said the school district did not support counselors going off campus to attend training, which forced the participants to take a personal workday to attend. Specifically, P7 felt she had not received much support from her district in regards college preparation for diverse students and reminded me that any training she had taken was due to her own self-motivation. P7 voiced, "I've not received any training from the school. Again, I probably have taken that up on my own initiative, whether I read articles about that, or I seek out that information

It was evident that support from school officials in Hunt ISD in relation to college readiness training for high school counselors was all but prevalent. While participants conveyed dissatisfaction with the state of their PD, participants did not mention that it was within their capacity to change the circumstance. While school counselors may have dismissed their ability to modify their PD training, participants did express the many roles the counselors played parts in their seemingly powerless situation.

### **Theme 2: Multiple Roles**

Participants in the study are high school counselors. For that reason, their role as a counselor was a pertinent theme discussed in this study. According to ACA (2012), the role of a counselor is one who is involved in relationships that allow diverse individuals and groups to achieve mental health awareness, academics, and career goals. In the role of a high school counselor, participants articulated college readiness as a process that helps students in the following areas: admissions, financial aid, college entrance exams, and taking the right courses in high school to get accepted into college. As for college readiness, as it specifically pertains to diverse learners, participants in this study presented limited knowledge. In fact, P3 stated, “Well, college readiness, I think you can give it kind of like a blanked statement. You can generalize that students need to be prepared for the rigor of an academic postsecondary education, and that's across the board.” However, P3 continued to say, “I don't think that has anything to do with diversity as much. So, my understanding of postsecondary success for diversity is very limited, I would say.”

High school counselors' limited knowledge about college readiness for diverse learners helped answer this research question: What are the challenges faced by school

counselors in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college? All participants stressed that *time* due to various job responsibilities played a key factor in their limited knowledge about college readiness for diverse populations. Challenges were apparent in the expressions of P1 who felt college readiness training to help high school counselor prepare diverse learners for college was a great idea, but too many counselor tasks would prevent this notion from happening. P1 stated, “I really do believe that's a great idea, but I don't know that [pause]. We've got so many different things they have us doing. We have our caseload with our seniors is crazy busy, and our numbers are big.” To gain a better understanding about what P1 meant by the counselors’ caseload and large numbers, I asked P1 how large was her caseload. P1 stated, “I know here on this campus, we usually run about 600 students per counselor.” P2 added, “Our caseloads haven't changed or any other responsibilities. So, I think we're overloaded with too many other responsibilities at the same time.” P6 was consistent and indicated, “And normally a counselor's caseload is around four or five hundred students, which is larger than what's recommended for ratios. And so, the opportunity to sit down and know the details of what I'm looking for just aren't there.”

All participants communicated that they needed more time during the workday to either work with students or attend PD. P1 stated, “We don't have the knowledge, which is the first thing we're lacking, and then the second thing is we don't have the time.” P2 added, “Having the time to research what schools need or kids need to know about the colleges because it changes so much. You don't have the time to learn it.” P4 continued, “Time. Juggling all the important things. So, I guess it feels like the role of the counselor is spread so thin across so many different things like 504, credit checks, emotional

support, and college readiness.” P5 stated, “We don't have the time to go to college meetings to get the information about what colleges are looking for and then also to meet with the kids.” I communicated to P4 that it sounded as if high school counselors had a lot on their plate. P4 responded, “We're going to get in trouble legally for not doing a credit check right and letting a kid graduate...[who] shouldn't graduate, or not conducting a 504 meeting correctly.” P4 continued, “The consequences of missing the mental healthcare piece are, it's unacceptable. In college readiness, it's frustrating because that's equally important. It doesn't feel like we have time.”

P6 conformed to the other participants in regards to time and also mentioned prevalent college information. P6 stated, “Access to current information--by that I mean that I do not have the time to get out and visit and network colleges or trade institutions.” She resumed, “I don't have time to access potential workshops, because there are none locally. If they are local, a lot of times I just don't have the luxury to leave work to do that.” When P6 was asked to elaborate on the word time, P6 indicated that on any given week she could work three to four afternoons a week just to catch up with things that she was not able to get done during the school day. She stated, “We have no built-in time frame to address these things. I don't have time to meet with parents and students like I'd like to. I definitely don't have time to network with colleges for their expectations.” P8 added, “Well, I think that one of the big challenges that goes with college readiness, but also anything in counseling, is making time for those things.” P7 further remarked, “I do think that the main thing that we face is time. We have such a large workload that it's difficult to see all of the students even though we make a great effort to do that.”

P7 and P8 believed it was challenging to see their students with all the work counselors had to manage. Both participants also disclosed additional responsibilities that hindered their time with students. When P7 was asked to expound upon workload, P7 reiterated her role as a career and technical education counselor, and that role encompassed dual credit, a term used to describe courses students take to earn high school and college credit. P7 stated,

My job in particular deals not only with CTE students, but it also deals with dual credit. So, in addition to dual credit, and doing applications, doing TSI testing, connecting with the students, and trying to schedule them as well, it's also trying to work with schedule changes and schedule conflicts.

P8 was consistent with what the other participants informed about counselor assignments. She stated, “We are pulled in a lot of different directions. So, not only time to implement whatever strategies are needed in school, but also the training for them. [To] high school counselor here, 504 is a huge responsibility.” P8 further stated, “The role as a crisis counselor, there's a lot of the emotional support, social, mental health aspect of counseling.” Not only did P8 voice her concerns about her workload in regards to crisis counseling, but P8 also voiced her concerns about other duties as assigned. P8 stated, “Enrollments, scheduling, and transcripts, I mean, all of those administrative duties that go along with high school counseling take away a lot of time.

The participants’ feedback on their role as a high school counselor described what a typical day as a high school counselor looked like. These roles illustrated counselor duties that inhibited college readiness for diverse learners. Participants’ responses about their challenges made me question counselors’ understanding of college readiness for

diverse learners. Each counselor had different perspectives on what college readiness really meant. This information helped to develop Themes 3 and 4 as well as answer the following research question: What are the PD needs of school counselors in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college?

When asked to explain counselors' understanding of college readiness for diverse learners, P1 described entrance exams, financial aid, and students' background. P1 stated, "There are different facets such as, SAT, ACT, and the TSI for students who choose to attend community college. There is also financial aid." P1 continued to mention diversity within Hunt ISD and stated, "Many of our students being diverse, whether it be their ethnicity, education level, or their financial level, or if they have special needs, I feel we need training that's helps diverse students in that capacity." P2 answered, "Well, now that can be a big problem because I'm not sure anyone's really telling us exactly what college readiness should look like." Because P2's response to this question was similar to another participant's response, I then asked P2 to state what college readiness meant to her. P2 stated, "To help students be able to navigate the admissions process, able to have the courses that they need to be accepted." P2 furthered her explanation and stated, "[And] get the information they need to know how to be accepted, I guess the admissions, the financial aid, [and] the testing required, I guess I know most of those things." P4 indicated, "College readiness, to me, is the student being prepared to go to college, and stay in college, and graduate." She felt the counselor's role was "less about the retention of college, or the preparedness of college, and more with the getting into college." Like P1, P4 also communicated the following subjects were important for counselors to be well versed in: SAT, rank, GPA, scholarships, and applications.

P3, P6, and P7 did reference the term diverse when asked to explain their understanding of college readiness for diverse learners. P3 mentioned that college readiness could be generalized and stated, “You can generalize that, like students need to be prepared for the rigor of an academic postsecondary, and that's across the board. I don't think that has anything to do with maybe diversity as much.” She added, “So my understanding of postsecondary success for diversity is very limited, I would say.” While P3 expressed limited knowledge about postsecondary success for diverse learners, P6 not only revealed her knowledge of college readiness, but P6 also revealed how Hunt ISD viewed college readiness for diverse students. P6 was concerned that Hunt ISD thought every student looked the same in regards to the collegiate process. P6 stated, “I feel like we blankly feel they're all going to fill out a FAFSA. They're going to all put in a college application. They're going to all know the process.” She added,

I feel like college readiness is actually just postsecondary readiness. Is that going to be in the workforce? Is that going to be military? Is that going to be a 4-year college? Is that going to be a 2-year college? Is that going to be a specialty trade school?

P6 made me aware that high school counselors would “need to know all the different requirements for all those different processes. And then you need to...[teach] the student individually on their specific path that they need to go.”

P7 believed college readiness was continued learning in order to develop a trade or go into the university. She indicated that this task could be taxing for diverse learners. P7 conveyed, “I think for diverse students, the challenge is that they may be first generation students, and so they don't always have the resources that a student who has a

parent who might have already gone through that process.” P5 added, “Providing opportunities for them to have that encouragement. Because a lot of them at home don't have the support because their parents didn't go to college. So that means they're not really supportive or encouraging.” P7 furthered her explanation and mentioned a personal experience with one of her students who was expected to receive a large sum of money for college through grants and scholarships. However, her parent’s limited knowledge about financial aid hindered the student’s progress. P7 stated, “Her parents just thought there was a catch to it, so they didn't want to proceed with the FAFSA. She was eligible for grants. She was eligible for some scholarships, but her parents didn't realize that whole process.”

Participants had an array of descriptions on what it means to prepare diverse students for college. While some participants spoke of college preparation in general, several participants focused on diversity. Participants’ training needs were discovered from their understanding of college readiness for diverse learners.

### **Theme 3: Competing Training Needs**

All high school counselors in this study professed a need for current PD dedicated to helping high school counselors prepare diverse learners for college. Although different, responses to what school counselors feel they need to prepare diverse learners for college were sustained. P1 communicated the need for more training and more resources for counselors, even outside of the school district. She stated, “I’m sure there are a lot of really neat and inventive ideas and great strategies that are being used in other districts whether it be our state or not.” Although participants previously indicated the director of counseling placed much attention on mental health, P1 revealed,

Our director has mentioned she would like for us to have some extra training outside of our school district. Maybe going to a Region 10 or whatever your region may be, but...when it's been approached on the campus level, it's not always supported.

The following participants concentrated on the meaning of diversity as it relates to endorsements and what colleges wanted to see on high school transcripts: P2, P4, P5, P6, and P8. P2 stated, "The endorsement piece as far as what is really going on with the colleges in that regard. How are these endorsements actually impacting admissions, if at all?" P5 reinforced this notion and added, "What do universities really want to see? If a kid's going into pre-med, are they going to look for more sciences, more maths? If we make their learning diverse enough, they kind of have a really good transcript." P6 mentioned, "I feel like I need to know what the current College Board expectations are. I need to know what current college trends are. Are they pro-AP or are they pro-dual credit? Both?" P8 mentioned, "I think that would be followed by the high school graduation requirements and how those apply to different institutions." P4's take on counselors' training needs in regards to what colleges want was similar. P4 stated, "Community college. Just getting in. And then, the transition from a junior college or a community college to a 4-year. In-state versus out-state, private versus public?" Whereas the majority of counselors felt the need to know what colleges wanted as it related to high school graduation credits, P7's focal point resided in college entrance exams. She voiced, "As far as the training goes, just keeping us abreast of some of the new information that's coming out. The changes that come out with ACT or SAT. The changes that come out with the TSI."

Financial aid appeared to be another subject for the participants. P4 indicated, “So, it feels like there needs to be access to or I just, in general, need to have a better understanding of FAFSA, and loans, and scholarships, and grants. And how to do it, and how it works.” P5 continued, “I guess better set them up for getting financial aid. Because I feel like the kids think that financial aid's the most important thing. They worry about, "How am I going to pay for it?" P8 further added, “Financial aid would be a big one. Definitely. Because I have a lot to learn in that area. In fact, I've needed to go to more of their little FAFSA things so that I can learn there.” Although the majority of participants felt knowing current expectations from colleges, whether it was testing requirements, financial aid, and what colleges want to see on high school transcripts in regards to courses related to endorsements, three participants expressed ways to involve parents as a PD need. After P3 was given examples of what I meant by PD needs, P3 did agree that financial aid and the alignment of high school endorsements with college expectations was also PD need.

P1, P3, and P8 felt ways to involve parents was a PD need. P1 communicated the struggle to get parents involved in their child's education at the study site, and felt training that helps counselors better inform parents was a need and would be beneficial in the college readiness process. P1 stated, I know we have a hard time with parent participation on the high school level. But I do believe that if we were able to have our firsthand knowledge so we could pass that on to the parents, I think in turn that would encourage our parents to encourage their students to go.

P3 added, “Yeah, and I think more community too, like parent involvement. How to get parents involved, and...[teaching] parents on all of this stuff.” To understand what P3 meant by “stuff”, P3 continued, “[Teaching] parents on financial aid. I mean, this is simple as what's the difference between a scholarship, a grant, and a loan. Just simple training for the community, and training us to prepare parents for that as well.” P8 added, “I think that's one of the big things is just them being aware of opportunities and finding ways to connect families so that it's a team effort.”

All school counselors implied that they would like to have had more training on wide-spread college expectations to redirect diverse students with their career aspirations. Ways in which to reach this goal was demonstrated when participants identified what they needed. Although time seemed to be a challenge for the participants, time was also shown to be a need in order to receive proper training. Theme 4 was established through this process and further informed the research question: What are the PD needs of school counselors in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college?

#### **Theme 4: Delivery Methods**

The participants expressed the desire for Hunt ISD to first begin to have PD to address high school counselors' college readiness needs. While each participant explained different ways in which they would like to see PD delivered, all participants desired more resources and collaboration with others to help counselors equip diverse learners with their postsecondary aspirations. Several participants also communicated the need to acquire information about what their diverse students needed before collaboration with others could begin. Counselors noted collaborating with individuals from the

following organizations: school counseling directors, 4 year colleges, 2 year colleges, and trade schools. Participants' declarations are categorized below.

P1 conveyed, "I think that we need to understand what students' needs are. It's just like in the classroom, every student has a different style of learning while every student has a different need to get to college." P3 also felt knowing the needs of diverse learners was important and stated, "Just knowing the needs of our diverse population. What do they need to know? Like I said, I'm ignorant when it comes to what they need." P3 proceeded with, "So just having someone say, let's look at the different cultures that we have here at Hunt high school, and what do they need to be successful in college? P3 seemed to be passionate about knowing the needs of diverse student before counselors could be helpful in assisting these students with postsecondary options. P3 noted after diverse students and their needs were identified, she would then know what to look for as far as her needs as a counselor. P3 stated,

I think finding what's out there. I'm assuming that there are tools, that there are resources already out there that will help kids access college, but it's just finding them and then making them available to students. So, I think a staff development that said, 'Hey, this is a list of resources that kids can go to.

Just like P3, P4 identified helping counselors with resources to assist students with college as a PD need. P4 augmented, "Teaching me where to get the resources. How to get the resources. Who to get the resources from." P4 intensified the conversation and added, "How to find the answers. Time to find the answers. It would be intentional. It would have a clear purpose." Counselors having more resources was a significant topic

for some of the participants; however, time to connect with representatives from various colleges was paramount.

P5 expressed, "I mean, even if we were all sent to different schools or different campuses, it would be nice if when we went we could sit down with the counselor to teach us what they're looking for." P5 appeared to be unsettled while discussing ways to help counselors and further stated, "But I'd like to hear it from universities or hear it from somebody that went and heard it from a university recently not like this was 20 years ago." P2 added,

You might not realize until you go to a lot of those college updates what good information you really do get and what a better counselor it makes you by just seeing the admissions people and listening to what they have to say.

P6 also felt when colleges do come to high school campuses, colleges are there to recruit students, not to partner with counselors. She stated, "It's not a half day or different types of scenarios represented to let those people partner up with counselors and equip them to help kids when they've been recruited."

P6 continued,

I feel like it needs to be built into a counselor's week. Half a day on Monday, example, is my day that I scheduled appointments with, or my district brings in these people or whatever. We have five different campuses we can rotate that through.

P2 too communicated thoughts similar to P6 about designated time built into counselors' workday for college training. P2 stated, "If we could plug things into the school schedule

and the curriculum somehow, if we knew what the colleges wanted, where you could have some time to actually just focus on some things you know you need.”

P7 thought it would be beneficial for high school counselors to attend trainings that emphasized college entrance exams that determine whether or not a student is ready for college. P7 stated, “I think it's important to be able to attend some of these ACT and SAT meetings.” P7 continued, “I think if you're going to grow the college numbers, I think it's important to allow us some time to be able to get some of that training.” P7 also expressed the need to allow counselors instead of those who are not required to assist with the college process to attend meetings with partnering colleges. P7 stated, “So I think it would be good when there are meetings with some of the colleges that you do invite the people involved.” P8 had one perspective on delivery methods that was similar to P7’s statement about disseminating information to those who are actually involved in the college readiness process. P8 also mentioned time as a factor in order to incorporate college readiness training into counselors’ schedule. P8 stated,

I think everyone having the opportunity to provide input into what's necessary, because I think sometimes when trainings are given, just like with all things, it's given from a certain perspective. And sometimes that perspective doesn't come from the counselors who are doing it on a daily basis. And also, just having time scheduled for those things.

In spite of the fact that high school counselors in this study had limited knowledge about college readiness for diverse learners, all participants demonstrated a strong need for PD that would address college readiness for diverse learners by giving counselors time to network with various colleges, giving counselors resources to help students and

their parents, and by giving counselors ways to establish the needs of their diverse students. In order to make this goal achievable, counselors felt some of their assigned tasks needed to be revisited. Several participants also expressed a need to have those who interact with diverse students on a day to day basis be a part of training sessions instead of receiving this information from individuals who may not work in that capacity.

### **Conclusion**

High school counselors in this study had not received PD from their school district in relation to college readiness for diverse learners, nor had counselors collaborated with various types of postsecondary institutions to establish their expectations for college admissions. A qualitative case study was used in which I interviewed eight high school counselors in a school district that was carefully chosen. I used semi-structured interviews by asking open ended questions to inform three important research questions. Participants were motivated to honestly communicate to me about PD that had previously and currently addressed students' college readiness needs. I requested counselors' ideas about college readiness for diverse learners and whether or not they felt training on how to prepare diverse students for college would be beneficial to their growth and development. Member checking and peer debriefing were used to ensure the reliability and validity of this study.

Four themes were identified while transcripts were read, open coded, and analyzed. It was evident from interview questions that participants want to attend more PD designed to help high school counselors prepare diverse students for postsecondary education by way of collaborating with colleges and school district officials. It was also clear that counselors wanted to be given a list of resources that could be used for their

benefit and their students' benefit. Additionally, counselor displayed the need to able to discuss current trends amongst each other on assigned PD days. Although counselors did state there were consistent days set aside to PD in Hunt ISD, counselors did not acknowledge that it was possible to change how they received PD to help them with the college expectation of their job.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

Evaluating high school counselors' PD needs is important. High school counselors impart educational guidance to learners that makes the counselors' role significant in obtaining information that helps students with postsecondary options (Hoyt, 2001). Ensuring that high school counselors have continuous learning opportunities is effective at preparing underrepresented students for college (Hughey, 2011). High school counselors in this study had not shared in district PD that was relevant to their role in preparing diverse students for college. Counselors expressed the need for more time during assigned PD days to address the expectations of partner community colleges as well as universities pertaining to high school graduation credits, financial aid, and college entrance exams. Counselors also expressed the need for a list of available resources to help counselors and students navigate the college progress. Important, counselors desired to collaborate as a learning community with college representatives, namely representatives who are involved with college admissions.

Previous collaboration with representatives of colleges in which high school counselors had any interaction involved attending a college update outside of Hunt ISD at their own expense. As described by counselors, interactions with college representatives were either brief or designed for recruiters to speak with students who were scheduled to be enrolled in their institution. Due to this inability to have direct encounters with college representatives regarding their needs, counselors demonstrated a common aspiration to connect with admissions representatives by inviting the representatives to speak on PD days. Creating a professional learning community (PLC) for counselors and partnering

college admission representatives would create opportunities for high school counselors to participate in ongoing PD addressing college readiness for diverse students. Past counselor experiences with colleges expressed in interviews did not fulfill the meaning of a collaborative PLC and went against what research has shown to be a part of effective PD. For example, Schlachter (2013) noted accountability for professional growth necessitates educational leaders to be collaborative when executing their practice. Additional previous research also shows that meaningful accountability and leadership are important when executing PLCs (Anfara & Mertens, 2012; Blanton & Perez, 2011). Spencer (2016) mentioned keeping notes that reflect PLC goals, accomplishments, and future objectives are ways to demonstrate accountability. Although high school counselors are not typically viewed as leaders, the ASCA (2012) mandated that school counselors participate in leadership activities. According to Salina et al. (2013), becoming an educational leader may be the optimal way for counselors to lobby for their students as well as themselves.

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) noted PLCs require stakeholders to work as a team in a collaborative manner and conduct endless research for student success. Counselors in this study did not divulge information on team characteristics matching DuFour's et al. (2008) characteristics of effective teams where they are able to discuss ideas about students' college readiness goals with other counselors or with other stakeholders such as college recruiters. DuFour's et al. (2008) description of successful teams includes the following:

1. Shared mission, vision, values, and goals.
2. Collaborative teams focused on learning.

3. Collective inquiry.
4. Action orientation and experimentation.
5. Commitment to continuous improvement.
6. Results orientation.

Scholarly literature detailed how workers in nontraditional professions such as high school counselors and representatives of postsecondary institutions applied DuFour's characteristics suggesting that leaders manage student success through PLCs. For example, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) suggested other collaborative groups such as vertical and blended teams and further indicated that teachers who taught in a specialty area such as special education, fine arts, and physical education could join a team if seeking solutions connected to their areas of proficiency. Likewise, counselors could team up with college representatives as both roles cover the transition from high school to college. Consequently, this project consists of an interdisciplinary blended team approach to a PLC formed on the basis of DuFour's et al. (2008) attributes of a valuable PLC where high school counselors and college representatives collaborate during assigned PD days to establish prevalent college readiness goals for diverse students.

My project consists of three days of PD to increase Hunt ISD counselors' knowledge about college readiness for diverse learners by developing a PLC with stakeholders from partnering postsecondary institutions. This idea is considered a blended team approach because groups operate under separate organizations. Although affiliates of this blended team do not have equal job responsibilities, workers in both positions can demonstrate DuFour's et al (2008) characteristics of an effective PLC. The components of this PD use DuFour's et al.'s six characteristics of advantageous PLCs

while updating high school counselors about college readiness mandates adopted by the U.S. Department of Education that insists all students will graduate from high school college ready (USDE, 2010). Developing a blended team PLC may also help high school counselors identify their own potential to become a leader within their organizations.

In an effort to define a blended team PLC as it relates to PD for high school counselors, in Section 3, I cover the goals of a project and how the project addresses the problem in this study. The rationale, literature review, and steps for implementation are discussed. In addition to a guide for implementation, a suggested timeline for implementation and possible resources are included. Also included are potential barriers and a section on how this project may spur social change. A way to evaluate this project is also considered. Appendix A includes all documents related to this project.

### **Project Goals**

To expand on continuous learning for high school counselors, I inquired with an administrator in Hunt ISD about the creation of a PLC. The importance of developing a learning culture for high school counselors and representatives of postsecondary institutions became clear in response to the identified problem, scholarly literature on the problem, and findings in this study. The need for more time and opportunities for counselors to enhance their knowledge of college readiness for diverse learners became the focus of the project. As mentioned in Section 1, Hunt ISD lacks PD for high school counselors about college readiness needs for diverse learners. Although counselors stated the need to know what colleges expect from high school students entering college and suggested college representatives come speak to counselors on PD days, the term *PLC* was not verbalized. Therefore, the project is intended to enhance counselors' knowledge

about college readiness for diverse learners through the creation of a PLC with postsecondary institutions.

From data analyzed, the goals of this project were developed. The project goals are listed below:

1. High school counselors in Hunt ISD recognize and implement the six characteristics of a PLC.
2. High school counselors and representatives of postsecondary institutions collaborate during PD days to establish what diverse students need to be college ready.
3. High school counselors jointly develop their PD needs in relation to college readiness for the projected school year and explicate their needs to the director of school counselors and school administrators.
4. High school counselors work with postsecondary institutions to establish PLC goals for the projected school year and explicate the goals to the director of school counselors and school administrators.
5. High school counselors understand how to execute their role as leaders in the college readiness process for their students.

### **Rationale**

The project is a way to respond to high school counselors' proclaimed desire for time to work with postsecondary institutions to improve college readiness at Hunt ISD for diverse learners. A PLC composed of high school counselors and college representatives as a way to ensure counselors receive college readiness training was a product of the data analysis, the literature review, and the suggestions from the case study involving Hunt ISD's underprovided PD for counselors regarding college readiness for diverse learners. To implement collaboration between counselors and representatives of higher learning institutions, in the project, much attention was paid to the six characteristics of PLCs. With pressing college mandates on the horizon, this project is also a means to address school counselors' need to advocate for their PD needs.

## **Review of the Literature**

Functioning as the conceptual framework for this study, the Proficiency Theory of adult learning suggests adult learners are satisfied by how well they are beneficial to others as a result of learning information that is useful to the role in which they perform (Knox, 1980). High school counselors in this study had not received any PD about college readiness for diverse learners for college. As a result, counselors felt they were not preparing their students for postsecondary learning. PD for counselors, college readiness, and diverse learners were subjects that developed from the research with regards to the identified problem. Data from the research led to the need to investigate ways in which high school counselors in Hunt ISD encounter opportunities for PD that addresses college readiness for diverse students, and to answer the following research question: How do school counselors perceive their PD needs in the area of college readiness for diverse students?

The findings from analyzed documents and interviews illustrated a significant need for high school counselors in Hunt ISD to experience opportunities to improve their knowledge of postsecondary education for diverse learners. Reviews of each study participant's employee training file and the interview transcripts revealed that PD for high school counselors in Hunt ISD was primarily focused on mental health and had little relevance to their expected job responsibilities. In addition to limited PD about college preparation for diverse learners, analysis of the interviews revealed the need for collaboration between high school counselors and partnering postsecondary institution staff members, along with a need for counselors to advocate for their own PD.

The foundation of this project stemmed from the data analysis included in Section 2. Analyses of the data displayed counselors' desire to connect with colleges about their admissions requirements as a means for counselors to prepare their students for college. Therefore, I proposed a project PD for counselors in Hunt ISD. To create the final project resolution, a second literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed journal articles from databases through Walden University's library. The following terms were searched using ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, SAGE, and Academic Search Complete: *collaboration, collaboration between school counselors and colleges, PLCs, establishing a PLC, school counselor PLCs, school counselors as leaders, college readiness training, evaluating professional development for school counselors, and professional development and college readiness.*

### **PLC: An Agency for Professional Development**

Educators are continuous learners who strive to improve their knowledge and skills for the betterment of the entire education system. PD for counselors has been a mandatory requirement for obtaining appropriate skills needed for program improvement (ASCA, 2012). Therefore, in-service and preservice counselors need to enhance their skill set in order to perform as growing professionals. According to Wallace (2014), students can improve their learning based on PD for educators that focuses on content and educational skills. The purpose of PD is for educators to strengthen their knowledge base and equip learners for entrance into the workforce (Hough, 2011; Teague & Anfara, 2012). However, Collopy (2015) found that PD can be inefficient and detached from the vision of the school, students' needs, and the needs of its faculty. High school counselors

in this study demonstrated through responses to interview questions that PD as needed for the sake of their professional growth and the needs of their diverse learners.

According to Dufour and Fullan (2013), a learning community in relation to a system is about a group of people collaboratively working to do their individual part. A learning community also recognizes that all persons should make a contribution to the system without thinking of themselves as being isolated from the system. Dufour and Fullan's (2013) suggested that in order for an organization to function as a learning community, it takes a team of leaders working together for the best interest of those who belong to that institution. In this study, there was no evidence that high school counselors considered themselves as leaders. A PLC may allow high school counselors to share leadership roles in their PD training with colleges for improving college readiness for diverse students in their school.

Frequent use of PLCs has become rewarding to educators and their departmental teams. DuFour and DuFour (2012) argued the rising acceptance of the PLC process and its potential to influence learning has made *professional learning community* an ordinary term for educators worldwide. DuFour served as a notable influence who helped bring this idea to existence. DuFour et al. (2008) described a PLC as a group of educators devoted to collaboration and the process of inquiry that allows action research to produce better outcomes for students. This concept of a devotion to collaboration and inquiry serves as a blueprint for the development of a project featuring collaboration between high school counselors and representatives from colleges who to collectively share ideas about college preparation for diverse students. According to Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2013), opportunities for adult learning can be given by coming together as a

team, dividing leadership roles in efforts to learn from one another, and sharing inquiry that creates discussion and reflection and advisement that builds mutual growth. High school counselors' responses to interview questions supported the need for shared learning to better prepare diverse students for college.

Time, encouragement, and support from leaders were needs identified by high school counselors in this study. In order for counselors to use PD to form a PLC with representatives from colleges that achieves the shared learning goal, buy-in from all parties including leaders in Hunt ISD is needed. Gibson and Brooks (2011) discovered that effective PLCs were consistent with school goals, considered the needs of teachers, and presumably the need of counselors, used collaboration and modeling, made opportunities for feedback, and were backed by administrators. Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky (2010) completed a quantitative study with 77 schools regarding educational support from leaders and concluded that encouragement from principals had a significant impact on student achievement. Additionally, Gibson and Brooks (2011) explained how important it is for PD to be supported by school leaders in order for participants to feel championed, galvanized, and authenticated. Kaagan and Headly (2010) agreed with the idea of support from administrators in their study about PD through the use of PLCs and stated that fruitful dialogue acknowledged the needs of all members, kept the attention of its participants, and included buy-in from everyone involved. Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) added PLC achievement is not contingent upon its members, but rather PLC achievement results from belief in the concept, dedication, and perseverance. The backing of school leaders would boost belief in the concept of PLCs and dedication to and the perseverance of the PLC.

Counselors in this study were concerned with their expected role in the college readiness process and felt the currently administered PD was not related to their job responsibilities. This PD need as it relates to high school counselors was described by DuFour and Fullan (2013) when they mentioned that a leader should be mindful that professional learning occurs when instruction is job-related, shared, linked to the intent of the school, and evaluated as a result of the outcome. DuFour et al. (2010) mentioned using PD to establish a PLC provides a way for participants to learn how to use a PLC in a school as well as provides a way for leaders to learn the aspects of PD relative to job-related challenges and school improvement. PD on establishing a PLC with colleges may enhance counselors' knowledge as it relates to their job responsibilities and gives leaders a better understanding of PD's importance to adhering to governing mandates placed on school districts. Lewis, Baker, Watts, and Lang (2014) noted that, due to mandates placed upon schools, PD with PLCs is an easier way to have a practical learning opportunity.

High school counselors in this study should have PD on forming a PLC with colleges that is rewarding. Characteristics of good PD that apply to teachers apply to counselors. Counselors and college representatives' shared collaboration about college readiness for diverse learners should reinforce their individual professional attributes and ensure accountability for their job responsibilities. Spencer (2016) found that PD used to better teacher practices while harnessing PLCs must ensure teachers feel PLCs are beneficial to their time. The same applies for other educators such as counselors. Owens (2010) noted using PD by way of PLCs has functioned effectively when activities are endorsed and participants' thoughts and reflective practices are valued. Thessin and Starr (2011) discovered that PD as a means to instruct on PLCs must be effectively

administered because placing individuals with good intentions together and expecting them to work jointly is not enough. Furthermore, Bayar (2014) determined that successful PD on the use of PLCs must be corresponding to the obligations of the school and the obligations of the educators created with suggestions from educators include active demonstrations, and yield continuous involvement. Barber and Mourshed (2009) found that PD on using PLCs works well when participating educators work cohesively and are held accountable for learning. Popp and Goldman (2016) suggested that PD needs to illustrate to participants how to employ collaboration, advocate inquiry, and stimulate reflection that fosters learning for all students. This concept can be developed with high school counselors and partnering colleges.

Ho, Lee, and Teng (2016) noted that, in order to strengthen PLCs, PD must turn towards learning and away from knowledge transference. PLCs have proven to be impactful when the possibility for PD has been used to secure knowledge transmission in relation to leadership opportunities within PLCs while building relationships and promoting collaboration through the use of PLCs (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). According to Hairon, Goh, and Chua's (2015) study, teachers can develop leadership opportunities by building relationships with colleagues and encouraging active collaboration and a common goal of improving student learning. Building relationships with colleagues and encouraging active collaboration can provide procedures for open communication, mutual trust, and constant refinement of educators' instructive strategies (Chen, Lee, Lin, & Zhang, 2016). This project was designed to develop leadership opportunities for counselors by fostering relationships between high school counselors and between counselors and college admission representatives and encouraging the

shared goal of making sure students transition to postsecondary institutions properly.

Using PD to implement PLCs may be the best option.

In a study conducted by Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012), college faculty members generated an alliance with three schools and explored factors related to PLCs. The faculty members worked with teachers at elementary and middle schools to establish PLCs in their surrounding schools and found that teachers loved to govern their own learning, which aligns well with Knox's (1980) proficiency theory of adult learning that suggests effective teaching transactions between adult learners occur when adults take responsibility for learning objectives, a synopsis of content is provided, and activities that promote the use of new learning are included. Linder et al. (2012) also mentioned teachers felt a sense of empowerment as well as achievement when they were given the choice to select their own topics to be discussed while formulating PLCs. Maloney and Konza (2011) concurred on giving the choice on topics when they investigated processes to develop PLCs and established that PLCs gave teachers independence in planning PD and selecting favorable topics that would allow reflection.

Lutrick and Szabo (2012) directed a study with two elementary principals and three assistant principals who uncovered that effective PD is collaborative, interesting, ongoing, interactive, and data driven by its participants. To ensure PD functions as a way to sustain school improvement, DuFour (2011) declared that schools must produce ways for educators to become participants of PLCs. Professional learning communities are known to provide collaborative ways to satisfy the demands of all students and have been described by researchers as a technique for educators to use familiar practices to provide positive results for students (Thessin, 2015). Different from traditional PD where

educators attend workshops outside of school, Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) mentioned that PLCs are organized to be offered on campus, are ongoing, and utilize collaboration as an approach to PD. Professional learning communities will serve as the framework for PD for high school counselors to improve college readiness for diverse learners.

### **Development of Effective PLCs**

Brodie (2013) established that affluent PLCs connected teachers, students, and the knowledge that students are expected to learn. Furthermore, Gray, Mitchell, and Tarter (2014) asserted that educators who worked in environments that cultivated innovative learning had better professional growth and a definite influence on student achievement. DuFour et al. (2013) further added one of the characteristics of developing PLCs is transitioning from isolation to total collaboration with colleagues to meet a cohesive goal. According to DuFour et al. (2008), the following attributes of PLCs are effective and will be used to develop three days of PD for high school counselors: “shared mission, vision, and goals, a collaborative culture with a focus on learning, collective inquiry focused on best practices and current research, learning by doing, committing to continuous improvement, and being results oriented” (p.15). High school counselors and representatives from colleges may be able to work together to discover systems for devising learning opportunities best for diverse students.

### **Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals**

DuFour and DuFour (2012) asserted that shared mission, vision, values, and goals are the main components of a PLC that binds the PLC together and served as the premise to direct school staff members and the schools governing body. DuFour et al. (2012)

further argued that educators who inquired about school related information based on these elements would be able to form the basis of a PLC that included authentic interchange about solutions to their school related concerns. Hord (2008) mentioned that sharing a vision has nothing to do with acceptance of a desired intention, but rather a cognitive image of what is essential to an institution. Although high school counselors should have a vision of how their counseling programs can help diverse learners with postsecondary education, counselors cannot master the vision, mission, values, and goals alone. Educational success for all students is linked to all affiliated with college transition. High school counselors and representatives from colleges may be able to establish the foundation of a PLC that is grounded by using PD to develop a PLC with a shared mission, vision, values, and goals. DuFour (2008) stated that shared responsibility should be in agreement with the school's mission and further added "shared mission, vision, values, and goals not only address *the way in which* educators will work to improve their schools, but also reinforces the moral purpose and collective responsibility that clarify *the importance* of their day--today work is so important" (p. 15).

### **Collaborative Teams**

Professional learning communities are teams who collaborate interdependently in order to arrive at common goals for teaching learners (DuFour et al., 2012). Williams and Hierch (2015) supported this claim and stated that teams who are in leadership positions need to build goals and make challenging decisions through shared knowledge. In relation to PD and collaboration, Forte and Flores (2014) stated in their research about teacher collaboration and PD that collaborative learning opportunities can be a positive way to incorporate continued PD by promoting collective growth and shared leadership.

High school counselors and representatives from colleges may be able to depend on one another using their specific areas of expertise to achieve the common object of preparing diverse learners for college. According to Senge (2010), “Intelligence of a team exceeds the intelligence of the individual in the team” (p. 9). This statement suggested that it is more beneficial for educators to work together rather than work in isolation. DuFour and Fullan (2013) explained leadership and its role as it pertains to a PLC as delivering ongoing guidance for a PLC to yield unified commitment that leads to encouraging results. Huffman (2011) agreed with PLCs as housing leaders when he studied PLCs for 12 years and determined that PLCs consist of professionals in a school who work collaboratively and deliberately to maintain a culture that strengthens education for all students. These findings noted the power of collaborative teams and their ability to influence student achievement.

### **Collective Inquiry**

Collective inquiry is the engagement of educators who share ideas and reflect on ways to execute curriculum to make superior options for students (DuFour et al., 2012). That statement suggested that collective inquiry continuously questions the existing state of education. Senge (2010) established that generating a way for collective inquiry to take place creates an environment for learning that is unrelenting. PD using PLCs with high school counselors and representatives from colleges may broaden counselors’ chances to share college readiness practices with college representatives. Woodland (2016) evaluated the Teacher Collaboration Assessment Rubric (TCAR) in regards to PLCs with PK-12 schools and confirmed that dialogue was a key element of PLCs that involved meticulous inquiry so that all learners receive suitable ways to solve problems.

Diverse students at the study site had not been successful with college transition and may benefit from PLCs that possess collective inquiry. Collective inquiry found in Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow's (2010) study was described as PLCs employing conversations to recognize conventional goals and methods for better instruction. The process of collective inquiry may allow high school counselors to learn new information to increase the college-going rate of culturally diverse populations.

### **Action Orientation and Experimentation**

Action orientation necessitates participants of PLCs to turn what they have learned into action. DuFour et al. (2008) indicated members of PLCs comprehend that successful learning comes in the form of taking action while remembering that it is always good to test new ideas. In other words, members of PLCs learn by doing. Hanaford (2010) made it clear that PLCs present conditions that influence action and experimentation with intentions of learning improvement for all students. Dufour et al. (2010) further added, "learning that requires participants to actively do something creates intense commitment rather than learning by reading, listening, planning, or thinking" (p. 3). High school counselors and college representatives who make an effort to change the way things have always been done at the study site by taking action may provide the PD training counselors need to improve college readiness for diverse students. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) mentioned that credible schools use PLCs to promote action that welcomes school revision for the betterment of student learning. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), dialogue is the initial task within PLCs that leads to more action that creates the most learning.

### **Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

Members of PLCs are dedicated to lifelong learning by finding avenues to enhance their professional growth. DuFour et al. (2010) noted continuous learning as a perpetual undertaking of the following: confirming students' level of learning, managing students' weaknesses and improving their strengths, applying new strategies, finding out what is beneficial and what is not beneficial, and utilizing new knowledge for the next phase of continuous learning. In a study conducted by Shipton, Zhou, and Mooi (2013), researchers discovered that organizations that identified their employees' learning goals were reliable and thrived on the need for reform. DuFour et al. (2010) asserted the goal of continuous learning is not to master a plan of action but rather shape an environment that sustains learning forever. To be devoted to continuous learning associated with college readiness for diverse learners at the study site, participants in the PLC process must understand that perpetual learning is not assigned to individuals who serve as leaders, but it is assigned to all affiliates of the organization (DuFour et al., 2010).

### **Results Orientation**

Participants of a PLC make every effort to include the five characteristics of PLCs mentioned above and end with the final element, results orientation. DuFour et al. (2008) noted proponents of PLCs are insistent to accomplish results and attempt to find proof that their methods are essential to student learning. DuFour et al. (2010) further added PLCs that are not assessed on the premise of results constitute arbitrary rummage rather than meaningful advancement. Dogan, Pringle, and Mesa (2016) found that educators who create PLC norms permit time to not only analyze teaching but also time to analyze learning of students and teachers. This statement suggested members of PLCs are

constantly seeking ways to improve student curriculum and their own PD by examining previous results. High school counselors in Hunt ISD may be looking for ways to better their own knowledge about college readiness because the counselors seemed shaky in responding to questions on their students' college readiness. The counselors know aspects of college readiness as appropriate like transcripts and qualifying exams. If the counselors knew more about how students become college ready or knew more about the college assessment to determine students' readiness, a PLC with counselors may provide an avenue for professional growth and lifelong learning.

### **PLCs for High School Counselors**

The nature of PLCs can apply to any organization that is willing to use its basic components. Although much research about PLCs is geared towards teachers, other school professions benefit from PLCs including counselors. PD is a way to establish a culture of learning about new information on student outcomes and the college transition process. For example, Allen, Roegman, and Hatch's (2015) study encompassed 26 superintendents who engaged in collaboration involving small teams about instruction that induced positive outcomes. According to Linder et al. (2012), accomplished PLCs possess the attributes held by members who are committed, members take ownership of their actions, and collaborate with others.

High school counselors in this study reported through interviews that PD regarding college readiness for diverse students had not been presented. Chenoweth (2015) noted administrators who understand the importance of instruction through the use of collaboration to support learning for teachers and students function as successful agents of change. Although this study involved a population of high school counselors,

Balkiston (2011) discovered it is necessary for leaders to promote learning opportunities for all of their staff and added that leaders are responsible for establishing whether learning within institutions is enriched or inhibited.

Heck and Hallinger (2010) conducted a study of incorporating 195 elementary schools about collaborative leadership and its effect on systemic growth. Findings suggested instructional practices and student achievement improved with collaborative leadership. James, Mann, and Creasy (2012), in their study concerning collaborative leadership involving a program evaluation of the National College for School Leadership in England, described learning as “communities, schools, teachers, pupils, and leaders learning from each other, with each other and ultimately, on behalf of each other” (p. 87). The participants in this study reported a need for collaboration with school leaders as well as appropriate college personnel, and PD on PLCs may spur the solution.

The importance of using collaboration as a means to encourage a culture of learning among counselors was shown in a study conducted by Bierma (2007) who found collaboration by means of allowing a group of counselors at a middle school share their ideas for the upcoming year with the entire faculty produced positive results with the school’s learning culture. Although related to new counselors, Pflieger (2013) noted how imperative it was for new counselors to be able to collaborate with more seasoned colleagues. In Pflieger’s (2013) study, one individual served in the role of a counselor, and the author stressed the need for new counselors to have the opportunity to collaborate with others through mentorship. While the benefits of collaboration among counselors on in-service days and during counselors’ lunchtime were reinforced in Dollarhide and Saginak’s (2012) study, outcomes from these collaborative opportunities were not

provided. Young and Kneale (2013) mentioned the influence of counselors having leadership roles that involved collaborating with their peers and suggested establishing counselor cohorts in order for counselors to share their job related experiences.

Comparable to Young and Kneale (2013), Woodward and Aiello (2012) had encounters with all levels of school counselors on aligning counselor curriculum and found a need for school counselors to collectively work with one another for the betterment of their students and parents.

When developing PD training on the implementation of PLCs with high school counselors and college representatives, learning should align with the counselors' curriculum that stated

high school counselors will provide equitable and appropriate services by addressing students' academic, career and social/emotional developmental needs in addition to balancing delivery methods and recognizing students learn in multiple ways (ASCA, 2017, para. 7).

According to Stewart (2014), PD exercises are related to faculty members' work responsibilities, are information driven, focus on student achievement, and happen over a period to ensure application and reflection. For this reason, PD on how to implement a PLC with high school counselors and colleges will help counselors' become leaders of their own professional growth by focusing on their responsibility to advocate for students' educational needs, as well as ensuring all students have a successful transition in to postsecondary education (ASCA, 2012). Linder et al.'s (2012) study on implementing PLCs to form university partnerships found that one of the main considerations when developing PLCs is participants want to be accountable for their

own learning. By establishing a PLC with counselors and colleges, counselors will be able to make their voices heard about their needs for preparing diverse learners for college while establishing themselves as leaders of their own PD.

### **Counselors as Leaders**

An analysis of interview data indicated high school counselors perceived that they did not have a voice about their PD needs. The counselors did not disclose whether or not they were told they did not have a say about what PD they needed; however, some counselors mentioned they were not provided professional learning or other PD opportunities.

School counselors taking a leadership position have always been an important strength for managing a school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). The expectation for counselors to become leaders within the counseling profession is noted in the ASCA National Model that describes school counselors' competencies. However, high school counselors in this study did not disclose that a counselor in their organization had positioned themselves as a leader and approached administrators or the director of counselors about counselors PD needs. Failure to advocate for the counseling profession and student achievement is incompatible to the responsibilities of what the ASCA has designed for a professional school counselor (ASCA, 2012).

Wingfield, Reese, and West-Olatunji (2010) noted 21<sup>st</sup> century school counselors should be leaders who worked to create a climate of diversity. Wingfield et al. (2010) further noted counselors who are acknowledged as leaders and are able to explain to their colleagues the social background of student achievement are positioned to advocate for diverse students who have been discriminated against. According to Shillingford and

Lambie's (2010) study, it is fundamental for school counselors to take on leadership positions in order to better serve students. In addition to taking on leadership roles, Shillingford and Lambie (2010) also mentioned the significance of collaboration for the purpose of sharing goals and creating ways to apply program activities. School counselors who become leaders are more capable of stimulating students' academic performance. High school counselors in this study may be able to establish a PLC with colleges as way to advocate for diverse students in their organization. Salina et al. (2013) noted developing a PLC is one way to show leaders in education that counselors are fighting for their students and their school counseling program.

Odegard-Koester and Watkins (2016) concluded that school counselors are leaders who are often overlooked and conducted a qualitative case study about creating a leader-member relationship between school counselors and principals in a rural elementary school. Odegard-Koester et al. (2016) discovered student-centered focus, role differentiation, and trust were factors that constituted a working relationship between counselors and principals. Walker (2006) supported this notion and found that in order to remove inequitable barriers for diverse populations, counselors must be welcomed as members of a leadership team. Walker (2006) continued the idea that counselors needed to be invited as leaders in stating that principals and counselors must work together to provide interventions best suited for culturally diverse students. High school counselors in the present study voiced a desire to collaborate within their organization as well as collaborate with administrators to gain support for more PD training about their college readiness needs.

School counselors are expected to be leaders of their profession and to work with all parties involved in student learning. In Section 2, high school counselors did not state they had any collaboration with their administrators. In fact, school counselors' indication of no support from administrators regarding PD training illustrated counselors and administrators in the study had not worked jointly to improve counselors' professional growth. Nappi (2014) mentioned the idea of principals securing other educators to assist with the role of a leader. Nappi (2014) further stated students are more likely to be successful when leadership is shared. According to ASCA (2012), collaboration, trust, and leadership are imperative for school counselors and administrators when working together for student achievement. When high school counselors learn how to develop a PLC with colleges through PD training, they can begin to collaborate with school officials about their experiences, thus promoting shared leadership while implementing a component of a promising PLC.

### **Project Description**

The goal of the project is to provide PD opportunities that will educate high school counselors about college readiness for diverse learners, provide knowledge to become an impactful PLC with representatives from colleges, provide opportunities for high school counselors to unite with like peers, and to create a college going lifestyle that cultivates positive learning for all students. The project's objective is to establish a PLC with high school counselors and representatives from colleges in order for counselors to learn what is expected of their students entering college, establish an ongoing relationship with local representatives of colleges, and provide ongoing training for high school counselors to adhere to their PD needs in relation to college readiness. The

implementation of these goals and objectives will be illustrated in this section along with the following information: potential resources and supports, potential barriers, timetable, and roles and responsibilities of others.

### **Implementation**

The proposed execution of this project will occur during the fall semester of the upcoming school year to formulate PD goals and objectives. The project will take place on three district assigned PD days. There are seven in-service days set aside for teachers before students return. School counselors will use three days out of the same seven in-service days to implement this project. The project will take place at district's PD center in the leadership room where counselors' meetings are typically held. All three sessions will have an official start time of 9:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. There will be two 15-minute breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Lunch will be provided for each session. A layout of each session's activities is illustrated in Appendix A.

#### **Day 1**

The first day is intended for the director of counselors to give an opening statement on PLCs followed by a 30-minute question and answer session on what a PLC would look like at the study site by one of Hunt ISD's executive directors and a school administrator. Counselors from all high schools in the district and a guest speaker from one of the district's partnering colleges will attend. Every high school in the district has a lead counselor. Therefore, lead counselors will be asked to serve as PLC coordinators with representatives from colleges. Lead counselors will be asked to follow school leaders on Day 1 with why counselors feel collaborating with colleges is important to their job responsibilities in terms of college readiness for diverse learners. In addition, the

director of counselors who is in charge of counselors' PD opportunities will be asked to discuss the district's college readiness data and how this data is important to the district's accountability. This information will show how students' college readiness success rate not only affects students' college transition, but this information will also show how college readiness affects high schools in the district. The guest speaker will discuss what high school students need to know about college admissions as well as what colleges need to know about high school in regards to graduation requirements. Opening day will be an exchange of what counselors want to know about the college admission process and what colleges need from counselors in hopes that administrators and executive directors will see the need and approve ongoing PD sessions with high school counselors and representatives from colleges.

## **Day 2**

The second day will provide high school counselors with an exchange of in-depth information about the college admission process. Topics that were deemed significant to counselors in the study were financial aid, various college entrance exams, and high school courses students need for college. Guest speakers from each entity will be asked to speak in the Day 2 session. This information is critical for students and for parents as they are key figures in their offspring's postsecondary education. Counselors have a chance to have open dialogue with each speaker at the conclusion of their presentation. The director of counselors will help guide each session with assistance from lead counselors that will encompass activities for counselors, college readiness topics, effective collaboration, and assessing examples of ways to help diverse learners prepare for college.

**Day 3**

The third PD session is meant to combine leaders from the first day and high school counselors involved in the PD sessions as it is aimed to illustrate what good PD sessions look like as a means to a PLC with high school counselors and representatives of colleges. The results of the PD training will also be analyzed on the third day to permit effectiveness of this occasion. In addition, the final day allows counselors to follow up on activities presented during the previous two sessions for the benefit of creating discussion with leaders about their learning moment. Through PD with representatives from colleges, counselors and administrators can be shown the advantages of having a PLC. The advantages may encompass making counselors' workload lighter in order to have PD while making students' transition to college more pleasant.

**Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

To be successful, this project must have support from district leaders. Implementing the PD sessions would become a part of in-service training for the upcoming year. The school district where the study took place has already developed a relationship with local community colleges and universities. One department at three local community colleges has offered to provide PD to high school counselors and has devised a plan on how to increase the number of students attending their college by offering scholarships and tuition reduction for students who come from diverse backgrounds. In addition to helping counselors and students, local community colleges are committed to working with teachers on acquiring additional course workout in order to teach college courses on high school campuses for dual enrollment. This initiative not only helps students get a start in the college process, but this initiative also helps

counselors get accustomed to what colleges expect from high school students. This alliance will be a positive resource for this project.

The following resources will be required for this professional learning opportunity: access to a screen and projector for the purpose of displaying videos, power point presentations, or any other computer data, handouts for participants with a set agenda for all three days, and food for a light breakfast and lunch. Although the district has days set aside for PD at the beginning of the school year, counselors do not spend these days learning about college readiness. Therefore, another resource that is needed is time for high school counselors to attend three days of training.

### **Potential Barriers and Solutions to Barriers**

While the need for PD about college readiness for diverse learners was identified by high school counselors in Hunt ISD, a potential barrier to this project could be a lack of support for time away from other administrative duties. The demand of student enrollments and schedule changes are typically priority at the beginning the school year for high school counselors which could possibly be another barrier to this project's implementation. High school counselors in this study voiced they typically work in their offices on campus staff development days as the PD sessions are designed for teachers. For this reason, high school counselors may need their administrators to seek support from the superintendent and explain to staff concluding the year that counselors will use three days during in-service week to collaborate with representatives from colleges to prepare for the upcoming school year. For example, instead of counselors taking three full consecutive days for training, counselors could train on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This would at least give counselors Tuesday and Thursday to work on student

enrollments and schedules. Knowledge of what will take place prior to the start of the school year will give counselors an idea of what to expect on in-service days as well as allow schools to inform parents there will not be any student enrollments on those days.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

This project's execution is intended for the 2020-2021 school year. To secure the PD project on the 2020-2021 in-service calendar, approval from administrators would need to happen before the 2019-2020 school year ends. I will speak with the director of counselors about my plans to meet with administrators to consider my project. Upon approval from the director of counselors, I will schedule a meeting with administrators from all five high schools at the end May so they may receive permission from district administration to have this project added to the in-service calendar for the next school year. If approved, I will contact the director of counselors, all high school counselors, and representatives from neighboring colleges by email and inform them of the PD opportunity. I would implement the project in August 2020.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

As the project developer, I will be accountable for administering this project. During the preparatory phase, I will contact guest speakers from partnering colleges as well as lead counselors from all five high schools in this study to communicate their role in this PD project. I will facilitate by introducing the agenda planned for each day. Lead counselors from all five high schools will give a brief discussion on opening day about the need for counselors to collaborate with representatives from colleges. Lead counselors will also assist college representatives with discussions from other participating counselors as group and open discussions will be included in the training.

College representatives will discuss the significance of working with high school counselors as well as give detailed information about what diverse students need to transition into post-secondary education. On the last day of training, lead counselors will help me when everyone from Day 1 comes together to discuss using PD as a means to implement a PLC with high school counselors and representatives of colleges. The group will elaborate the project's strengths and weakness. Participants will give feedback on the project in hopes that college readiness for diverse learners will continue to be a topic for in-service PD for high school counselors. A final evolution will be given in the form of a survey and I will share the results with participants in order to plan for future PD.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The purpose of this project is to provide PD for high school counselor in relation to college readiness while utilizing a PLC with representatives from colleges to impact college access for underrepresented students. High school counselors can obtain knowledge and skills to help students successfully transition to college while encouraging valuable collaboration with representatives of colleges. Formative and summative evaluation methods will be adopted to evaluate the PD opportunity. Formative evaluation will be used each day by asking follow-up questions. For example, at the end of each session, presenters will ask participants to verbally paraphrase the content discussed on that day as a way to check for understanding. Participants' feedback will be shared through reflections at the end of each session, both written and verbal. Formative assessment will allow me as the facilitator to make adjustments as needed by the participants. In terms of summative assessment, an evaluative survey will be given to determine the influence of the learning opportunity (see Appendix A). Administrators and

executive directors will be asked to complete an evaluation on the first day and on the last day. Participants who completed the three day training will be given a survey that will cover the training in its entirety. Surveys will allow me to make adjustments to training agenda and the way sessions are conducted for future PD. In addition to the survey at the end of the training, a follow up survey will be given during the spring semester to ascertain counselors' comprehension of the PD training and the effects the training had on their knowledge of college readiness for diverse students. A meeting will be scheduled after follow-up data has been collected and will be reported to school administrators and the director of counselors at the study site to demonstrate the project's impact.

The evaluation surveys will be based on the six goals of the project that will confirm if the results of the PD specify whether or not the goals have been met. The goal of the evaluation is to observe the progress of high school counselors' PD as a means to form a PLC with representatives of colleges. The surveys will enable administrators, the director of counselors, and me as the facilitator to establish if the PD opportunity attained its goals. Evaluations will not only help me determine if the project needs modifications based on counselors' needs, but evaluations will also help supply information that may be necessary for obtaining money to enrich future PD at the study site and help other high school counselors interested in this learning opportunity.

## **Project Implications**

### **Local Community**

This project contributes to possible social change at a local level by enhancing high school counselors' knowledge of college readiness while developing a PLC with neighboring colleges to impact diverse student outcomes in Hunt ISD. Collaborating with representatives from colleges as well as learning how to set program goals will help high school counselors become effective advocates for themselves and their students. High school counselors in Hunt ISD lack of PD that may assist counselors in executing one of the main components of the ASCA's National Model that suggests "advocating for the academic success of every student is a key role of school counselors and places them as leaders in promoting school reform" has prevented counselors in this study from providing adequate college information to their students and their students' parents (ASCA, 2003, p. 24).

Helping high school counselors become aware of their potential to become leaders of their own learning opportunities may empower counselors to become agents of change within their district's counseling program, thus creating better avenues to help inform students and parents in the participating district about college. Currently, high school counselors in Hunt ISD do not have a system in place to educate parents when their children began as freshman in high school about college expectations in order for diverse students to begin overcoming challenges such as, financial aid and course requirements associated with college readiness. Because school counselors typically work in isolation, they do not have many opportunities to share experiences with one another as well as share experiences with others who may be of value outside of their

organization. Therefore, customizing a setting that allows counselors to deliberate issues related to their practice with collaborating experts in the community may inform a better comprehensive counseling program for Hunt ISD. In turn, Hunt ISD may have an increasing number of students graduating from high school prepared for college with the potential to improve economic performance in their surrounding community.

### **Larger Context**

This study may contribute to social change in a larger context by adding to minimal literature about high school counselors' college readiness training and high school counselors' involvement with PLCs. This study may also serve as a guide to high school counselors in other districts on how to formulate a PLC with representatives from colleges through PD sessions while acquiring knowledge about college preparation for diverse students. Feedback from counselors after attending college readiness training, may give precise measures for administrators to improve PD for counselors in relation to college readiness within school districts. Additionally, this study may supplement existing information about college readiness training for high school counselors as there is inconsistent knowledge about the impact this kind of training has on school counseling programs. By improving high school counselors' college readiness skills, school districts can create a school environment that encourages college access for all students through collaboration with counselors and representatives from surrounding colleges.

### **Conclusion**

High school counselors in Hunt ISD were in agreement about their PD needs to prepare diverse learners for college. High school counselors were also in agreement on professional learning opportunities that would allow counselors to collaborate with

representatives from colleges. A three day PD opportunity was developed as a means to implement a PLC with high school counselors and representatives from colleges by using six characteristics of PLCs. In addition to college readiness training, the finding also indicated the need for counselors to become leaders in their profession by advocating for their needs and their students' needs. This PD opportunity will give counselors a chance to fight for what they need by demonstrating to administrators the impact collaborating with representatives from colleges can have on their job responsibilities, their students' college transition, and their school's accountability. A formative assessment will be used to evaluate the accomplishment of the learning opportunity.

Section 4 illustrates the project's strengths and weaknesses, alternate ways to address the study problem, and a reflection of myself as a project developer. Additionally, section 4 discusses scholarship, project development, and leadership pertaining to the development of this study. Ultimately, section 4 reviews the study's implications, applications, and avenues for future experimentation.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The leading strength of this project was the personal experiences of high school counselors about their PD needs expressed through interviews. PD about college readiness for diverse learners needed to be provided as a training opportunity for high school counselors in the study. In addition, it became apparent that collaboration with representatives from colleges needed to be incorporated into the PD opportunity as a way to form a PLC with counselors. Although no abundance of research exists on PLCs for school counselors, PLCs can be used as a PD resource for teachers and other educational groups to enhance academic growth for students (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Marzano et al., 2016). High school counselors in this study may be able to share their participation in a PLC with representative from colleges in order help make PLCs with counselors more widespread.

Another advantage to this PD opportunity is its potential to build collaborative relationships with representatives of colleges. PD as a means to develop a PLC will allow high school counselors collaborate as a counseling team, as well as allow high school counselors to collaborate with representatives from colleges. According to Collopy (2015), the execution of effective PD needs to include collaboration with its participants. Besides, data analysis revealed a need for high school counselors to collaborate not only with representative from colleges, but data analysis also revealed a need for high school counselors to collaborate amongst each other and their administrators. Because PLCs can be used as a representation of PD, Marzano et al. (2016) suggested that PLCs should be structured in a way to increase collaboration that is beneficial to students. High school

counselors in this study sought out communication with representatives from colleges to improve college readiness for diverse learners.

In addition to counselor interviews and the potential to build collaborative relationships with representatives from colleges, the mere creation of a high school counselor PLC is a strength that will provide a channel for counselors to have continuous PD in regards to college readiness for diverse learners. Because counselors in this study voiced the absence of administrative support for needed training, this project can be used to show administrators how counselors effectively used PLCs with representatives from colleges to sustain ongoing training. Research has shown that PLCs can systemically change schools. Despite this project's strengths, there are limitations that could lead to future research.

This project study is not exempt from limitations as I am aware that a 3-day PD session may not change the state of the high school counseling program in Hunt ISD in regards to college readiness for diverse learners. However, this project may be a start to changing high school counselors' knowledge and skills about a subject matter that effects not only the school district in terms of accountability, but it also effects students' transition into life after high school. One limitation is time due to student enrollments and schedule changes that are deemed important during district planned staff development for teachers. Time away from completing student enrollments and schedule changes may double counselors' workload upon return from training. At the same time, completing student enrollments and schedules changes may hinder counselors' ability to receive the training they need for the upcoming school year. Therefore, it is essential for high school

counselors to get buy-in from administrators and the director of counselors, and find a way to enact on this project.

Another perceived limitation is the study's small sample size in which eight high school counselors are interviewed about their PD needs representing one school district. Although the sample size produced saturation from the data collected, but the ability to interview more high school counselors about their PD needs for preparing diverse learners for college could strengthen the study. According to Morse (1995), "Saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work but there are no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation" (p. 147). However, many textbooks continue to recommend data collection until no new themes are recognized in the data.

### **Alternative Approaches**

The PD project concerning high school counselors' college readiness needs could be handled through other methods. One alternative approach to this project would be to have counselors attend college readiness training later during the school year outside of the school district. Although this would require counselors to be away from work, it could be done during the time of year that is not as busy as the beginning with student enrollments and schedule changes. With that being said, counselors would also need to get approval to leave their school and find monetary sources for attending the training. The PD project as described in this study was the best solution for addressing high school counselors' specific needs with the focus on college readiness for diverse students, while being feasible enough to be used in other school districts.

Time in general as well as time away from other duties has been an issue for high school counselors at the study site. Therefore, another alternative approach for addressing the study problem would be to have representatives from colleges create a college readiness resource book for high school counselors following the initial PD opportunity. After collaboration occurs with counselors and representatives from colleges, representatives from colleges may have enough information to develop a college readiness guidebook containing information counselors deemed important for diverse students to be successful in college. The resource book would include literature that supports college readiness and diverse cultures. This alternative may help with alleviating ongoing training sessions that would require counselors to be absent from job responsibilities administrators consider paramount. However, this approach would defeat the purpose of building a continuous relationship with representatives from colleges for establishing a successful PLC if counselors do not have the opportunity to physically collaborate and express their concerns.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

#### **Scholarship**

When I think about scholarship in terms of this project study, I think of developing knowledge about a particular subject. College readiness is a subject that became extremely important to me as a practicing counselor due to data given to all staff members at my school about the number of students who were not considered college ready based on state assessment, college entrance exams, and simply not taking the time to apply to college due to the lack of motivation. These students were diverse in race, language, learning disabilities, socioeconomic status, and other factors. I also noticed a

shift in administrators' demands for high school counselors to improve college readiness due to accountability placed on schools by law makers, yet a plan to get this done had not been developed. Therefore, I began to observe the students that I serve as well as high school counselors' role in making college access happen for their diverse students. I became aware that I, as a counselor, do very little to encourage my students due to my own lack of knowledge about college readiness, and time made available to me as a professional to help my students succeed. Therefore, I took it upon myself to further my education and conduct research concerning this matter.

My study has given me in-depth knowledge about what it really means to be college ready, what counselors have been missing from their PD, the advantages of PLCs, and importantly how to conduct research. Concluding the project was challenging in terms of knowing what was pertinent to the study and what was not pertinent to the study. I remember many times I was informed to narrow my thinking and to realize that I cannot save the world. In addition to my broad thinking, preserving through life's hardships and working as a school counselor while completing this project was also challenging. I had to push myself after extensive days at work to continue writing. The following obstacles forced me to revisit keeping a strict schedule: staying organized, managing time, and remaining tranquil with day-to-day interferences. I found motivation through reminiscing on my father's words, the late Revered James White, *get your education*. My father's words and my dedication to the counseling profession propelled me to keep writing.

### **Self-Practitioner**

Currently, I serve as a high school counselor who has firsthand experiences with limited PD training. Therefore, I use every moment I can to reach out to neighboring high

school counselors about things they are doing to remain current with their role in the college readiness process. I am typically given resources I can use for self-development in the form of websites, videos, and free online seminars. At times, colleagues may suggest a workshop that requires to me to use a personal day off from work and pay for a college update offered at a community college or university. My doctoral journey has taught me the significance of staying current with topics relevant to my job as a school counselor. Although school counselors have a wide array of responsibilities that necessitate present-day information, college readiness is a topic that has been neglected and I will relentlessly find opportunities to be a lifelong learner concerning college preparation as this topic impacts the future of our nation.

### **Project Development**

As a project developer, I learned how to identify a problem, investigate the issue, and develop a potential resolution. To plan the PD project, I used what I digested throughout this doctoral process in terms of how adults learn to formulate what would take place on three days of PD in relation to college readiness. One of the four principles of adult learning is adults are eager to learn topics that are applicable to their job responsibilities (Kearsley, 2010). This statement has proven to be true based on interview data from participants in this study who mentioned that current PD in Hunt ISD was either related to classroom instruction or mental health. College readiness is a recent concern not only in Hunt ISD, but college readiness is also a concern for America. According to Tierney and Sablan (2014),

college readiness has become a growing concern for educational policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. This issue has risen to the fore not just with the

federal government, but with state and local administrators, school districts, universities, and philanthropic organizations, who are all vested in examining and increasing college readiness (p.943).

Therefore, I used the themes that emerged in this study to create topics, activities, and materials I felt would be useful to high school counselors' role in the college readiness process. These activities included moments for group discussions and self-direction as Kearsley (2010) stated adult learners need to be a part of the groundwork and the evaluation of their own learning. I included an evaluation at the end of each day to determine whether or not adjustments to the plan needed to be made.

### **Leadership and Change**

High school counselors in this study failed to recognize their ability to be leaders of their own learning. Therefore, this project has the potential to create leaders within the counseling profession that could be beneficial to the growth of students at the study site. According to Dollarhide (2003), counselors who struggle with conflicting demands as well as their role are sending a message that counselors should become leaders of their profession and advocate for their students. Possessing leadership skills as a school counselor is an essential attribute as school counselors have a role in adhering to drawbacks in today's schools. My experience as high school counselor and the knowledge I have gain through research regarding the identifying problem in this doctoral study has the potential to impact my own school counseling program and other surrounding school districts.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

I have been immersed in the education setting my entire life. Aside from attending elementary, middle, and high school, I have been an educator for 17 years. I am aware of the importance of hard work as it pertains to continuous learning. However, this doctoral process has taught me the definition of resiliency, social change, and scholarly work while pushing through the feeling of isolation that comes with online learning. Because the majority of my educational experiences have been in brick and mortar schools, the thought of not having one on one contact with my professors and classmates regarding this doctor study forced me to motivate myself, figure out how to manage my time, and stay organized. Although self-motivation was a challenge at times, I must say that I am pleased with the effort I have put forth in completing this project. Hard work has given me the opportunity to achieve something significant, discover something new, and to improve myself as a lifelong learner to my organization. I believe my work will lead to future research concerning high school counselors' PD needs with respect to college readiness for diverse learners.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This study has the potential to influence positive social change by improving PD for high school counselors while strengthening diverse students' college readiness skills. This study also has the potential to create relationships with representatives from colleges through the formation of a PLC. A PLC will allow counselors in this study to collaborate with not only representatives from colleges, but a PLC will also allow counselors in this study to collaborate among another. Through collaboration, high school counselors will be able to voice their concerns about their counseling program while becoming leaders of

their own professional learning. In turn, high school counselors can improve their practices, thus promoting academic advancement among their diverse learners. This project can be a vehicle for researchers to use to accumulate data from high school counselors who are a part of the PD training. Moreover, this project can be an example for other high school counselors in nearby school districts as college readiness continues to be a leading concern in America.

Future research may inform administrators and practicing leaders on the power of using PD as a mechanism to implement PLCs with other groups besides teachers; in this case, high school counselors. It is also recommended that future research explore ways to support training that is grounded in counselor related practices as high school counselors move from traditional PD to leaders of their own learning. Moreover, student outcomes could be documented when high school counselors participate in PD that allows counselors to advocate for what they need as well as allow collaboration with representatives from colleges. While this project paid much attention on high school counselors PD needs in a district with moderate college readiness mastery, further research may be warranted on high school counselors' PD needs in districts that have successful college readiness skills.

### **Conclusion**

This project was chosen due to high school counselors' perceptions of their PD needs regarding college readiness for diverse learners. The study's findings indicated there is a need to review high school counselor's roles, training, and leadership support in relation to counselors' PD for preparing diverse students for college. The literature review gave supporting information about the use of PLCs as means to conduct PD

through collaboration with peers. A three day PD opportunity was established in order to change the way in which high school counselors receive college readiness training.

My reflections in section 4 began with the strengths, limitations, and recommendations for alternatives approaches to this project study. My reflections further entailed my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, I discussed what I learned about the importance of completing the work while describing the implications, applications, and directions for future research. It is my desire that this project opens the door for improved PD for high school counselors that will not only impact college readiness for diverse students but will also impact counselors' roles and leadership abilities.

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Appendix A: The Project

**3-Day Professional Development Training  
For High School Counselors**

.

### **3-Day Professional Development for High School Counselors**

#### Purpose

Provide high school counselors with professional development opportunities that will increase high school counselors' knowledge about college readiness for diverse learners by establishing a PLC with postsecondary institutions.

#### Goals

1. Train high school counselors and administrators on the intended purpose and characteristics of PLCs.
2. Educate high school counselors and administrators on what diverse students need to be college ready.
3. Provide an opportunity for high school counselors to collaborate with representatives of postsecondary institutions to develop PLC goals while establishing counselors' PD needs in relation to college readiness for diverse learners.
4. Encourage high school counselors to be leaders in the college readiness process by allowing counselors to voice their PD needs.

#### Learning Outcomes

1. High school counselors and administrators will comprehend the characteristics of PLCs for effective implementation.
2. High school counselors and administrators will understand postsecondary institutions' expectations for students entering college to ensure diverse students are college ready.

3. High school counselors will learn how to collaborate with representatives of postsecondary institutions to build relationships for the benefit of college success for diverse learners.
4. High school counselors will grasp how to demonstrate their PD needs as a means to show leadership in the college readiness process.

#### Program Objectives

1. As a result of PD training, high school counselors and administrators will be able to determine the value of using the characteristics of PLCs with postsecondary institutions to improve college readiness for diverse learners.
2. As a result of PD training with, high school counselors and administrators will be able to identify what counselors need to prepare diverse students for college through effective PLC usage with postsecondary institutions.
3. As a result of PD training, high school counselors and administrators will be able to apply the components of PLCs with postsecondary institutions to increase the college going rate among diverse learners.
4. As a result of PLCs, high school counselors and administrators will be able to understand counselors' roles as leaders in the college readiness process for diverse learners.

#### Target Audience

- High School Counselors
- Administrators
- Executive Directors
- Representatives of Postsecondary Institutions

### Format

- Includes various components
- Open Discussions
- Power Point Presentations
- Questions and Answers
- PLC Group Collaboration

### Timetable

A 3-Day professional development session should take place August 2020. To ensure the PD project takes place in August 2020, approval from administrators would need to happen before the 2019-2020 school year ends.

### Materials

- Handouts
- Computer
- Projector/screen
- Power Point Presentation
- Examples of Effective PLCs
- Examples of College Admissions Process
- Pens/Pencils/Chart Paper
- Note Pads
- Evaluation Forms



### **3-Day Professional Development Training Day 1 Agenda**

**9:00-9:30** Light Breakfast

**9:30-10:00** Director of Counselors will oversee the following tasks:

- Welcome and introduce administrative staff and guest speaker.
- Indicate the intentions of the 3-day professional development training by stating the purpose of the training, learning objectives, and statement about PLCs.

**10:00-10:30** Concentric Circles Icebreaker (See PowerPoint Slides 3-4)

- Counselors will be divided evenly into small groups. Lead counselors will provide questions for each group as a way for counselors demonstrate how to build relationships by sharing their thoughts and experiences.
- Counselors will come together as an entire group and reflect on their experience with the icebreaker

**10:30- 10:45** Reflections- open discussion about the icebreaker activity and how it relates to the purpose of the PD training.

**10:45-11:00** Break

**11:00-12:00** Executive Directors, School Administrator, and Lead Counselors will speak on PLCs

- Question and answer session with Hunt ISD's executive directors and a school administrator on what a PLC would look like at the study site. Each leader will have 10 minutes to speak.
- Lead counselors will briefly state why counselors feel developing a PLC with representatives of colleges is important to their job responsibilities

**12:00-1:00** Lunch

**1:00-2:00** Director of Counselors will present the following:

- District's college readiness data
- State how this data is important to the district's accountability ratings.
- Use data to show how college readiness affects college transition and high schools in the district

**2:00-2:15** Break

**2:15-3:00** Guest speaker will discuss

- What high school students need to know about college admissions
- What colleges need to know about high school students in terms of graduation Requirements

**3:00-3:15** Discussion with guest speaker

- Counselors will exchange what counselors want to know about the college admission process and what colleges need from counselors in hopes that administrators and executive directors will see the need.

**3:15-3:30** Evaluation Form

<b>DAY 1 HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS' COLLEGE READINESS TRAINING</b>	
Topic: _____ Date: _____	
<b>I learned ...</b>	
<b>Most helpful ...</b>	<b>Least helpful ...</b>
<b>I would like to know more about ...</b>	<b>Questions, Comments, Concerns ...</b>

<https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/.../PD%20Evaluation%20Forms.docx>



### **3-Day Professional Development Training Day 2 Agenda**

**9:00-9:30** Light Breakfast

**9:30-10:00** Director of Counselors will oversee the following tasks:

- Welcome and introduce guest speakers (college representatives).
- Director of counselors will state the purpose of day 2 training and learning objectives
- Reflections (allow open group discussion on what counselors took away from day1)

**10:00-10:30** Icebreaker (Common Chain)

- Counselors will be divided evenly into small groups. Lead counselors will give instructions and participate by starting the activity. The purpose is to see what group members have in common with one another in relation to their own college readiness experience.

**10:30- 10:45** Reflections- open discussion about the icebreaker activity to allow all counselors to reflect on what they learned from one another and compare those experiences to what their students experience.

**10:45-11:00** Break

**11:00-11:30** Director of Counselors will breakdown the 6 characteristics of PLCs.

**11:30-12:00** Group Activity

- Participants to evenly divide in groups. Lead counselors will be the spokesperson for their group
- Counselors will brainstorm on paper how PLCs can strengthen school climate as it relates to college readiness for diverse learners using the 6 characteristics of PLCs.
- Lead counselors will verbalize each group's ideas on PLCs and school climate to the entire group. Counselors will look for similar answers among all groups

**12:00-1:00** Lunch

**1:00-2:00** College Representatives from will speak on the following:

- Scholarships, Pell Grants, and Loans (Financial Aid Office)
- College entrance exams (SAT, ACT, TSI). If high school students can exempt from taking these exams, and how to prepare for the exams. (Testing Office)
- GPA requirements test scores, required high school courses. (Admissions Office)

**2:00-2:15** Break

**2:15-2:45** College Readiness Activity (answers given by lead counselors for open discussion) 6 groups will divide 3 scenarios and decide how to best prepare the student for college. The intent is to have multiple answers to the same scenario.

**2:45-3:15** College representatives will return separately for open discussions

- Counselors will ask questions about financial aid, testing, and admissions.
- Counselors will inform college representatives on what they are currently doing and what they need to be doing to prepare diverse learners for college.

**3:15-3:30** Evaluation Form

## Sample Professional Development Evaluation Form

Topic: _____	Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Date: _____					

**Content**

1. The objectives were clearly stated.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Today's session aligned with stated objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Today's session was useful and practical.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Process**

4. Today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.) were engaging and interactive.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. The facilitators of today's session effectively modeled appropriate instructional strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. The facilitators of today's session incorporated our experiences into today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Time was allocated to help me understand the material.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Context**

8. There were opportunities during today's session to collaborate with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my professional development needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. The organization of the learning environment (facilities, tools, materials, etc.) was conducive to my learning needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Comments**

--



### **3-Day Professional Development Training Day 3 Agenda**

**9:00-9:30** Light Breakfast

**9:30-10:30** Director of Counselors will oversee the following tasks:

- Welcome and introduce leaders and guest speakers from day 1 and day 2.
- Director of counselors will state the purpose of day 3 training and learning Objectives
- Reflections (follow up on day 1 and day 2 topics)
- Open group discussion on what counselors took away from day 1 and 2

**10:30-10:45** Icebreaker (Connections)

- The director of counselors will facilitate the “connections” activity by setting a time limit on the activity (example, 10 minutes).
- Counselors will voluntarily state one thing they did not know about college readiness for diverse learners before coming to the PD training. Others are to listen and make no response. “Connections” is not an activity for discussion; it allows one to feel comfortable expressing thoughts.

**10:45-11:00** Break

**11:00-11:15** School Counselor as a Leader

- Counselors will think about the following question: Do you consider yourself a leader in the college readiness process for diverse learners?

Why or why not? Take notes and share with entire group. This reflection will help counselors plan ideas for the upcoming assignment.

**11:15- 12:00** Plan Presentation for school leaders

- Lead Counselors will divide counselors in to 6 groups and give each group a characteristic to present.
- Counselors will demonstrate how they can show leadership in the college readiness process using the 6 characteristics of PLCs. Lead counselors will help facilitate each group. Group members will decide how to present.

**12:00-1:00** Lunch

**1:00-1:30** Presentation to School Leaders

**1:30-1:45** Break

**2:45-3:00** Professional Development Needs

- Counselors will return to their groups and reflect on what they have learned from the 3-day PD training. Within their groups, counselors will list their PD needs.
- Each group will have their lead counselor write their needs on chart paper. As a group, counselors will collectively establish their PD needs to demonstrate to school leaders in hopes that this training will continue.

**3:00-3:15** Questions and Answers

**3:15-3:30** Evaluation

## Sample Professional Development Evaluation Form

**DAY 3 HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS' COLLEGE READINESS TRAINING**

<b>Session Title:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
<p>Instructions: Please rate each item from "Poor" to "Excellent"          If the statement is not applicable, leave it blank.</p>	
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Poor</b>
1. Were the objectives of the session made clear?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
2. How effective were the leaders' instructional skills?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
3. How effective was the program in holding your interest?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
4. Were your questions and concerns addressed?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
5. How useful will these ideas and skills be in improving students' college readiness?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
6. How would you rate the overall value of this PD?	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
7. The material was useful.	[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
<p>8. What were the best aspects of this PD training?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>9. What could be done to improve this PD?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>10. For future PD, what college readiness topics would be most helpful in helping you prepare diverse students for college?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>11. Additional Comments?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	

COLLEGE READINESS FOR  
DIVERSE LEARNERS 3 DAY  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT TRAINING  
HUNT ISD HIGH SCHOOL  
COUNSELORS  
FALL 2020

COLLEGE READINESS TRAINING  
DAY 1

- Welcome and introduction of administrative staff and guest by the Director of Counselors
- Intentions of the 3-day PD Training by the Director of Counselors
  - Purpose of Training
  - Learning Objectives
  - PLC Definition.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES  
ICEBREAKER

- Concentric circles- a bonding activity for shared experiences in one-on-one conversations
- Arrange chairs so that counselors are facing each other in two small circles. (If a group is uneven, a facilitator will participate)
- Counselors should introduce themselves to each new partner, and share time so that each person has a chance to speak.
- Lead counselors will give their group a question that each pair is to discuss.
- After one or two minutes, call time and inform the inside circle to move one seat to the left so that everyone is facing someone new.

<http://www.teachingwithacupofcocoa.com/2012/04/05/concentric-circles/>

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES CONT.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES QUESTIONS

1. State name and give your partner the following: which high school you work for, years of experience as a counselor, and how you spend the majority of your time as a counselor?
2. What do you like about being a high school counselor?
3. What do you know about PLCs and have you ever participated in one?
4. How can high school counselors benefit from a PLC with representatives of colleges?
5. In what ways do you prepare diverse learners for college?
6. What are you hoping to learn from this 3-day PD training?

QUESTION AND SESSION ON WHAT A PLC  
WOULD LIKE IN HUNT ISD WITH  
REPRESENTATIVES OF COLLEGES

EXAMPLE-When would high school counselors meet with representatives of colleges and how often?

HUNT ISD COLLEGE READINESS  
DATA

- Director of Counselors presents the following data: STAAR scores (passing and failing rate)
- How many current seniors applied to a postsecondary institution, including a trade school and military
- How many current seniors took the SAT/ACT and scored at least a 1070 (average) or better on SAT and a 20 (average) or better on ACT
- How many current seniors filled out their FAFSA

### COLLEGE READINESS TRAINING DAY 2

- Welcome and introduction of guest speakers (college representatives)
- Director of Counselors explains the following:
  - Purpose of Day 2 Training
  - Learning Objectives
- Reflections (open discussion on what counselors took away from day1)

### GUEST SPEAKER COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVE

- What high school students need to know about college admissions.
  - Example-deadlines, early admissions, application process
- What colleges need to know about high school students in terms of graduation requirements
  - Example-what school districts require for graduation (Career/Graduation Plan known as Endorsement) versus what colleges require

### COMMON CHAIN ICEBREAKER

- Divide counselors evenly into small groups. Lead counselors begin by stating something about his or her college readiness experience. Ex.- my high school counselor helped me fill out my college application.
- As soon as a participant hears something said by the 1st person that he or she has in common with them, they will stand and link arms.
- The person who links with the 1<sup>st</sup> person will say something about their college readiness experience starting with what they have in common with the 1<sup>st</sup> person.
- As soon as another counselor hears something they have in common with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person, he or she will stand and link arms with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person. The chain will continue until everyone is linked in one long chain.

<http://www.counselors.org/resources/articles/icebreaker-activities.aspx>

### SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF PLCs

1. Shared mission, vision, values, goals
2. Collaborative teams focused on learning
3. Collective Inquiry
4. Action orientation and experimentation
5. Commitment to continuous improvement
6. Results Orientation

### PLC GROUP ACTIVITY

- Brain storm on paper how PLCs can strengthen school climate as it relates to college readiness for diverse learners using the 6 characteristics of PLCs.
- Look for similar answers among all groups as lead counselors announce each group's ideas to the entire group.

### COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES

- College Representatives from will speak on the following:
- Scholarships, Pell Grants, and Loans (Financial Aid Office)
  - College entrance exams (Testing Office)
  - GPA requirements test scores, required high school courses. (Admissions Office)

### COLLEGE READINESS ACTIVITY

- Divide in to even groups
- Lead counselors will give each group a scenario
- Counselors are to read their assigned scenario and collectively decide how to best prepare each student for college.
- Give answers as a whole group

### DISCUSSION

- Counselors ask college representatives questions about financial aid, testing, and admissions.
- Counselors inform college representatives on what they are currently doing and what they need to be doing to prepare diverse learners for college

### COLLEGE READINESS TRAINING DAY 3

- Welcome and introduce leaders and guest speakers from day 1 and day 2.
- Purpose of day 3 training and learning objectives
- Reflections (follow up on day 1 and day 2 topics)
- Open group discussion on what counselors took away from day 1 and 2

### ICEBREAKER (CONNECTIONS)

- Director of counselors announces: "connections is open," and provide a time limit. Give rules: "Speak if you want to. Do not speak if you do not want to".
- Counselors will speak only once and state one thing they did not know about college readiness for diverse learners before coming to the PD training.
- Others are to listen and allow peers to get comfortable sharing their experiences

<https://www.counseling.org/resources/articles/connections-icebreaker-activity>

### PRESENTATION TO SCHOOL LEADERS

- Counselors will present to school leaders how they can show leadership in the college readiness process using the 6 characteristics of PLCs.
- Lead counselors will help facilitate each group. All group members will decide on the best way to present

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

- Counselors are to return to their groups and reflect on what was learned from the 3-day PD training. Within their groups, counselors will list their PD needs.
- Lead counselors will write counselors' responses on chart paper. As a group, counselors will collectively establish their PD needs to demonstrate to school leaders in hopes that this training will continue.

## Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

### Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Natalie White. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am wholeheartedly asking for your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: School Counselors' Professional Development Needs for Preparing Diverse Learners for College. The purpose of this study is to understand what professional development training school counselors need to support diverse learners with reaching their college readiness goals. The study involves completing a one on one interview that should last no longer than 1 hour. In addition to an interview, I am asking that you bring a copy of your professional development transcript for review of any previous college readiness training. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Information obtained in this study as well as your identity will remain confidential. If you are willing to participate in this study, please read the attached Informed Consent letter and respond to this email with your decision within two weeks. Your participation in this study will contribute to social change by providing insight that may assist in refining professional development for school counselors and expand college access for diverse learners. I would like to thank you in advance for your time and contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Natalie White

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study related to high school counselors' perceptions of their professional development needs to prepare diverse learners for college. The researcher is inviting all high school counselors in this school district who assist students with college and career planning to be in the study. I obtained your name/contact info via the district's website that contains all employees' email addresses. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Natalie White, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to understand what professional development training school counselors in this school district need in order to guide and support diverse learners with reaching their college readiness goals.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Make yourself available in person for a one on one interview that will take no longer than 1 hour to conduct
- Permit the one on one interview to be recorded
- Bring a copy of your professional development transcript for review of professional development topics in relation to college and career readiness
- Evaluate a transcript of your interview session within 2 weeks from the conclusion of the interview that will take no longer than 20 minutes to read, and provide feedback (if needed) to the researcher to ensure data accuracy

Here are some sample questions:

- Describe your role as a high school counselor
- How would you describe professional development training received in this school district?

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one in this school district will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or stress. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

This study's potential benefits to this district include providing intelligence that may aid in improving professional development for school counselors and expanding college enrollment

for diverse students. Not only will this change help close the gap between underrepresented students and other groups in college, but this change may also help enhance professional development for school counselors in neighboring school districts.

**Payment:**

Participants will not be paid to participate in this study.

**Privacy:**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by storing interview responses and participant data in a password protected computer. Participants will also be assigned an identifier paralleled to their response data. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

The following measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of all data: 1.) Interview data will be transcribed and made available to each participant to ensure data is accurate, 2.) Transcribed data reports will be password protected and secured on the researchers personal laptop 3.) Raw interview data will only be accessible to me as the student and my committee members. This research study has gone through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) review process at Walden University and was approved on \_\_\_\_\_

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **01-11-18-0390500** and it expires on **January 10, 2019.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consensus by replying to the invitation email with words "I Consent".

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

**Interview Protocol Form**

**School Counselors' Professional Development Needs for Preparing Diverse  
Learners for College**

***[Prior to the interview]:***

Good evening,

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview aspect of my study.

As I previously disclosed to you in the initial invitation by email, my study seeks to understand what professional development training high school counselors' need to prepare diverse learners for college. This study also seeks to discover any resources that would benefit counselors with future growth, development, and efficacy as counseling professionals. The interview today will last 30 minutes to an hour, during which I will be asking you about your professional development training as it relates to college readiness for diverse learners.

***[Review Consent Form]***

In the initial email asking you to participate in this study, you were given a consent form that was returned to me specifying that I have your authorization (or not) to audio record our conversation. Are you still in agreement with me recording (or not) our dialogue today?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

If yes: Thank you! Please inform me at any point if you would like for me to stop recording or remove any conversation that has been recorded.

If no: Thank you for notifying me. I will only draft notes of our conversation. Before we begin, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions] If you have any questions at any point in this study, please do not hesitate to ask them. I am more than willing to adhere to your questions.

***Interview Question #1:*** What are some challenges (if any) you face in Hunt ISD for preparing diverse learners for college?

***[Probe if needed]***

1. Please explain to me your understanding of college readiness for diverse learners.
2. During your time as a school counselor, have you been part of any professional development training that has assisted you with helping diverse learners prepare for college? If so, did your school district offer this training or did you register for this training on your own at another location?
3. If you have attended any kind of college readiness training, please discuss topics presented that were applicable to your work as a school counselor?

Reflection by Interviewer

***Interview Question #2:*** How would you describe professional development training you receive in relation to preparing diverse learners for college?

***[Probe if needed]***

4. Tell me more about what a typical professional development session looks like for you throughout the school year in regards to college preparation for diverse students?

5. How many times during a school year do you attend professional development that targets your job responsibilities?
6. Can you tell me if any of your professional development trainings were mandatory and if you were released to adhere to other job responsibilities in your office?

Reflection by Interviewer

***Interview Question #3:*** What are some of your professional development needs (if any) for preparing diverse learners for college?

***[Probe if needed]***

1. What would you identify as your professional development priorities in regards to college readiness for diverse learners? For example, financial aid, high school graduation requirements etc.
2. If you could change anything about professional development you receive to improve college readiness for diverse learners, what would it be and why?
3. What do you think about professional development for school counselors as a way to address college access for diverse learners?

Reflection by Interviewer

Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience in Hunt ISD that you feel influences your professional development training in relation to college readiness for diverse learners that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

***[Summarize the interview session]***

**Conclusion-** Thank you for taking time out to participate in this study. I would like to reassure you that everything stated in this interview is confidential. I would also like your permission to send a follow up email with a copy of the results from recorded and analyzed transcriptions to ensure accuracy and validity.