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**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS’
PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE
PROCESS OF GAINING RECOGNIZED ASCA MODEL PROGRAM (RAMP)
CERTIFICATION**

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was on elementary school counselors who successfully received the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) distinction for their schools. The purpose was to provide insight into the motivations, perceived personal characteristics, organizational factors, and other important considerations that played a role in counselors' ability to successfully obtain RAMP distinction, as well as the perceived consequences of doing so. Cottrell's *role theory* (1941) and Schein's *organizational culture and leadership* (1985, 2004) provided a basis for the theoretical framework of this study, which posited that school counselors' implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs would be influenced by counselors' personal characteristics and organizational culture of schools and districts. Eight elementary school counselors participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were formed into narratives of the 'RAMP experience' after which thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009) was conducted to derive findings common across participants' stories.

Findings included two themes of 1) Don't be afraid to engage in the RAMP process, and 2) The value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors' perceptions of themselves. The findings indicated that in addition to RAMP distinction validating the presence of a data-driven comprehensive school counseling program, much of the distinction's value came from engaging in the RAMP process. Reception of RAMP distinction was a positive experience for school counselors through its ability to change perceptions of themselves as practitioners and professionals. Future research is needed to

explore the RAMP experience for counselors at the secondary level to provide a more holistic understanding of the process for school counselors across settings.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The role of school counselors has grown and developed since the position was first created in the 1900s. Originally an auxiliary set of roles and responsibilities fulfilled by administrators and teachers, school counseling soon became a position in and of itself, which focused on assisting students' personal adjustment and vocational needs (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Gysbers, 1997). Over the past two decades, the school counseling profession has pushed for national standardization of the role, beginning with the first set of national standards for school counseling programs being published in 1997 (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Six years later the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2003) was published.

The ASCA National Model was developed to provide a framework for school counselors to plan, implement, and evaluate their school counseling programs, as well as concretely define the specific roles that school counselors should hold in their schools. In 2004, ASCA created Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) distinction as a means of identifying schools that provide evidenced-based comprehensive counseling programs demonstrating positive changes in student outcomes.

Findings from several recent studies (e.g. Carey, Harrington, Ian & Hoffman, 2012; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Wilkerson, Pérusse & Ashley, 2013) support the assertion that comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCP) á la the ASCA National Model, correlate with positive outcomes for students. Literature also however, indicates that few schools have a CSCP (Studer, Diambra, Breckner, & Heidel, 2011), and that only a small portion of school counselors' time is dedicated to implementing this comprehensive approach. Further support for few schools utilizing a CSCP is that of the

approximate 98,500 public schools in the U.S. (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2015), only 927 have received RAMP distinction to date, and only 242 schools currently hold this distinction. (ASCA, 2018a).

Statement of the Problem

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), currently in its third edition, specifies the characteristics of a comprehensive school counseling program and details appropriate and inappropriate duties for school counselors. Despite having the National Model as a guide, researchers have found that school counselors are not always able to implement comprehensive school counseling programs (Nelson, Robles-Pina, & Nichter, 2008; Poynton, Schumacher, & Wilczenski, 2008; Studer et al., 2011). Further, though the benefits of school counseling programs are well documented, less is known about the process of implementing comprehensive programs, especially for school counselors that enter a school with no programming established. Current school counseling literature indicates that both individual counselor characteristics and environmental factors influence duties that counselors undertake which, in turn, facilitate or hinder the implementation of comprehensive programs.

Individual Characteristics

Several authors (e.g. Bemak & Chung, 2008; Trusty & Brown, 2005) have suggested that certain counselor-characteristics (e.g., knowledge of resources, problem-solving skills, willingness to be confrontational, etc.) should facilitate ASCA-aligned programs, but these articles are theoretical rather than empirical. The few empirical studies of counselor characteristics and their role in programming (e.g., Lochman et al, 2009; Young, Dollarhide, & Baughman, 2015) also have limitations in that they utilized

school counselor opinion data, which were not tied to program quality or student outcomes. Therefore, exploration of *how* personal characteristics relate to implementing comprehensive school counseling programming is still needed, which is one aspect of the program implementation process that this study explored.

Environmental Influence

Organizational factors of schools also influence school counselors' role and ability to implement a CSCP making them an important consideration in this study. At the individual school level, administrators have significant influence in assigning the roles and duties that school counselors perform (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). Additionally, teachers are an important piece of the counseling team (Jackson et al., 2002), and may also influence counselors' role within a school (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

A Combination of Factors

Schools are not islands. In addition to the individual staff members within each school who create a school culture, they are shaped by the communities where they reside, and their district-level leadership (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Hubbard, Stein, & Mehan, 2013). This combination of influence affects the ability of school counselors to implement a CSCP. Altogether, school counselors must navigate and work within the context of their schools, whose focus might not necessarily align with the counselor's or ASCA's vision of what the counselor's role "should" be (Amatea & Clark, 2005) while also being a member of their schools. The extent to which the visions and mission of a particular school and district aligns to the goals of the ASCA National Model will affect school counselors' ability to implement a comprehensive program. A more detailed

exploration of extant literature on CSCP, individual counselor characteristics, and the influence of organizational elements on school counseling program implementation will take place in Chapter 2.

Current literature on both individual-counselor and environmental influences on counselor role have failed to illuminate the process and important interplay between personal and environmental characteristics, and what school counselors see as important considerations when providing comprehensive programming. This has been exacerbated by many of these studies being quantitative in design, which does not allow for nuance to be seen (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Palmer & Erford, 2012; Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008).

This study provides insight into how school counselors navigate organizational factors (e.g., ratios, interpersonal relationships, school culture, district level decrees, etc.) and use personal characteristics throughout the process of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, specifically a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). A qualitative research approach was used to allow nuance and obtain a better understanding of the specific challenges and benefits of obtaining RAMP distinction. Qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry which was the methodology for this study, provided an opportunity for participants' stories to be told, and for readers and listeners to find importance and meaning within them (Riessman, 2008).

Importantly, RAMP distinction is not the only indication of a comprehensive school counseling program. In fact, the vast majority of studies have explored the effects of non-RAMP CSCP (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2011; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Salina et al., 2013;

Sink et al., 2008). At the current time, however, RAMP represents the highest level of accountability and commitment that few school counseling programs have obtained, and will therefore be used in this study when sampling participants.

Research Question

One research question guided this study and explored the process and interactions pertinent to implementing a RAMP school counseling program. The question was broad, and written with the purpose of exploring different aspects of the experiences of school counselors who successfully implemented a Recognized ASCA Model Program in their schools.

Research Question

What do elementary school counselors see as important considerations throughout the process of successfully obtaining RAMP distinction?

The sample for the current study included elementary school counselors who underwent and successfully completed the RAMP process since 2013. The rationale for using only elementary school counselors is that they are typically the only school counselor in the building (Bodenhorn, 2006) and therefore would have contributed extensive effort in the process. Further, given school counselors' unique and specialized training (Flaherty et al., 1998; Robertson, Lloyd-Hazlett, Zambrano, & McLendon, 2016) and role, they are likely to be the school's point person for the RAMP process. Using only counselors who have achieved distinction since 2013 ensured that participants gained RAMP distinction utilizing the third (most recent) edition of the ASCA National Model.

Efforts were made to limit the sample to only include one-time RAMP recipients. This was to ensure that the narratives shared reflected the first and only time that RAMP was received, rather than participants having to recount the experience of two or more RAMP-processes. In actuality, one of the counselors interviewed for this study had achieved RAMP at a second school by the time that our interview took place. Though initially conceptualized as a limitation, this participant provided important insight into the benefits of RAMP that were unforeseen until the second time that the process was completed. For a full account of this participant readers can look to Appendix J on page 263.

Significance of the Study

This study provides information that begins to fill a gap in extant school counseling literature concerning how comprehensive school counseling programs (e.g., RAMP) are implemented. This study sheds light on the role of individual and organizational elements, the interaction between them, and how school counselors navigate them.

The findings from this study hold implications for the school counseling profession broadly. Specifically, the data collected from qualitative research can be used to inform best practice and interventions in counseling (Kazdin, 2008). The results of this study may assist school counselors in implementing a CSCP in their own schools. This study's results also provides implications for school district resource allotment, and use of counselors. Districts can utilize participants' stories of implementing a model program as a template for allocating time and resources for counselors' being able to do so in their

own schools, especially since the goals and outcomes of RAMP distinguished schools align well with district-goals.

Lastly, the findings from this study provide implications for school counselor educators, as the ASCA National Model is often used as a framework for training school counselors. This study explores commonalities between individuals who were able to receive RAMP distinction, and may serve to inform educators' use of the ASCA National model in their teaching.

Limitations

This study examined the roles and experiences of school counselors within schools running an exemplary school counseling program, as indicated by RAMP distinction. One limitation, as is the case with all qualitative research, is that the meanings garnered from each interview are open to the interpretation of the researcher, which is inherently subjective. Measures were built into the study's design to prevent the subjectivity of interpretation such as triangulation, peer debrief, member checks, and multiple data sources.

Definition of Key Terms

Some of the terms used frequently throughout the dissertation may be part of the everyday vocabulary for those working in a school counseling setting. However, these terms may hold different meanings for those working in other disciplines, or in a different aspect of K-12 schools. For the purposes of this investigation, the following operational definitions will be used.

Advisory Council

A representative group of stakeholders that provides input and suggestions to school counselors. Advisory councils are a necessary part of RAMP distinguished school counseling programs. In addition to having one or more school counselor they often include representatives from community organizations, parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model

A framework used by school counselors to plan, deliver, and evaluate school counseling programs. Currently in its third edition, the ASCA National Model includes 176 pages of standards, research, definitions, documents, and templates that school counselors can utilize.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP)

A programmatic delivery of school counseling services. They are preventative, developmental and driven by student data. CSCP are based on standards of academic, career and personal/social development and promote and enhance the learning process for all students. They have been the dominant mode for delivering school counseling services since the 1970s.

Direct Student Services

These include face-to-face interactions between the counselor and student. They may take the form of classroom guidance lessons, small-group counseling, individual student planning, or individual student counseling.

Indirect Student Services

Indirect student services are activities taken on behalf of students, and include counselors meeting with teachers, parents, or other stakeholders. The four ASCA themes

of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change typically fall under indirect student services, as the incorporation of these themes within counselors' work ultimately benefits students, but does so through the changing of systems and work with others rather than with students directly (ASCA, 2012b).

Organizational Culture

This refers to the beliefs, values, norms, and assumptions that dictate expected behavior within a group. Organizational culture is thought to be stable and deeply embedded within a group, so much so that it may be invisible to members.

Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP)

This is a comprehensive school counseling program within a K-12 school that has been labeled as exemplary by the American School Counseling Association. RAMP distinction requires at least one year of collecting school-specific data showing that students have benefited from the services provided by the school counseling program.

RAMP Application

RAMP application refers to the scored 12-part document that counselors submit to ASCA in order to be considered for receiving RAMP distinction.

RAMP Process

RAMP Process in this dissertation will be used to refer to everything included within the journey of obtaining RAMP distinction. It will include the initial motivation(s) for applying for RAMP, as well as the implementation of a Comprehensive School Counseling Program that counselors used as the basis of their RAMP application. It also includes the consequences of achieving RAMP as perceived by the participants of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The school counseling profession has a long and storied history marked by debates and movements. Over the last century, the role of school counselors has grown and been redefined multiple times (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Stone & Dahir, 2015) with focus moving from individualized to systemic services in the latter half of the 20th century (Gysbers & Henderson, 1997). Proponents of programmatically delivering counseling services existed as early as the 1920s (Gysbers & Henderson), but it wasn't until 1970 that this viewpoint became dominant (Akos & Duquette, 2016). Even in the late 1990s, only 24 U.S. states had models for comprehensive school counseling programs (Sink & MacDonald, 1998).

Since the late 1990s, the profession has consistently argued that comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCP) are the ideal means of school counseling service delivery in the profession. This, in turn, led to a push for national standardization of school counseling programs to ensure that all students, regardless of location, would have access to the same or similar programming. In an attempt to increase the legitimacy of the profession (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008) and guide school counseling programs, Dahir and Campbell released the first set of national standards, *Sharing the Vision: The National Standards for School Counseling Programs* (Dahir & Campbell, 1997). In 2003, the American School Counselor Association followed with its first edition of the *ASCA National Model* which quickly became the standard for best practice (Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008).

The ASCA National Model has undergone two revisions meant to further shape school counselors' roles and is currently in its third edition (ASCA, 2012). Aside from

providing practice standards the model empowers school counselors to create longer-term, programmatic goals rather than merely respond to unplanned events (Sabella, 2006). Today, the ASCA National Model (2012) is still considered the gold standard of what CSCP should entail.

A shift towards more programmatic services is not unique to school counseling. The broader counseling profession has called for creating and utilizing a systemic approach for serving a multitude of clients including transition aged youth (Manteuffel, Stephens, Sondheimer, & Fisher, 2008), children in the juvenile justice system (Ford & Blaustein, 2013), and military couples (Bankhurst, Loew, McGuire, Halford, & Markman, 2017). More widely, mental health counselors are charged to recognize the role of context, culture, and social systems in working with clients (Goldberg & Smith, 2011; Wong, Wang, & Maffini, 2014). Understanding how school counselors navigate complex systems, therefore, has value for school counselors as well as the profession at large.

The trend in school counseling over the last two decades has been towards programmatic delivery of student services through Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP). By and large CSCP are associated with positive outcomes for students, the specifics of which will be discussed in sections to come. What is less well known is how school counselors are able to implement a CSCP. Extant research indicates that a combination of individual and environmental factors play a role in the work-duties that school counselors perform day-to-day, and influence counselors' ability to implement comprehensive counseling services (Beesley & Frey, 2006; Clements, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; Poynton et al., 2008). The

vast majority of previous studies have been quantitative in design (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Palmer & Erford, 2012; Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008), and have not allowed counselors' unique experiences to be told. An aim of this study was to provide clarity in regards to the important considerations taken by counselors who implemented model evidence-based comprehensive school counseling programs.

The focus of this literature review, therefore, is not on all of the work that school counselors do, but specifically on Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP) and the ways in which individual and organizational factors affect school counselors' ability to implement them. The study that follows this literature review was on a specific subset of schools that have been able to implement a nationally recognized CSCP. This subset is a group of schools known in the profession as "RAMP" schools, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

What Are Comprehensive School Counseling Programs?

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs are multifaceted. They are grounded in principles of development and human growth and include individualized, small-group, and large-group services (Gysbers, 2013). They are preventative in scope (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2015), but also include responsive and remedial services. CSCP are designed to help students obtain knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will lead them to be successful academically, socially, and in their eventual careers (Gysbers, 2013).

What is “RAMP”?

The ASCA National Model is currently in its third edition and is considered the gold standard for what CSCP should encompass. Schools that implement a program based on the ASCA National Model have the ability to apply for what is known as: Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) distinction. RAMP distinction was created by ASCA in 2004 as a means of recognizing schools with exemplary school counseling programs (Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013). RAMP distinction indicates that a school that has successfully implemented a data-driven CSCP that shows measurable differences for students based on data. These data are submitted to and evaluated by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) who ultimately decides if schools have implemented a program that is comprehensive and impactful enough to warrant distinction.

A brief clarification is necessary here in that CSCP are put in place by school counselors. RAMP distinction indicates a model CSCP. All RAMP schools have a CSCP, but not all CSCP qualify as RAMP. Schools must go through a stringent application process to obtain RAMP distinction (ASCA, 2018c). Specifics of the process will be addressed in the following sections. RAMP schools are the specific subset of schools from which the current study sampled participants.

An overview of the extant literature on the findings related to comprehensive school counseling programs including Recognized ASCA Model Programs is provided in this chapter. I also include a discussion of Non-RAMP CSCP literature because there is a dearth of studies specifically on RAMP schools. In addition, a discussion on the

profession's current understanding of the ways in which individual and organizational elements facilitate or hinder the implementation of CSCP is included.

This chapter is composed of five sections. The first presents a summary and evaluation of the findings on CSCP. The second provides a brief overview of the ASCA National Model and RAMP process, and the findings garnered from studies of RAMP-specific schools.

The third section is used to discuss *Role theory* (Cottrell, 1942b; Lopata, 1991) and Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985), which serve as a theoretical explanations for understanding why some schools are able to implement CSCP (and even RAMP-distinguished programs) while others are not. The fourth section is meant to provide of a broad review of present literature on individual characteristics of counselors and organizational aspects of schools and how they affect counselors implementing a CSCP, and therefore beginning the RAMP process. The fifth and final section is a summary and rationale for the current study.

A Case for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP)

School counselors work with students' personal/social, academic, and career needs, and have an overarching goal of promoting achievement for all students (ASCA, 2012). Evidence suggests that CSCP benefit students (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011; Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001), and correlate with higher rates of counselor satisfaction (Pyne, 2011). Despite this, recent studies (e.g., Nelson, Robles-Pina, & Nichter, 2008; Studer, Diambra, Breckner, & Heidel, 2011) indicate that many school counselors are unable to put comprehensive school counseling programs in place.

The continuing trend that first took national foothold in the late 1990s calls for school counselors to implement Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Dahir & Campbell, 1997). Still, some have questioned the extent to which CSCP have been adequately and accurately researched. Brown and Trusty (2005) argued that there was little support to the claims that CSCP boosted student achievement. In 2011, Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Stevenson brought to light that only four rigorous state-wide evaluations of CSCP had been conducted up to that point, and only across two states. As of 2012, six statewide studies had been conducted (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012).

Individual schools vary in their engagement and utilization of CSCP. Lapan (2012) highlighted the discrepancy between school counselors' goal of serving all students, and the reality of many schools failing to implement comprehensive services. For example, Nelson and colleagues (2008) found that school counselors were only able to devote 17% of their time towards creating a CSCP. Additionally, Studer et al. (2011) indicated that roughly half of schools studied were not running any form of a CSCP.

Other studies suggest that schools may not necessarily need an entirely comprehensive school-counseling program. Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Stevenson (2011) found that student-need dictated which aspects of the program were more salient, and therefore necessary to spend time on. Similarly, Rayle and Adams' (2007) nationwide survey of how 388 school counselors utilized their time showed that schools with a CSCP actually provided fewer group counseling experiences and responsive services than those without. The findings of the Rayle and Adams study are both surprising and not so. Group counseling interventions have been found to be of particular value compared to other school counseling services (Whiston & Quinby, 2009), so it is

surprising that comprehensive programs would have fewer of them. That said, the existence of fewer responsive services is not surprising given the preventative nature of CSCP.

Student Outcomes

Common criticisms of CSCP are that they overpromise their benefits, or are inadequately evaluated (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2011). However, many studies show positive outcomes for students who are in schools with a CSCP. Understanding how students are better off as the result of school counseling services is important for the profession largely, but an especially critical step in gathering evidence for application of RAMP distinction.

The apparent benefits of CSCP are visible in students' academic achievement, personal/social, and career development. Demonstrated benefits of CSCP include (a) lower suspension rates, (b) fewer incidents of discipline, (c) higher math and reading proficiency (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011), (d) higher graduation rates, and (e) higher participation rates in Career & Technical Education programs for non-traditional students (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2011; Salina et al., 2013). The aforementioned studies utilized statewide or school-level archival data as well as surveys completed by school counselors.

Further, CSCP correlate with (f) better student-teacher relationships, (g) higher grades, (h) higher levels of school satisfaction, (i) fewer interpersonal problems, (j) students believing their education is more relevant (Lapan et al., 2001) based on teacher and student self-report data. Programs were also associated with (k) fewer incidents of bullying, (l) higher attendance rates, (m) healthier parent-child relationships, and (n)

higher levels of school belongingness according to school personnel (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, social workers, supervisors) parents, students, and statewide middle and high school data (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012). Sink and Stroh (2003) also found a causal relationship between the existence of CSCP and the (o) closing of academic achievement gaps based on a comparison of data garnered from Washington state test scores and surveys of school counselors in elementary schools (both with and without a CSCP in place).

Not all studies show positive results for students in schools with comprehensive counseling programs as directly. Palmer and Erford (2012) found that the extent to which Maryland elementary and middle schools implemented the ASCA National Model was not a significant predictor of student outcomes in their program audit of Maryland schools. For high schools, however, they found that students' scores on English and math standardized tests increased as comprehensive service implementation increased.

Sink et al. (2008) also found mixed results in a study of Washington state middle schools' standardized test scores coupled with school counselors' reports of their school counseling programs. The authors found largely non-significant differences in 6th grade Washington Assessment State Learning (WASL), and 7th grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) between schools that had a CSCP and those that did not, and even one test on which students from non-CSCP schools significantly outperformed CSCP students (7th grade math WASL scores).

Sink and colleagues (2008) also divided schools with a CSCP into two groups based on programs longevity, with schools having programs fewer than five years old labeled "low-CSCP" schools, and those with programs five years or longer labeled "high-

CSCP” schools. When this distinction was investigated, students from “high-CSCP” schools significantly outperformed students from non-CSCP schools on almost every measure, including the aforementioned 7th grade math WASL. This study, though less direct in its benefits of CSCP, provided evidence for the importance of longstanding comprehensive counseling programs.

The last empirical study conducted on the effects of truly comprehensive school counseling programs was in 2014. Duarte and Hatch published an article on a violence prevention program implemented in three California elementary schools. The program was effective in helping students build life skills, work habits, and problem solving-skills, and in reducing disciplinary referrals, but showed no significant effect on students’ math or reading skills.

Since 2014, only five peer-reviewed articles have been published on CSCP (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2016; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a, 2017b; Mason, 2016; Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donohue, 2016). With the exception of the two Goodman-Scott and Grothaus studies in 2017, all of these were theoretical in scope and provided insight into ways that school counselors can couple comprehensive school counseling with other goals and programs currently running in schools (e.g., PBIS, MTSS, and closing academic achievement gaps). The Goodman-Scott and Grothaus studies were a phenomenological investigation of RAMP school counselors’ experience with PBIS, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Evaluation of CSCP findings. Despite showing generally positive results for students, the aforementioned studies are not without limitations, some of which are common across multiple studies. For example, some (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, &

Hoffman, 2011; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson 2011; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Palmer & Erford, 2012) were correlational in design, making it impossible to draw causal links between the school counseling program and student benefits. Palmer and Erford (2012) note that many sample schools had other educational programs running concurrently with CSCP, making the effect of school counseling services alone on student achievement difficult to see in isolation. Palmer and Erford also noted their study was limited by a failure to look at school culture and leadership differences as these may have affected counselors' ability to implement comprehensive programs.

In addition to limitations of design, the measurements used by some researchers studying CSCP did not relate directly to school counseling services. Some studies (e.g., Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Lapan et al., 2001) used student self-report data that asked for general satisfaction with school experience rather than asking directly about experiences with school counseling services. In the case of Lapan and colleagues (2001), the study was also conducted before national comprehensive school counseling program standards existed, making it difficult to compare to the field's current concept of CSCP.

One study (Carey, Harrington, Marin, & Hoffman, 2011) also had a confounding variable that affected the results. These researchers found that student to counselor ratios accounted for a significant portion of the variance for three of their outcome variables (attendance rates, students' technical proficiency, and completion of the technical education program), muddying the extent to which CSCP could be correlated to positive student outcomes as opposed to ratios alone.

There are also limitations for studies with comparative design that allowed causal conclusions to be drawn. For example, Sink and Stroh (2003) found a statistically

significant link between the presence of a comprehensive school counseling program and the closing of achievement gaps by comparing schools with a comprehensive school counseling program to those without. But, similar to Erford and Palmer (2012), Sink and Stroh (2003) failed to take into account the organizational culture of the schools, including the teaching and learning differences that were occurring in schools with a CSCP versus those without. Additionally, the statistical significance found in Sink and Stroh (2003) could have resulted from their large sample size. These authors note that the practical applications of their findings were limited (with effect sizes being reported as modest at best). Sink et al. (2008) had a similar limitation in that statistically significant differences between schools may have been influenced by a large sample size. Further, Sink et al.'s conclusion that programs with long-term CSCP (i.e., longer than five years) had additional benefits for students didn't measure program quality of long-terms CSCP, only whether or not they existed.

In summary, the current literature on CSCP indicates that they are generally associated with positive student outcomes. Importantly, all of the aforementioned studies of CSCP were quantitative in design, which does not provide any understanding of what allows CSCP to be put in place—they simply provide a retrospective look at their effects. The current study aimed to investigate the stories of *how* CSCP were put into place by using a qualitative design. The next section provides an overview of the ASCA National Model, which represents the highest standard of CSCP to date and outline the process that school counselors must go through to have their programs recognized by ASCA (i.e., RAMP), as well as the current findings RAMP schools. The following section concludes with additional research needs based on existing research gaps.

Understanding the Highest Standards: The ASCA National Model and the RAMP Application Requirements

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model is a framework for planning and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. Though the first edition of the ASCA National Model was published in 2003, the ideals and visions that it promotes date back further.

The current edition of the ASCA National Model espouses that a comprehensive school counseling program is integral in supporting the academic missions of schools (2012). Exemplary school counseling programs are based on data and delivered to all students systematically. The model is comprised of four main components: *Foundation*, *Management*, *Delivery*, and *Accountability*, each of which contains additional parts to further specify the school counselor role.

The *Foundation* component of the national model examines how counselors' personal beliefs relate to how students will benefit from the counseling program. This is particularly important as it is the starting point of an entire school counseling program. The importance of school counselors' personal characteristics, and their effects on program implementation are still more-or-less unknown, and will be discussed later in this chapter. Operationally within the *Foundation* aspect of the national model, school counselors typically create vision statements and goals that describe how students will be different after services have been implemented (ASCA, 2012).

The *Management* component of the ASCA National Model is comprised of the tools that counselors use for assessing, organizing, planning, and evaluating their

programs. *Management* also encompasses the use of data to identify and close achievement gaps. School counselors are encouraged to track and analyze how their time is spent through calendars and a use-of-time assessment and specify goals and duties yearly (ASCA, 2012). The *Management* portion of the national model also provides templates for school counselors to use in tracking their data and time use. Counselors who apply for RAMP Distinction are required to use these templates.

Arguably, the most important part of the ASCA National Model is the *Delivery* component. ASCA recommends that delivery of school counseling services comprise at least 80% of counselors' time. Specifically, *Direct Services* include the use of curriculum to deliver lessons to all students to ensure that they are equipped with developmentally appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Direct Services also include: *Individual Student Planning*, and *Responsive Services*, such as individual counselor, small-group interventions, and crisis response. *Direct Services* are those where counselors are face-to-face with students. Delivery is also comprised of *Indirect Services* which include referring a student out for additional support, and collaboration with teachers and parents (ASCA, 2012).

Accountability, the last of the four main components of the ASCA National Model has gained more attention and importance since the turn of the century as the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2002) brought increased emphasis on standardized-testing as a means of allocating federal education funds (Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, & Zlatev 2009). *Accountability* provides strategies and resources for data collection and analysis to determine how

students are different (e.g. academically, socially, behaviorally, etc.) as a result of the counseling program (ASCA, 2012).

In addition to the four main components, the ASCA National Model emphasizes four themes that counselors should apply throughout their work. These themes of *Leadership, Advocacy, Collaboration, and Systemic Change* highlight the importance of school counselors seeing themselves as change agents beyond the scope of their school building, and the necessity to continually work towards creating more just and equitable educational environments (ASCA, 2012). The ASCA themes also encompass emphases found within the larger context of the counseling profession (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010; Ratts et al., 2015) where counselors are called upon to be advocates for social justice and societal change. In order to obtain RAMP distinction, school counselors need to show a utilization of all aspects of the National Model (ASCA, 2012).

The Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) Application Requirements.

RAMP distinction indicates that a school has implemented a CSCP that can adequately answer the question, “How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?” Currently, there are 242 certified RAMP schools across the United States. Obtaining RAMP distinction requires an application process spanning at least one full year of data collection and analysis (ASCA, 2018c). For districts with low familiarity with the ASCA National Model, longer periods of time will be necessary. In developing a district level self-assessment tool for measuring ASCA readiness, Carey, Harrity, and Dimmitt (2005) suggested allowing three to five years to transition to using the National Model.

The RAMP application costs \$250 or \$500, based on whether or not the applicant is a member of ASCA (ASCA, 2018d). The application consists of 12 scored sections each with a possible score ranging from three to six points. The necessary elements of each section are as follows:

Section 1: Vision Statement (3 points) - School counselors communicate what they hope to see for the future of their students in the next five to fifteen years. School counselors are encouraged to have their vision statements align with their school and district visions when available.

Section 2: Mission Statement (3 points) - School counselors describe the means through which the school counseling program will reach its vision and provide an overarching focus and purpose to the school counseling program. School counselors are encouraged to, when possible, align their work with district and state level mission statements. Foci of mission statements often include equity, access and success for all students as well as a focus on long-term outcomes for students.

Section 3: School Counseling Program Goals (6 points) - Program goals are based on achievement, attendance and/or behavior, and are specific to the needs indicated by school data. These goals are written in SMART format and should address achievement and opportunity gaps, attainment, and existing school improvement goals.

Section 4: ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (4 points) - Based on an ASCA document of the same name, this section addresses the extent to which students have the knowledge skills and attitudes to be successful socially/emotionally and in college and career readiness. The specifics mindsets and behaviors addressed will depend on students' developmental needs.

Section 5: Annual Agreement (5 points) - The annual agreement indicates that a formal conversation between school counselors and administrators has occurred. Annual agreements are signed documents including percentages of time that school counselors will spend on each aspect of their role. In order to meet ASCA standards, school counselors must have at least 80% of their time dedicated to direct and indirect services to students. The annual agreement also specifies counselors' caseloads and goals for professional development throughout the year.

Section 6: Advisory Council (5 points) – The advisory council consists of teachers, administrators, community members, parents, counselors, students, and other stakeholders and are an important part of a CSCP. For this section of the application school counselors must submit agendas and minutes (separately) from at least two meetings that occurred with the advisory council during the school year. School counselors also provide any supporting documentation such as handouts, data, charts, or announcements that were part of each meeting.

Section 7: Calendars (Annual & Weekly) (5 points) – School counselors use calendars to inform other stakeholders of the activities and programs that they are running. For the RAMP application, school counselors must provide an annual plan that shows the overarching elements of their CSCP as well as at least two weekly calendars that shows time use. Calendars must include services provided, the topics that services addressed, the delivery method (i.e., classroom guidance, small-group, large group, individual), and whether or not the delivery was direct or indirect.

Section 8: School Counseling Core Curriculum Action Plan and Lesson Plans (6 points) - Core curriculum is often called “classroom guidance”, and consists of class-

wide lessons delivered to students. Counselors submit all classroom guidance activities and lessons for the year and an explanation of how the lessons address program goals (if at all). Further, any extant perception data (what students thought of the lessons) or process data (number of students who received the lesson) are to be submitted.

Section 9: School Counseling Core Curriculum Results Reports (6 points) - This section consists of analysis of outcome data from class wide lessons, and implications on how the data will inform the CSCP in future iterations. Counselors must provide graphs summarizing perception data over the course of the year.

Section 10: Small-Group Responsive Services (6 points) - This section includes any small-group counseling provided to students for a particular prevention or intervention goal. Groups must have a minimum of four sessions, and require collection of perception and outcome data on effectiveness. Counselors must also submit lesson plans from each session and a copy of any instruments used to collect data.

Section 11: Closing-the-Gap Results Report (6 points) – Closing-the-gap activities address academic, attendance, or behavioral discrepancies that exist between groups based on school data. They are multi-tiered, evidence-based, and/or research informed. Counselors provide insight into how they identified gaps in their school (e.g., school data profile, school improvement plan, etc.) and an overview of the activities and interventions they chose to address these gaps.

Section 12: Program Evaluation Reflection (5 points) - The ASCA National Model has four themes of advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012). This section of the application requires that school counselors reflect and describe how they specifically used these themes to change their schools and students.

This response, unlike the other sections of the application, may be submitted as a three-to-five minute video in lieu of a written response.

In addition to submitting the above artifacts for scoring, counselors must provide a narrative rationale for all 12 components, each ranging in length from 300 to 750 words. The only exception to this is Section 12, which can be submitted either as a three-to-five minute video or a written narrative of 500-1,500 words (ASCA 2018d). School counselors are required to use ASCA-specific templates throughout the application. Appendix A (pg. 205) provides a link to exemplar RAMP applications provided by ASCA.

Schools must earn at least 58 out of a possible 60 points to be awarded RAMP distinction (ASCA, 2018c). If awarded the distinction is given to school counseling programs rather than individual counselors. Prior to 2015, RAMP distinction which lasted for three years, after which schools must reapply (Wilkerson et al., 2013). Schools obtaining RAMP distinction since 2015 earn the distinction for five years (ASCA, 2018b). The re-RAMP process requires school counselors to complete the entire RAMP application again, as well as respond to the following prompt

What impact has a high-quality, comprehensive school counseling program had on your school and students? Select one area for which you have collected data for the previous three school years and include a results report demonstrating the impact your program has had during that time. Relevant information and documentation must be included. (ASCA, 2018b, n.p.)

The RAMP scoring rubric ensures school counselors are running a CSCP by requiring submission of differentiated services (e.g., schoolwide, small group,

individualized, program evaluation, etc.). By design, if schools are not running a CSCP they will not be able to receive RAMP distinction.

RAMP findings. Though various studies have been conducted on the results of CSCP, far fewer have been conducted in RAMP schools specifically. In fact, in my review of the literature, I came across only six studies (Dodson, 2009; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a, 2017b; Wilkerson et al., 2013; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011) that specifically studied RAMP distinguished schools or their counselors. Only two of these studies (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a, 2017b) were qualitative in design, and were both published utilizing the same interview data. The other four RAMP studies (Dodson, 2009; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016; Wilkerson et al., 2013; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011) were quantitative in design, while the vast majority of studies on school counseling programs examined general CSCP.

There is no clear reason why so few studies have explored RAMP schools specifically, but the most likely is that there are not a lot of RAMP schools. As of this writing, there are only 242 RAMP schools nationwide. Reasons for why there are so few RAMP schools vary. One, it may be the case that school counselors follow state-specific school counseling models as opposed to the ASCA National Model. Martin, Carey, and DeCoster's (2009) study of state-level school counseling programs across all 50 states and DC found that 17 states had established state-level models, 24 states were in the progress of implementing models, and 10 were in the beginning stages of state-level model development.

Additionally, it may be the case that schools with CSCP do not apply for the RAMP process because of the cost (\$250 or \$500 depending on whether or not the

applying school counselors are members of ASCA) (ASCA, 2018d). Regardless, given the trend of national standardization across the profession and the status of RAMP as the gold standard, it is important that additional research is done on both the process itself and its outcomes.

Importantly, positive results were found in the four extant quantitative studies conducted on RAMP schools and their counselors (Dodson, 2009; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016; Wilkerson et al., 2013; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Wilkerson et al. (2013) found that students in RAMP elementary schools had significantly higher proficiency rates on math and English achievement tests over a four year period than students in non-RAMP schools. Moreover, a study of High School principals found that counselors in RAMP schools were perceived as providing more classroom guidance lessons and student record interpretation than counselors in non-RAMP schools (Dodson, 2009).

Studies of school counselors have shown that RAMP counselors score higher on social justice advocacy measures than non-RAMP counselors (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016), and have a thorough understanding of the importance of using data in planning and implementing student services (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). The two studies by Goodman-Scott & Grothaus (2017a, 2017b) examined the extent to which school counselors saw PBIS and RAMP as mutually-beneficial to one another, and found that school counselors saw coordinating PBIS efforts as an important role for school counselors.

Evaluation of RAMP findings. Extant studies on RAMP schools, though few, provide some insight into the ways in which the distinction holds implications for the counselor's role and student achievement. Importantly, only two of the extant RAMP-

based studies (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a, 2017b) were conducted since the third edition of the ASCA National Model was created, meaning that the majority utilized a currently-outdated version of the model. The Goodman-Scott and Grothaus studies were also the only two that utilized qualitative data. The design of the extant RAMP studies also leave some questions unanswered. For example, Young and Kaffenberger (2011) only looked at the beliefs of RAMP school counselors, making comparisons with non-RAMP schools impossible. They also utilized self-report data, which may have skewed their results. In the case of Dodson (2009), only ten RAMP high schools were in existence when the study was conducted, meaning that they had a small sample size, making the conclusions that they drew based on the differences between schools tenuous.

Feldwisch and Whiston (2016), another RAMP study, note that the recruitment of participants for their study may have had a selection-bias in that the intention of the study (to examine social justice advocacy) was mentioned at the onset, meaning that counselors who already had a stronger social justice orientation may have been more likely to participate in the study. This notion was further supported by the study having a lower than expected response rate. Feldwisch and Whiston also failed to distinguish between schools that were RAMP versus those that were Indiana Gold Star schools (based on the Indiana state-level school counseling model). Though many Indiana Gold Star schools also have RAMP distinction, not all do (Wilkerson et al., 2013).

The best designed of the four quantitative RAMP studies was Wilkerson et al. (2013), which was a four-year longitudinal study of 75 schools across Indiana, both RAMP and Non-RAMP. Though well-designed, a limitation of this study is that it only looked at Academic Achievement as a means of *student success*. This study could have

been strengthened by also evaluating other aspects of student-improvement (i.e., personal/social, career development) to demonstrate the dynamic improvements that RAMP distinction may provide. Additionally, only one state (Indiana) was evaluated, making the generalizability to other parts of the country more difficult.

The Goodman-Scott and Grothaus studies (2017a, 2017b) drew from a sample of schools that did not necessarily still have RAMP distinction—that is, some of the counselors in their sample had obtained RAMP at one time, but were no longer actively RAMP distinguished. Additionally, their sampling allowed any counselors who worked in a currently-RAMPed school for at least one year. Therefore, there is a possibility that participants had not actually gone through the RAMP process themselves. Further, though an important addition to the extant literature on RAMP, these studies both focused primarily on PBIS and its effect on the school counselor role. Neither of Goodman-Scott and Grothaus studies delved into the specifics of the application process, and the majority of their sample was of counselors working in secondary school settings.

In summary, of the six RAMP studies included in this literature review four were quantitative in design and utilized survey, questionnaire, and/or school-based data. For the two qualitative studies, the focus was less on the RAMP process and RAMP application than it was PBIS. All six studies also had limitations that require additional research to be conducted within RAMP schools. Qualitative research is appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon (Jeanfreau & Jack, 2010), meaning that future qualitative research on RAMP schools and counselors would be beneficial in order to further understand what facilitates counselors' implementation of model comprehensive programs.

Additional Research Needs

There appears to be a relative moratorium on research regarding comprehensive school counseling programs, especially when compared to the years between the ASCA National Model's inception (2003), and the introduction of the third edition (2012). This may be due, in part, to the changes that were made to the ASCA National Model. The most substantial of which surrounded school counselors' use of data. Specifically, the third edition added emphasis and attention to data use in planning and evaluating programming.

The lack of continued evaluation of CSCP may also be a result of school counselors simply lacking the training to conceptualize, plan, implement, manage, and evaluate a CSCP (Rayle & Adams, 2007). School counselor accountability through the use of data has been an important aspect of the role since at least the 1980s (Isaacs, 2003) but evidence suggests that it remains an area of apprehension.

Extant literature suggests that school counselors are aware of the importance of using data, but do not necessarily know how to analyze or set up protocols for implementing an accountability system (Astramovich, 2017; Sink, 2009). It is not surprising then that an increased emphasis on the use of data in the third edition of the ASCA National Model may have affected the extent to which school counselors are willing to implement a CSCP, especially if they were using the ASCA National Model as a guide for their programming.

In a study of the beliefs and practices of RAMP counselors, Young and Kaffenberger (2011) found that RAMP school counselors were highly skilled in utilizing data to inform their work. Furthermore, 90% of these counselors agreed that the RAMP

process increased how often they used data to inform their programs, or identify barriers to academic success. Interestingly, Young and Kaffenberger found that the majority RAMP counselors were trained to use data through district-level professional development sessions, and less often from their graduate training. Therefore, counselors' apprehension of not knowing how to use data (Sink, 2009) is not necessarily unfounded, and may relate to why some counselors feel as if their graduate training did not prepare them very well (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011).

Young and Kaffenberger's (2011) findings also provide support for the importance of understanding organizational and school culture as they relate to the work that school counselors do (in this case, in how the role of district-level training initiatives led to counselors being able to adequately use data). This is oft unexamined in studies of comprehensive school counseling programs, and noted as a limitation by some of the aforementioned studies (e.g., Palmer & Erford, 2012; Sink & Stroh, 2003). Studies of school counselors' experiences in implementing RAMP programs, therefore, would benefit from exploring the role of individual counselor characteristics as well as school/organizational culture.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundations of *Role theory* (Cottrell, 1941, 1942a, 1942b; Lopata, 1991) and *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Schein 1985, 2004) provide a means of understanding how individual school counselor-characteristics interact with environmental elements and aspects of larger school systems (e.g., regional, district-level factors, community level factors, etc.). These interactions facilitate or hinder counselors'

ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs, and ultimately gain RAMP distinction.

Briefly, *Role theory* (Cottrell, 1941, 1942a, 1942b; Lopata, 1991) explores how individual interactions are shaped by previous patterns and expectations, while Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985, 2004) explores school culture's influence on school counselors' role. There are many similarities between these two theoretical frameworks, as both ultimately examine the influence of larger culture on the individual. The main distinction between the two is that *role theory* focuses more on the day-to-day interactions between individuals and their personal expectations (which may or may not be influenced by the environment), whereas *organizational culture and leadership* examines how organizational culture becomes an unseen aspect that underscores all actions and interactions. Each of these theories and their applicability to school counseling programs will be discussed in this section.

Role Theory

Role theory has its roots in Linton's (1936) conceptualization of social status as "a position in a particular pattern which is a collection of rights and duties" (p. 113-114). Over time, the concept of social status expanded to describe how interactions between individuals were based on respective roles within a larger system. This is the basis for *role theory* (Cottrell, 1941, 1942a, 1942b; Lopata, 1991). Cottrell (1942b) clarifies that even when not consciously aware of their roles, people are nevertheless influenced by patterns created by previous interactions. These patterns of communications are then used to make predictions about future, ambiguous interactions. Lopata (1991) argues that role encompasses more than individual behavior, as others within a system enable behaviors

an individual can carry out. In essence, behaviors are a negotiation based on all parties' expectations and perceptions of what a specific 'role' (e.g., school counselor) entails.

Bentley (1965) was among the first to investigate the ways that perceptions and expectations of school counselors may differ in the dynamic relationships between counselors, non-counseling individuals (e.g., parents, administrators, teachers, students), and school systems, and did so long before the existence of national school counseling standards. Bentley argues that counselors' personal role perceptions may be influenced by *others* within the school (i.e., teachers or administrators) and that these *others'* expectations may be the result of the larger social structure of the school, or simply the thoughts and beliefs of that particular individual. Therefore, expectations and operationalization of an individual counselor's role may vary greatly based on with whom an interaction is taking place and the social context (e.g., school environment) in which it is taking place.

There is also more recent literature to support *role theory* and its application to school counseling à la Bentley (1965). For example, administrators and teachers may have an inaccurate understanding of what school counselors do or should do (Bickmore & Curry, 2013; Fitch, Newby, Ballesteros, & Marshall, 2001; Reiner, Colbert, & Pérusse, 2009), or draw from personal and professional experiences with school counselors as a basis for conceptualizing the school counselor role largely (Bickmore & Curry, 2013; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). This is not to say that once expectations of the school counselor are put into place that they are unchangeable. *Role theory* argues that all interactions are a negotiation, so continued

interactions that challenge an individual's inaccurate perceptions or expectations of what a school counselor 'should' be would serve to change the conceptualization of the role.

Role theory (Cottrell, 1941, 1942a, 1942b; Lopata, 1991) may, therefore, provide some insight as to why some school counselors are able to provide comprehensive school counseling programs while others are not. It may be the case that there is a larger discrepancy between counselors' expectations for themselves and their roles (which would include providing comprehensive school counseling services) and others' expectations (which, to reiterate, may be influenced by larger social systems, or simply based on individual beliefs—Bentley (1965)) in schools where fewer comprehensive services are being put in place.

In contrast, a higher degree of congruence between all individuals' expectations, coupled with a social structure (i.e., school organizational culture) that supports counselors providing comprehensive services would lead to more comprehensive programming and a higher likelihood of being able to apply for and obtain RAMP distinction. This is also supported empirically. Kimber and Campbell (2014) found that ethical dilemmas stemming from disagreements between counselors and principals often arose due to both school organizational culture as well as differences in the individual beliefs of principals and counselors.

Individual differences in counselors' personal characteristics may therefore allow some counselors successfully shift inaccurate perceptions of their role to ones more aligned with the ASCA National Model, and cause others to struggle in trying to do so. For example, Duslak and Geier (2017) found that the frequency of meetings between counselors and principals significantly predicted relationship quality. These findings

support the idea that relationships between school counselors and other stakeholders are malleable, as suggested by *role theory*. Current school counseling literature has theorized a number of important personal characteristics for school counselors to possess, though little empirical work on these characteristics has been conducted.

Organizational Culture and Leadership

Adding to the framework of *role theory*, additional attention must be given to the environments where school counseling occurs (i.e., schools) as this can also influence individuals' thoughts and expectations (Bentley, 1965). The organizational culture of a school (or district, community, region) plays a role in what school counselors are expected to and/or are able to do by way of student programming. Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985, 2004) is an appropriate framework for further understanding the influence of environment as schools are often conceptualized as organizations (Griffith, 2006; Salo, 2008) with their own cultures (Dongjiao, 2015). School counselors work within these organizations and therefore contribute to creating and maintaining school culture, but are also affected by it.

Put simply, if the organizational culture of schools supports comprehensive student programming, more will occur. If it does not, less will occur. Given that academics are the primary outcome measures for schools across the United States (Barna & Brott, 2013), non-academic school counseling services may be given less attention as they are less in line with how schools are measuring success. An investigation of Schein's theory will provide further insight into what this may look like day-to-day for counselors.

The word "culture" has many meanings. For this study, the definition of culture in

the school context will be taken from Schein (2004), which defines culture as “The accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements of the group members’ total psychological functioning” (p. 17). School buildings are comprised of staff members that have a shared history and a sense of membership to their schools. They therefore qualify as a cultural group. Schein discusses the dynamic, all-encompassing nature of cultures within organizations. They are embedded, stable, and act as both a guide and constraint for behavior despite being largely invisible and unconscious.

Schein (2004) sees the creation of culture as a largely top-down phenomenon that begins with a leader but eventually takes on a life of its own. In the case of schools, the administrator (e.g., principal) is often the leader, and plays a large role in shaping and maintaining school culture (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Harris, 2002). Spontaneous interactions within a cultural group also serve to solidify patterns of behavior and cultural norms provide a sense of stability and consistency and eventually become “taken-for-granted assumptions” (Schein, 2004, p. 20). Schein believes that organizational cultures fall into three *levels*, or degrees-of-visibility. These levels are mutually dependent and influence one another.

The examples below illustrate the influence of organizational culture at the school level, where principals act as leaders. School systems, however, may be more complicated than some organizations in that principals, while the heads of their respective buildings, work within a larger, complex system of a school district (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000) which also play a role in shaping school culture. The influence of leadership may also happen at levels further

removed from the school through initiatives at the community, county, district, state, or regional level. The specific parts of Schein's (2004) theory are as follows:

Artifacts. Artifacts represent the most visible level of organizational culture. They can include the physical environment and visible products of a group, as well as its languages, ceremonies, published list of values, and even climate. The meaning of artifacts are not necessarily easily understood even though they are highly visible. Schein cautions outside individuals from interpreting organizational culture based on artifacts alone, as to do so would be clouded by assumptions (2004).

In schools, artifacts would range from what is on schools walls to how individuals talk to one another (which would also entail elements of *role theory*). Artifacts may reflect elements of the larger school culture (e.g., schools with student work posted on the wall value the displaying the work of students. Digging deeper, one could make assumptions based on the types of student work hanging on the wall. Hanging only exemplary examples of student work versus a range of student work may point to underlying beliefs and assumptions of the school culture. On a more positive note, school-artifacts may indicate an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students through the displaying of Safe-Zone stickers in the building (Mail, 2002)).

Artifacts on their own are insufficient to entirely explain culture or the underlying beliefs of members of the school. To truly understand the meaning of artifacts an observer would need to be exposed to the group for a long period of time (Schein, 2004).

Espoused beliefs and values. The second level of organizational culture is less visible, and operates from the notion that all group learning originally stems from an individual's beliefs and values of what "ought to be" (Schein, 2004, p. 28). When a

leader enacts his or her beliefs on the members of an organization and is able to successfully address or solve a group issue those beliefs and values begin to get adopted as part of the group's shared belief system. Over time and with continued success, beliefs move into a larger level of abstraction and become part of the group's underlying assumptions at which point members forget that there was ever a time at which the group did not necessarily see the value of the now-assumption.

Not all beliefs and values are empirically testable, however. Social validation is used as a means of confirming beliefs that are difficult to tie directly to performance. Moreover, beliefs or values that provide meaning for a group but do not correlate with effective group performance groups may lead espoused values that reflect *desired* behavior rather than *observed* behavior (Schein, 2004). An example of a desired versus observed behavior would be an organization that touts the importance of teamwork and camaraderie while actually promoting and rewarding competitiveness and individuality.

Schools are no strangers to espoused beliefs that indicate a contradiction between *desired* and *observed* behavior (e.g., outwardly stating a belief in the importance of all students learning while, in actuality, spending less time on low achieving students believing that they will not be able to achieve even with extra attention (Diamond & Spillane, 2004)). The abstract nature of beliefs and attitudes makes them more difficult to observe or even for members to adequately articulate which may serve as a reason for the existence of contradictory beliefs (Schein, 2004). In contrast to contradictory desired and observed behaviors, Bebell and Stemler (2013) found that a majority of school mission statements promoted both cognitive and emotional development of their students. Given that CSCP support students' emotional development, schools that run a CSCP would be

in line with their espoused beliefs and values indicated by their mission statement.

Basic underlying assumptions. The final and most covert level of organizational culture consists of underlying assumptions that are taken for granted by individuals within the organization (Schein, 2004). This is the logical progression of espoused beliefs and values that provide continued success. What were once the beliefs and values of an individual (i.e., leader) are now treated as the reality for all members of an organization.

When beliefs reach the point of becoming underlying assumptions it causes members to view alternatives as inconceivable. Basic assumptions become non-confrontable, non-debatable, and especially resistant to change (Schein 2004). Individuals begin to perceive ambiguous situations in ways that reiterate and affirm their beliefs in order maintain stability, even if the underlying assumptions are not necessarily accurate.

To illustrate an example of how beliefs become assumptions that ultimately color perceptions of events, consider the following example. A school may espouse the belief that student academic success is important, which may be reinforced by activities that increase instructional time by taking away recess or unstructured time (Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007). If doing so increases standardized test scores or other means of measuring academic success then the belief that “academic success is the most important goal of school” may become an underlying assumption causing other non-instructional activities to be deemed less important.

It would be difficult to justify activities that pulled students out of instructional time due to the underlying group assumption that instructional time is an important part of students’ school experience. To suggest that instructional time is *not* important, or less important than students’ socioemotional skills or career development skills would be

rejected as they do not square with the underlying assumptions of the culture. When additional non-instructional activities are presented, underlying assumptions cause them to be perceived as “auxiliary” or a “waste of time” rather than “an important part of creating well-rounded students”. What began as a belief in the importance of academic success ultimately shapes the activities that individuals in the school were willing to allow students to experience.

On the other side of the coin, if the existence of a comprehensive school counseling program boosts academic achievement (as they have been shown to do, e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman 2011; Sink et al., 2008), then the idea of students being taken out of instructional time for counseling services would not be seen as an impediment. Instead, a belief such as “supporting students’ emotional well-being helps them develop personally, and helps them achieve academically” would become part of the ethos of the school, and non-instructional activities that support students would be seen as beneficial and complementary as opposed to antithetical to the mission of the school.

The Individual & The Environment

Altogether, the school counseling “role” is not only defined by the ASCA National Model (2012), but also by the expectations and assumptions of individuals and organizations (e.g., schools, districts, communities). These expectations, coupled with actions by individual school counselors, color interactions between counselors and other school staff, and shape duties counselors are expected to perform. In turn, these duties are the basis of school counseling programming, and determine whether or not a comprehensive program can be put into place. Administrators may have a particularly

strong role in this dynamic because of the part they play in crafting organizational culture (Schein, 2004), and their role as school counselors' direct supervisors (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009).

A combination of *Role theory* and *Organizational culture and leadership* may therefore further explain why some schools are able to implement CSCP and others are not. *Role theory* looks at the individual interactions between school counselors and other staff members and the ways in which this serves to further shape the counselor role. *Organizational culture and leadership* looks broadly at organizational culture and its influence on the counselor role. Figure 1 serves to further illustrate the direction and strength of these relationships.

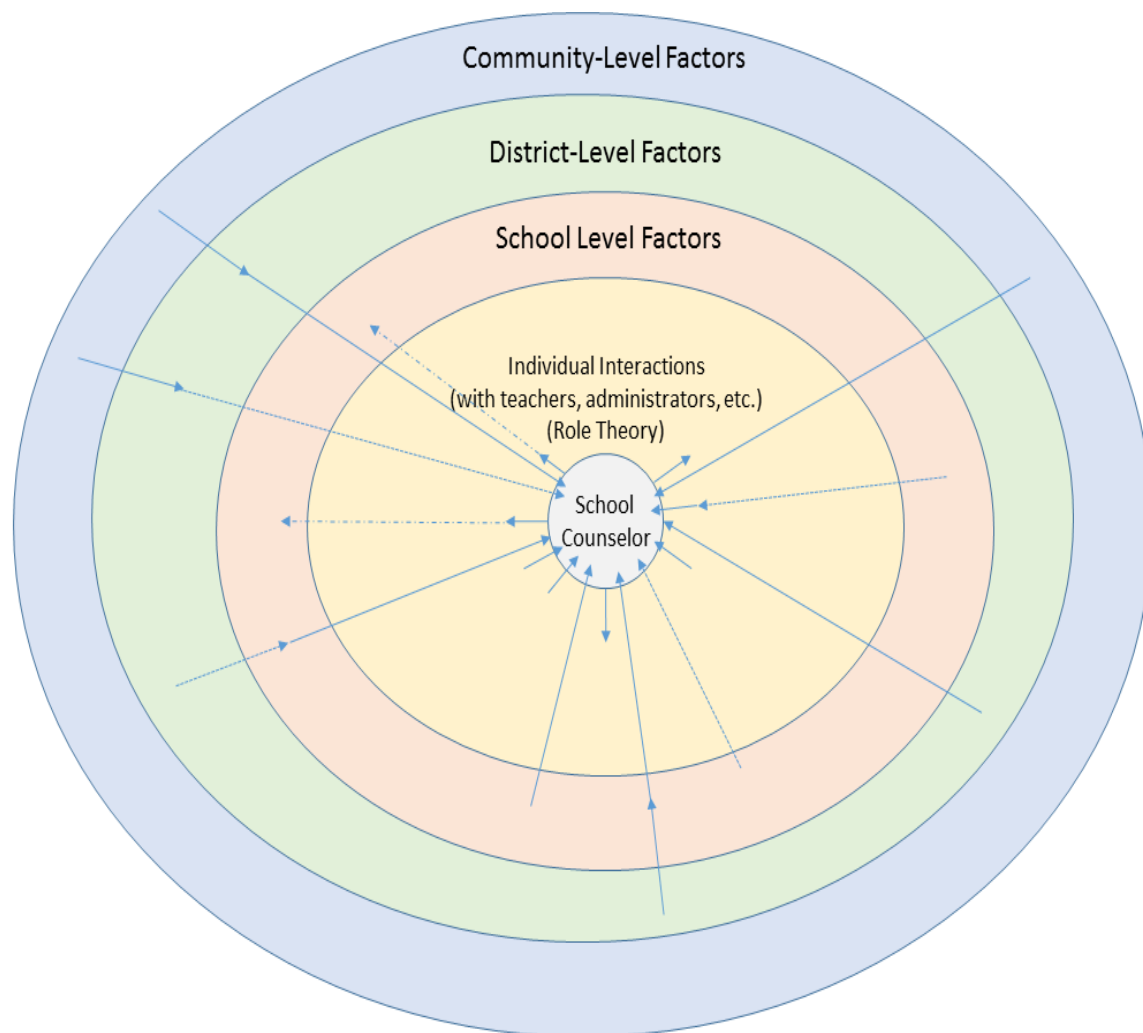


Figure 1. Role theory & organizational characteristics. The reciprocal interaction between school counselors, other staff members, school-level, district-level, and community (e.g., local, state, regional) level characteristics. The dotted lines indicated a weaker relationship than solid lines. Individual school counselors have the most influence over individual interactions with others in the school, which may serve to influence school-level factors, whereas external influences on school counselor role may come from levels (e.g., Community, District) that individual counselors have a difficult time influencing.

Influences on School Counselor Role and Duties

Following the discussion of role theory and organizational culture, school counseling literature suggests a variety of components shape school counselors' roles and duties. This section provides an overview of how various individual characteristics (e.g., disposition, knowledge, skills) and school-level elements (e.g., school setting and level, ratios, and non-counseling staff perceptions) affect school counselor role and, in doing so, act as a facilitator or impediment to implementing a CSCP. Given that RAMP distinction requires a CSCP to be in place, it also sheds light on elements that may be important for school counselors hoping to gain RAMP distinction. This section also provides findings on how school counselor role may vary between elementary and secondary school settings. I also evaluate the literature in this section in relation to the need for additional research to be conducted.

Individual Characteristics

Few studies have explored the specifics of individual characteristics as they relate to the role of the school counselor. The ASCA National Model indicates that counselors should be leaders, and change agents who work within and change systems (2012), but less is known about how this is done, or what characteristics are important in change agents and leaders within school counseling.

Conceptually. Since the introduction of the ASCA National Model in 2003, several conceptual pieces have been written about characteristics that counselors should have. In the broader counseling literature, Corey (2009) wrote that effective counselors should have personal qualities that allow them to be therapeutic. Some of these traits include: a sense of identity, a respect and appreciation for oneself, an openness to change,

honesty, sincerity, and passion. Corey's notions of effective counselors' characteristics are based in previous research indicating that personal identities of counselors are intertwined with outcomes for clients, and he notes that his list is not exhaustive.

Though Corey (2009) provides a good starting point for the conceptualizing personal qualities in effective counselors, its applicability to school counselors is limited. Corey's use of "effective" is in relation to client outcomes from individual or group psychotherapy which constitutes only part of the ideal school counselor's role (ASCA, 2012). Discussion must turn, therefore, to the specific skills that would be applicable to school counselors, especially in regards to providing programmatic comprehensive school counseling services.

Trusty and Brown (2005) conceptualized specific dispositions, knowledge, and skills school counselors should have in order to be effective advocates. Important dispositions included a tendency towards autonomy and altruism, empowerment of others, and ethical practice. For knowledge, Trusty and Brown argued that effective advocacy requires knowledge of resources within and outside of the school, as well as knowledge of how to handle disagreements that may arise while advocating. Further, effective advocates should understand systems, as well as models for advocacy and systemic change including the ability to collaborate and form partnerships with other stakeholders. According to Trusty and Brown (2005), effective advocacy also requires school counselors to be skilled in communication, collaboration, problem-identification and solving, and organizational skills.

In a similar vein, Bemak and Chung (2008) discussed personal characteristics that may impede school counselors from adequately advocating from a multicultural/social

justice perspective. They argued that personal fear of being disliked and the desire to be non-confrontational halts school counselors from sufficiently advocating for student need. This is exacerbated when school counselors concede to perform non-counseling duties assigned by administrators and teachers as it solidifies the role of the school counselor as a compliant, non-confrontational individual in the school, making it more difficult to change this role as time goes on, a point which also lends support to *Role Theory*.

Bemak and Chung recommend ways for school counselors to break out of these role-expectations in order to provide more socially just services. These recommendations include: being courageous, gaining an understanding of contextual factors that may impede student success, taking calculated risks, becoming comfortable with conflict, and being knowledgeable among others. However, Bemak and Chung provide little discussion of the ways in which recommended school counselor actions would adapt based on organizational factors at the school, district, or community level.

A final conceptual article meant to highlight important characteristics for school counselors to possess is McGlothlin and Miller (2008). This article is geared towards administrators looking to hire effective school counselors. McGlothlin and Miller suggest that administrators look for counselors who have certain personal characteristics (ethical, self-aware, a strong professional identity as a school counselor) and skills (strong counseling skills, strong organizational skills, and effective time management skills). The authors argue that these characteristics are especially important because they align well with the goals of the ASCA National Model (i.e., to implement a comprehensive school counseling program).

Empirically. Currently only two published studies (Lochman et al., 2009; Young, Dollarhide, & Baughman, 2015) have empirically investigated school counselors' personal characteristics.

Lochman et al. (2009) investigated the role of school counselor characteristics as they related to implementation of a youth violence prevention program by school counselors working in heavily impoverished inner-city schools. In their sample of 32 school counselors, the authors found that counselor agreeableness and conscientiousness were linked to the quality of counselors' engagement with the program, and how well they implemented the program. Agreeableness referred to the extent to which counselors were compliant, straightforward, and kind, whereas conscientiousness referred to characteristics such as organization and planfulness during the program. Conversely, counselors' level of cynicism was associated with a lesser ability to collaborate and engage others when implementing their program.

Interestingly, the findings of Lochman et al. (2009) both support and challenge conceptual recommendations of counselor qualities. For example, the importance of planfulness and organization empirically supports Brown and Trusty (2005) and McGlothlin and Miller (2008), both of which said that organizational skills were an important component of effective advocates and school counselors. Interestingly, agreeableness was suggested by Bemak and Chung (2008) to be an impediment to effective advocacy, as counselors who fear being disliked or confrontational will likely be less effective advocates. Lochman et al. (2009), however, found that agreeableness was linked to quality of counselors' engagement with their programming. This seeming contradiction may be due to the fact that Bemak and Chung's recommendations were

specifically within the context of advocating for students utilizing a multicultural and social justice lens, whereas Lochman et al. (2009) explored implementation of a specific program. This may also indicate that the specific skills and characteristics that school counselors utilize likely shift depending on what duty is being performed. Lochman et al. also pulled from a specific sample (impoverished inner-city schools), which supports the importance of considering contextual factors (in addition to personal characteristics) in program implementation.

Lastly, Young et al. (2015) aimed to identify important characteristics associated with school counselor leaders in a qualitative analysis of open-ended questions on a nationally distributed ASCA survey. Their sample of over 1,300 participants provided almost 2,500 meaningful characteristics related to school counselor leaders which were ultimately grouped into five themes of Leadership Attributes, Relationship Attributes, Communication and Collaboration, Exemplary Program Design, and Advocacy. These themes relate to the ASCA National Model, as well as some of the aforementioned conceptual studies of characteristics that school counselors 'should' have (e.g., Bemak & Chung, 2008; McGlothlin & Miller, 2008; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Within these five themes common characteristics included things like: flexibility, adaptability, organizational and time management skills, compassion, empathy, ethical practice, assertiveness, cooperation, knowledge, equity, and justice. Importantly, this study pulled from a sample of ASCA members, which may have influenced some of the responses, as members were likely familiar with the ASCA national model.

Young et al. (2015) provides important insight into characteristics deemed important by school counselors who are also members of ASCA. That said, no data were

provided regarding the extent to which participants utilized reported characteristics, or how they affected the ability to provide comprehensive school counseling services.

Organizational Characteristics

In 2002, Horenczyk and Tatar explored how teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism were influenced by school organizational culture, indicating that understanding ecological influences on individuals within educational systems has held importance since at least the turn of the century. Similarly, Sink and Stroh (2003) noted that not investigating school-level factors (i.e., leadership, structure, organizational culture) was a limitation of their study of school counseling programs, a sentiment echoed by other researchers in regards to their own studies (e.g., Palmer & Erford, 2012).

Despite the apparent importance of school organizational culture, it is only recently that school counseling literature has consistently explicitly discussed the ways that school ecology relate to school counselors' role. For example, McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, and Ruiz (2014) introduced an ecological model of school counseling which urged counselors to overtly consider the multiple contexts in which their work takes place, and how these contexts influence the needs of students and communities. Others (e.g., Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009) have written about the importance of school counselors understanding the importance of changing school culture for more impact, understanding school and community culture to better serve students (Cole, 2014), and conceptualized means of school counselors fitting counseling duties within the context of extant school frameworks (e.g., PBIS, MTSS, Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

All this to say, understanding context is an important part of the school counselor role, and has been given more attention in recent publications. In the following section, I outline the most prominently researched organizational factors that influence the role of school counselors.

School Setting & Level. School setting and level influence the activities counselors perform (Dahir, Burnham, and Stone, 2009; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Rayle & Adams, 2007; Studer et al., 2011), and therefore their ability to implement a CSCP. School counselors face different challenges based on the geographic location and developed environment (i.e., rural, suburban, urban) of their school (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009).

School level as a facilitator. Elementary school counselors are in a unique position in that they are usually the only counselor in their school (Bodenhorn, 2006), and therefore in charge of the implementation of a CSCP. In a survey study of 388 counselors across 40 states, Rayle and Adams (2007) found that when compared to high school counselors, elementary counselors had higher levels of flexibility, more closely followed the ASCA National Model, and were more likely to implement a CSCP. Similarly, Dahir et al.'s (2009) survey of over 1,600 school counselors in Alabama showed that elementary school counselors rated items related to program management and organization (both needed in order to run a CSCP) significantly higher than middle or high school counselors.

Importantly, there were limitations to both of the aforementioned studies. In both cases, samples were pulled from ASCA membership, which may in and of itself indicate more motivated, ASCA-aligned counselors. Further, in the case of Dahir et al. (2009), the

sample was pulled from only one state (Alabama), making it less generalizable to a different sample of counselors, and the *program management* subscale of the instrument used had only three items, as opposed to other subscales of the same instrument that had as many as 18 items.

Additional findings on elementary school counselors found that they are more likely to conduct classroom guidance lessons than counselors in other levels, based on a survey of school counseling graduates from a university in the Southeast United States (Studer et al., 2011). Elementary school counselors are also more likely to focus on students' personal growth and self-awareness skills over academic development (Dahir, 2004).

Though these studies lend important insight into the difference that school level may play, they should not be taken as the complete truth. As mentioned, Studer and colleagues' study recruited from only one state in the Southeast United States, and only had a sample size of 48. The Dahir study, though national in scope, and published after the turn of the millennium was based on data from 1995 that were used as the basis for creating the first national standards, rather than in response to them.

Generally, extant literature suggests that elementary school counselors have a higher likelihood of being able to provide more comprehensive (i.e., less academically-funneled) services in their schools, which would serve to facilitate implementation of a CSCP, but the exact reasons for why this is the case remains unclear. The aforementioned studies, though important, have limitations that require additional investigation of the specifics of why elementary school counselors may be more likely to implement a CSCP, and clarity on how they are able to do so.

School setting as an impediment. Socioeconomic status of school location also plays a role in the availability of counseling services. Dimmitt and Wilkerson's (2012) review of statewide data in Rhode Island schools found that high-poverty schools were less likely to have a CSCP. Notably, their study did not include elementary schools, so it is unknown if this trend would be found in lower grades as well.

Studies on school climate at the elementary level indicate a variety of variables that contribute to student success, but I was unable to find any that looked at school culture differences across levels or the ways that school climate influences school counselor roles. This gap indicates an additional need to investigate the role of organizational culture and leadership in shaping behavior (Schein, 2004), and how they relate to counselors' ability to implement a CSCP.

Ratios. The ASCA National Model (2012) recommends a ratio of 250 students for every school counselor, a figure that has been supported by empirical research (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley & Pierce, 2012). However, many studies (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Rayle & Adams, 2007; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012) analyzed use of time for counselors with caseloads higher than this number, as high as 760:1 (Zalaquett & Chatters). The national average student to counselor ratio currently is 491:1 (USDOE-NCES, 2014).

Ratios as a facilitator. Smaller student to counselor ratios have also been associated with lower suspension rates (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012), higher college matriculation rates (Pham & Keenan, 2011), higher graduation and attendance rates, and is argued to be especially important in high poverty schools (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012).

Though these findings are in line with what many school counselors already believed (Chen & Hayes, 2008), there are important caveats to them. In the case of Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman (2012), the study was conducted only with high schools, and only in Connecticut, where schools were also implementing PBIS systems. The presence of PBIS systems makes it difficult to know what role school counseling services played in reduction of discipline, given that PBIS systems are designed to do exactly that. Importantly, this study also used self-report data from both school counselors and principals, which yielded significant differences in the extent to which school counseling services were said to be implemented. This indicates that school counselors may have been incentivized to exaggerate the amount of comprehensive services they were providing, or that administrators did not fully understand the number of services that their counselors were providing.

Pham and Keenan (2011) also had limitations. The study utilized national data from two different years in a single analysis. Specifically, the researchers used college-matriculation rates from 2010 in comparison with school counselor ratios from 2009, but treated them as if they were the same year. Pham and Keenan's study also utilized a national sample of students, 89% of whom had over a 3.0 high school GPA and 39% of whom had a 4.0 or above. This may have had a larger impact on college matriculation rates than school counselor ratio alone.

Outside of the school counseling literature, ratios have also shown to hold importance. Teacher to student ratio are significant predictors of students' perception of school climate (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). This further demonstrates a need for additional investigation of school organizational culture

and the role that ratios play in creating and maintaining the organizational culture of a school, which may affect CSCP implementation.

Ratios as an impediment. Hatch & Chen-Hayes (2008) found that student-counselor ratio was rated as the second most important factor affecting school counselors' ability to implement comprehensive programming in a national survey of 3,000 school counselors. It should be noted that the survey looked at beliefs of school counselors rather than actual behaviors performed. In light of this, the lack of CSCP in schools with a high student-counselor ratio may be the result of school counselors *believing* it's not possible as opposed to actually attempting a CSCP and failing. Another study of student-counselor ratio (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012) indicated that when ratios were higher than ASCA's recommended 250:1 student outcomes were worse. Notably, this study was conducted in high poverty high schools, making its generalizability suspect, especially in light of the findings of Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2012), which found that SES played a role in schools' ability to implement CSCP. It is likely the case that high poverty schools also have higher student-counselor ratios.

Non-Counseling Staff Perceptions.

Administrators. School administrators play a role in the recruitment and hiring of school counselors (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). They are often school counselors' direct supervisor, and dictate counselor roles (Clemens et al., 2009; DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). Also, in being school leaders, they contribute to the organizational culture of schools (Schein, 2004).

Administrators as a facilitator. Administrators play an important role in school counselors' ability to perform appropriate counseling-related tasks. Research (e.g.,

Beesley & Frey, 2006; Leuwerke et al., 2009) has found that administrator expectations align well with the ASCA National Model and that administrators believed inappropriate duties hindered optimal counselor performance (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012), which would allow school counselors to be more likely to implement CSCP. Further, multiple studies of school administrators indicate satisfaction with counselors' performance, and impact on schools (e.g., Beesley & Frey, 2006; Zalaquett, 2005; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012), which would support counselors providing a CSCP.

School counselors' relationship with administrators also hold importance for the ability to implement comprehensive services. Clemens and colleagues (2009) found that stronger relationships may lead to school counseling programs more closely aligned with the ASCA National Model (2012). Notably, Clemens et al. also found that counselors' use of advocacy significantly affected program alignment with the national model, providing support for the idea that individual counselor characteristics play a role in program implementation.

Relationships with administrators have also been found to correlate with school climate. Rock, Remley, and Range (2017) found that higher levels principal-counselor collaboration had a significant impact on collegial leadership (the relationship between administrators and teachers), professional teacher behavior (relationships between teachers), achievement press (adult pressure for student achievement), and institutional vulnerability (relationships between schools and communities). These findings provide support for the idea that school counselors' work can affect entire systems. Notably, this study was only done with high school counselors, and counselors who were also ASCA members, making its transferability to other levels more difficult.

Relationships with administrators also appear to be malleable. Duslak and Geier (2017) found that the frequency of meetings accounted for over 25% of the variance in relationship quality between counselors and administrators. This trend held even when meetings were informal, indicating that face-time with administrators, even informally, holds important implications for relationships. Though these findings are important in conceptualizing how relationships may be leveraged to provide more comprehensive school counseling programs, Duslak and Geier only studied counselors' perceptions of relationship quality. Other studies (e.g., Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman., 2012) have found significant differences in self-report data between counselors and principals, making the lack of principal data a limitation of this study. Further, Duslak and Geier did not explore how certain counselors (i.e., what personal characteristics) were able to secure more frequent interactions with administrators.

Lastly, administrative support has been rated as more important than the use of data in implementing a CSCP (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). As mentioned previously, though, Hatch and Chen-Hayes' findings were based on the *beliefs* of counselors rather than behavior. Literature, therefore, suggests that administrators play an important role in school counselors being able to implement comprehensive services, but there is also evidence that individual differences in counselors play a role.

Administrators as an impediment. In line with the notion that there are differences in disposition between individual school counselors, administrators cannot all be lumped into the same category. In some cases, school administrators lack an understanding of appropriate counselor duties (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006), have limited awareness of

school counseling programs (Lieberman, 2004), and assign non-counseling duties to school counselors (Studer, Oberman, & Womack, 2006).

Expectations for counselor duties may also differ between administrators and counselors. Amatea and Clark (2005) found that principals' perceptions of the school counselor role differed by level, with elementary school principals favoring collaborative consultation over middle and high school counselors, who valued the responsive services at higher rates. Though this is a case of expectations differing between school counselors and administrators, it is important to note that for elementary school counselors it is not necessarily an impediment. The most important role noted by elementary administrators (collaboration) would likely lead to more comprehensive services being put in place, so it was only for middle and high school counselors, where administrators valued responsive services which may impede implementation of a CSCP.

Bardhoshi and Duncan (2009) found that *crisis response* was reported by administrators as the most important duty for school counselors in a survey of 538 K-12 rural administrators in the Midwest. Given that the ASCA National Model (2012) recommends a preventative approach to school counseling services, this would indicate a difference between school counselors' expectations of their role versus what administrators valued. One of the limitations of this study is that the sample was made up primarily of elementary school administrators, though, given the focus of the current study may not be as limiting. Another limitation of this study is that it only surveyed rural administrators in the Midwest, making it difficult to generalize to other regions and settings.

Teachers. Teachers do not have a supervisory role in relation to counselors, but are still considered a vital piece of the counseling team (Jackson et al., 2002) and are in a unique position to refer students for counseling services because of their frequent contact with students and parents (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Sherwood, 2010). Literature also suggests that school counselors' ability to intentionally create and foster relationships with teachers affects perceptions of the school counselor role, and teachers' willingness to consult (Cholewa, Goodman-Scott, Thomas, & Cook, 2016).

Teachers as facilitators. Studies of elementary school teachers' perceptions of school counselors have garnered largely positive results. Clark and Amatea's (2004) qualitative study using interview data from 23 teachers across elementary, middle, and high schools found that counselors' communication and collaboration skills were most highly valued by teachers, and that counselors were seen as integral in assisting with individual student and systemic concerns of the school. Studies of elementary school teachers specifically found that their conceptualization of the school counselor role was accurate (Ginter, Scalise, & Presse, 1990), aligned well with the ASCA National Model (Sherwood, 2010), and that teachers believed elementary counselors' time should be spent boosting personal/social skills over academic skills (Perkins, 2012).

Importantly, Ginter et al. (1990) conducted their study prior to the existence of the ASCA National Model and even before National Standards existed, making their study less applicable to the current conceptualization of the school counselor role. Moreover, Sherwood's (2010) survey of teachers had a sample size of only 31. Further, Sherwood's final analysis used multiple questions that had missing data, so the conclusions drawn from this study should be taken cautiously. Lastly, Sherwood (2010) aggregated

responses from elementary school teachers and counselors, making the thoughts of teachers alone impossible to parse out. In general, these studies, though limited, suggest that teachers' understanding of what counselors 'should' be doing is accurate and ASCA aligned, especially at the elementary school level.

Teachers as an impediment. Perceptions of the counselor role differed for high school teachers. For example, Reiner et al.'s (2009) national study of high school teachers saw both appropriate and inappropriate duties (e.g., registering and scheduling all new students, computing GPA, maintaining student records, working one-on-one with a student in a therapeutic setting, and administering aptitude and achievement assessments) as important parts of the school counselor's role, and most highly valued counselor assisting students with academic planning. Granted, this study only surveyed high school teachers, which makes it unable to generalize to other levels.

Similarly, Powers and Boes (2013) found that 70% of teachers studied believed that designing a master schedule, and creating student schedules were *extremely important* parts of the school counselor role. For reference, The ASCA National Model considers "creating student schedules" an "inappropriate activity" for school counselors (p. 45). Power and Boes conducted their study with teachers from only one Georgia high school, meaning that the organizational culture of that particular school likely played a role in how teachers responded and are not necessarily applicable to all teachers.

Generally, differences between elementary and high school teachers' perceptions of the counselor role may be due in part to the organizational culture and leadership of respective school levels. As these studies have suggested, often school level played a part in how ASCA-aligned teachers' perceptions of the counseling role were. No research has

been conducted on how school culture affects CSCP implementation. This study explored the role of organizational factors in promoting or hindering the implementation of comprehensive school counseling services.

Summary & Future Needs

As this review has shown, the role of a school counselor varies greatly. Despite the existence of national standards and models for exemplary programs, many school counselors still fall short of implementing a CSCP, which correlate with better student outcomes (Carey, Harrington, Ian & Hoffman, 2012; Carey, Harrington, Ian & Stevenson, 2012; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Wilkerson et al., 2013). Concurrently, previous studies of the benefits of CSCP generally have limitations that highlight the need for additional research and exploration, specifically as they relate to the considerations that individual counselors make in regards to how they navigate organizational characteristics during the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Relatively few schools have been able to obtain RAMP distinction (ASCA, 2018a), which represents the highest level of accountability and commitment that schools can demonstrate at the current time. RAMP distinction has existed for over ten years (Wilkerson et al., 2013), yet only six studies have explored RAMP schools, only two of which focused on the experience of the counselors. All RAMP-related studies have limitations from small sample sizes (Dodson, 2009) to non-comparative design (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Extant research also indicates that a variety of individual counselor characteristics (e.g., dispositions, skills, knowledge), and organizational elements (e.g.,

school location and level, ratios, non-counseling staff perceptions) influence school counselor role and ability to implement a Comprehensive School Counseling Program.

In this study I explore how individual counselors interact with the ecology of their schools (i.e., school building, district, state) to implement RAMP programs, and the effects that obtaining RAMP distinction has. To date, no studies have explored the actual RAMP process (i.e., motivation(s) for applying for RAMP, the specifics of completing the application, the perceived effects of RAMP distinction on the counselor, their school, and/or their community). This study gives voice to the stories of school counselors who were able to navigate all of these organizational factors to ultimately obtain RAMP distinction for their schools, as well as what they perceived to be importance considerations along the way, and the consequences of earning the distinction.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I present the design of my narrative inquiry into elementary school counselors' perceptions of important considerations throughout the RAMP process. My research question, researcher worldview, and a rationale for using a narrative inquiry are discussed. An outline of my procedures including my screening criteria, participants, interview protocol, data analysis and trustworthiness will also be discussed.

Research Question

The purpose of this narrative study is to describe the experiences of elementary school counselors who successfully completed the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) process. Specifically, this study explored counselors' experiences throughout and after the RAMP application, beginning with the motivation(s) to begin the application, and ending with the perceived consequences of RAMP distinction. The research question was as follows:

What do elementary school counselors see as the most important considerations throughout the process of successfully obtaining RAMP distinction?

The theoretical foundation for this study posits that a combination of individual characteristics (*role theory*) and organizational factors (*organizational culture and leadership*) influences counselors' ability to successfully complete the RAMP Process. The RQ for this study was broad, and flexible and therefore allowed counselors to talk about how they experienced the process, as well as the various important considerations (e.g., resources and personnel) that helped or hindered the process. Though each participant's story was unique, the collection of all seven stories illuminated underlying

commonalities in relation to personal characteristics of counselors undergoing the RAMP process and within the schools or districts in which the process took place.

Researcher Lens

As a qualitative researcher I recognize that I cannot separate who I am from the research that I conducted. My theoretical orientation guided my research design influenced how I analyzed and interpreted data throughout my study. I favor an interpretive, constructivist and symbolic interactionist worldview, which makes a narrative inquiry an especially appropriate methodology for conducting my investigation. An explanation of each of these provides additional insight into my research design.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism rejects the positivist idea of a single reality that can be observed empirically (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast, interpretivists are interested in understanding individual experiences in the world, and how experiences are influenced by context. Ultimately, interpretivism aims to understand how people find *meaning* in life experiences (Merriam, 2002).

Constructivism & Symbolic Interactionism

In addition to valuing the experiences of individuals I believe in a constructionist viewpoint of multiple, subjective realities (Ponterotto, 2005). I believe that realities are shaped by social interactions and in a constant state of flux based on context (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). Symbolic interactionism recognizes the importance of context, specifically in how it influences interactions between individuals (Charmaz, 2014), and posits that self-concept and self-image adapt and change based on previous interactions, which color perceptions of new situations (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan).

I recognize that my own life experiences and interactions have changed my self-concept and self-image, and that my investigation of school counselors entailed a reciprocal relational interaction that both drew upon and changed our respective (mine and my participants') selves (Clandinin, 2013). My analysis of narratives was influenced, in part, by own assumptions and biases (to be discussed further) (Clandinin, 2006). Further, my creation of narratives from interview data was co-constructed with participants, and represents one of many possible interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Research Design

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that aims to find and describe meaning in the stories that people tell about themselves and their experiences (Riessman, 2008). In essence, it is the “study of experience as it is lived” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 70). Though the rise qualitative methodologies can be traced back to the 1970s (Polkinghorne, 2007), the use of story-telling as a means of creating meaning dates back much further, and continues to be part of the day-to-day human experience (Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne; Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry as a methodology has its roots in phenomenology (Riessman & Quinney, 2005), but gained popularity in its own right throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative inquiry can stand alone or be used as part of other qualitative investigation (Creswell, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). Narratives have no tightly adhered to structural framework (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2007) nor strict guidelines on procedures, or even what constitutes *data* (Creswell, 2013; Riessman,

2008). They rely heavily on personal interviews as a source of data (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008), but lack strict guidelines regarding how structured interviews should be (Riessman), how many interviews should be conducted (Riessman & Quinney, 2005), or how data should be analyzed (Bloom, 2002).

The most fundamental difference between narratives and other qualitative methodologies lies in how stories are treated. Qualitative researchers have been likened to *bricoleurs* and quilt-makers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) piecing together different pieces of data to create a whole based on common thematic elements found across cases. Though some narrative studies utilize thematic coding or categorization of common leitmotifs (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2013), they are unique in that participants' stories are kept intact (Riessman, 2008). In the current study, intact stories can be found in Appendices H-N (pp. 225-354), wherein readers will notice that all of the stories shared common structural elements (e.g., motivations for RAMP, beginning and navigating the RAMP application, consequences of obtaining RAMP distinction, etc.). These structural commonalities serve to act as a 'template' of the RAMP experience. The creation of narratives also served to provide a basis for me to begin thematic analysis. The re-ordering and re-structuring of interview data to create a cohesive whole (Cain, 1991; George & O'Neill, 2011) required active participation of myself as the researcher, and assisted me in recognizing commonalities between stories before steps were made to intentionally code and analyze interview data.

The theoretical underpinnings of narrative inquiry as a methodology vary widely encompassing critical race theory, feminist theory, phenomenology, poststructuralism and postmodernism, among others (Kim, 2016). Similar to their structure and use of data,

there is little agreement on the theoretical background of narrative inquiry. Theoretically, narrative inquiry's focus on a postmodernism worldview provided flexibility and a basis for participants to be the authority in their own stories (Kim, 2016). Practically, narrative inquiry's postmodernist approach also aligned well with my worldview as the researcher.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry in the Current Study

Narratives can be used to persuade, entertain, argue, mislead and even call individuals to social action (Riessman, 2008). Counseling as a profession values narratives in that much of counseling involves listening to and respecting individuals' subjective reality. The value of narratives has led to a method of therapy named after them (i.e., Narrative Therapy, White & Epston, 1990). Counseling, therefore, lends itself well to the use of narrative inquiry on a pragmatic level, and narratives have been conducted in various therapeutic settings (Riessman & Speedy, 2012). Surprisingly, despite promoting the use of narrative therapeutic techniques, school counseling literature lacks an abundant number of published narrative studies. A search for the term "narrative" within *Professional School Counseling*, ASCA's flagship journal, yields fewer than 100 results broadly. A review of these studies indicates only two true narrative inquiries (Giles, 2005 & Peterson, and Goodman, Keller & McCauley, 2004) and one phenomenology (Eppler, 2008) that utilized narrative analysis as part of its methodology.

There are approximately 240 RAMP schools currently in the United States (ASCA, 2018a). This number represents roughly one in every 500 schools (USDOE, 2016), and less than one percent of ASCA membership after adjusting for the national school-to-counselor ratio (ASCA, personal communication, August 16, 2017a; USDOE, 2014). Current RAMP literature has demonstrated positive benefits for student

achievement (Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013), and perceptions of school counselors by themselves or others (Dodson, 2009; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011).

So what's missing? Few studies of RAMP schools have been conducted, the majority of which have been quantitative in design. Quantitative research has been criticized for the "faceless" nature of participants (Poplin, 1987), and for researchers being perceived as cold or uncaring (Charney, 1996). In contrast, qualitative research takes into account the unique voices of individuals. It is human nature to connect with and find meaning in stories (Dwyer, Davis, & Emerald, 2017). The low number of RAMP schools may be in response to a field that has failed to tell the stories of individuals who have completed the process. School counselors are, therefore, unable to see themselves within RAMP publications making the process feel more abstract and less obtainable.

My focus in this investigation was to tell the stories of elementary school counselors who have gained RAMP distinction. The stories focus on the process, from beginning to end, of navigating the RAMP process, and the perceived consequences of eventually earning RAMP distinction. The findings of this study will allow other school counselors to make a more informed decision about whether or not to engage with the RAMP process. Further, the common themes found across narratives shine a light on what has been, to this point, an uninvestigated process despite it being held up as the standard of best practice (Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008).

Obtaining Participants

In line with the structural and procedural aspects of narrative, there is little agreement on how many individuals should be sampled for use in a narrative study. Narrative inquiries provide rich and thick descriptions and may therefore not represent data saturation common across other qualitative methods (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Samples in Guetterman's (2015) review of educational narratives ranged in size from one to 24, with two studies not reporting any sample size. Creswell (2013) recommends a narrative sample size of one to two participants unless the investigator is presenting a collective story.

For this investigation I obtained a sample of eight elementary school counselors across seven schools. The result was seven stories of counselors' experiences of the RAMP process beginning with motivations to pursue the distinction and ending with perceived consequences of having done so. Stories were crafted using data from remote interviews with participants. One interview was conducted with two counselors of the same counseling team who went through the process together, from start to finish. Their story is, therefore, presented as a joint story. A sample of seven stories provided an opportunity to obtain rich data across multiple contexts and investigate common themes across experiences.

Sampling Methods

In regards to participant criteria, several educational studies (e.g. Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007, 2010; Goldhaber, 2007) have indicated that the first three years of teachers' careers are marked by drastic improvements with each year taught, after which these improvements plateau. Teachers and counselors must also have at least three years

of practice before applying for National Board Certification, a well-respected professional K-12 certification (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2017). Though no comparable study has been conducted with school counselors, this model was utilized for this study. All participants had at least three years of elementary counseling experience, and had successfully completed the RAMP process during some portion of their career.

Additionally, in order to control for the effects of schools having Re-RAMPed, which would require school counselors to discuss multiple times of completing the RAMP process, an attempt was made to allow only first-time RAMP recipients to be part of the study. In reality, one participant had completed the RAMP-process a second time between when a list of possible participants was obtained, and when data were collected. This information did not come to light until the interview was underway, so these data were still used, and the focus of the interview centered on the individual's first time receiving RAMP, with some mention of the second RAMP process. Lastly, to maintain the applicability of the study, only participants who received RAMP distinction since 2013 were asked to participate. This was to ensure that they received RAMP distinction utilizing the most current edition of the ASCA National Model (2012).

Recruitment

Literature on qualitative research (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2006) highlights the importance of building rapport with participants to ensure that data are accurate and truthful. I therefore leveraged relationships with mutual friends and acquaintances to facilitate rapport building. Specifically, I utilized my network of counselor educators and former school counseling colleagues to gain access to RAMP elementary school

counselors through district-level personnel and personal connections. Three of the eight school counselors interviewed for this study were secured through these connections.

For the rest of the sample, school counselors who met all eligibility requirements were contacted via email using a list of counselors provided by ASCA. The use of email messages to recruit participants is common (Creswell, 2013). The emails sent to possible participants served to introduce myself, the purpose of my study, the criteria for participation, and the time commitment of the study.

Counselors were asked to participate in a remote interview utilizing the method most convenient to them (e.g., Skype, Facetime, phone, Google Hangouts). Participants were informed interviews would last about an hour, but might go a little longer, and that we would check in at the one hour mark to see if they would like to continue. They were also asked to agree to member-checks throughout the analysis process, and asked to provide any RAMP application materials via email to the extent that they felt comfortable sharing with me. Lastly, the email invited participants to ask questions about the study, and provided information of an incentive (drawing for one of two \$50 gift cards) for participation in the study in hopes of increasing the likelihood of participation.

Participants were asked to email me back if they were interested in being part of the study. See Appendix B (p. 206) for an example recruitment email.

Once participants agreed to take part in the study, they were provided with the informed consent document via email (see Appendix D, pp. 208-209), and interviews were scheduled. Three of the participants asked for interview questions prior to the interview. These participants were informed that the majority of the questions would be follow-up questions based on their stories, and were also provided a copy of questions

one (*If you were to imagine the RAMP Process as a story, what would that story be?*), two (*Could you tell me a little bit about some of the key resources that helped or hindered you during the process?*), and four (*What is the likelihood of you Re-RAMPing? Why?*) from the interview protocol.

Overview of Participants

The sample for this study consisted of eight women who successfully obtained RAMP distinction for seven schools in five states. The ages of participants ranged from 27 to 44, with a median age of 36 years old. Six of the participants identified as White, and two identified as African American. All participants worked in Elementary Schools, though the make-up of the specific schools included a k-2 school, a k-4 school, a p-5 school, and four k-5 schools. Five of the seven schools were Title I schools. Four were in urban locations, and three were in suburban locations. None of the schools were located in a rural area. School populations ranged from 400 students to 1,200 students, and caseloads for the counselors in this study ranged from approximately 200 students to approximately 700 students, with the median caseload being 545 students.

Participants ranged from having two to eight full years of experience prior to applying for RAMP distinction, with the median being five years of experience. An overview of participants and their relevant school-related factors can be found in Appendix G on page 213.

Personal Characteristics. The theoretical foundation of this study posits that personal characteristics play a role in school counselors' ability to create and maintain a CSCP. Extant literature (e.g., Bemak & Chung, 2008; McGlothlin & Miller, 2008; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young et al., 2015) also indicates that counselors' personal

characteristics hold important implications for school counselor role. All of the counselors sampled for this study described characteristics of themselves that they perceived as having influenced their RAMP journey. Though there was no template for characteristics, common personal characteristics included a propensity to be driven, perseverant, direct, assertive, and even competitive or perfectionistic. Personal characteristics of counselors and their relation to implementing CSCP will also be discussed in Chapter 5's discussion of how well the proposed framework of *role theory* and *organizational culture and leadership* fits with the results. Exploration of each counselor's characteristics can be found in their full narratives in Appendices H-N (pp. 225-354).

Procedures

Data Collection

Data collection took place during the winter of 2018. After crafting initial interview questions alongside members of my dissertation committee, I conducted a Pilot Study with a school counselor who met all of the criteria to participate in the study. Pilot studies are used as a means of pointing out potential problems with research protocol, and serves to increase the likelihood of success in the main study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). The pilot interview lasted 46 minutes, after which we spent 15 minutes debriefing the experience, and creating a space for feedback and/or changes to the interview protocol to be suggested. Importantly, no changes were made to the protocol following the pilot study, which allowed these data to be used in analysis of the main study, given that the same methodology was followed (Thabane et al., 2010).

For all participants, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews during which I took brief notes in order to capture my thoughts in the moment. At the conclusion of each interview I used my interview notes to capture my reactions to the entire interview experience including my affective responses, and anything that stood out during the interview. Additionally, I explicitly answered the questions suggested by Emerson, Fritz, and Shaw (1995, p. 146), an additional question suggested by Saldaña (2009), and an open-ended “what else?” based upon my interview notes. These questions are:

- What are people [within this story] doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?
- What strikes me?

Together, these answers and my interview notes constituted my fieldnotes and served to help me reflect on each experience, supplement language-based data, and facilitate preliminary coding and data analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Fieldnotes are a common source of data for qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). In addition to interview data and fieldnotes, participants were also asked to send me a copy of any RAMP application documents that they had prior to the start of the interview, which were used to corroborate aspects of narratives.

Interviews.

Demographic questions. After being introduced to the background and purpose of the study, each participant was asked a brief series of demographic questions. These questions served to obtain a more holistic view of each participant as a person, and provided context for some elements of their overall “RAMP story”.

Interview protocol. With the exception of the first interview question, “If you were to imagine the RAMP Process as a story, what would that story be?”, the specific interview questions asked to each participants varied, and were follow-ups to continue probing information based on participants’ answer to the first question. I had a series of additional follow-up questions based on areas of interest (e.g., important resources utilized, what contextual considerations helped/hindered the process), but these questions were only explicitly asked in the case that they were not somehow already addressed within the first question or its follow-ups.

The interview questions for this study were developed through conversations with multiple counselor educators, a qualitative methodologist, and from feedback following the Pilot Study. Questions aimed to gain an understanding of both individual factors and organizational factors, as well as the specifics of the RAMP process. A complete copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix E (pp. 210-211)

Conducting interviews. Interviews were conducted and recorded by me using the remote method most convenient for participants. The majority of the interviews took place over Zoom software, with two interviews taking place via phone, and one via Skype. Interviews were recorded using digital recording devices. For phone interviews I

utilized Green Apple Studio's *Call Recorder* app. For video-calls I used Araelium's *Screenflick* software to record the video and audio of the call.

Narratives differ from other qualitative methodologies in terms of how structured interviews are. Contemporary narrative scholars (e.g., Riessman, 2008) promote a less structured protocol in which investigators give up control of the interview. Giving up control of the interview in this case was facilitated by participants being asked a very open question to begin the interview, from which follow up questions were asked.

Having less structured interviews ensured that conversations followed participants down their chosen path, rather than them being led preconceived paths set by me. Further, narrative interviews are designed to allow participants to tell their stories rather than directly answer research questions (Chase, 2010). To facilitate this, I explicitly told participants at the onset of each interview that they may interpret questions in the way that they saw fit. My interviews, therefore, followed a semi-structured format and protocol (Charmaz, 2014) and changed and adapted across participants through relevant follow-up questions based on how participants answered the first open-ended question.

Though there are no strict guideline for how long interviews should be, Glesne (2006) suggests that a one-hour interview allows for sufficient exploration of a topic without tiring out the researcher or the participant. For this study, I aimed to conduct interviews that were one hour in length, with the possibility of some interviews going slightly over this amount. The actual length of interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 77 minutes.

Archival Data/Artifacts. The use of archival or extant materials is common in narrative research (Cain, 1991; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Counselors' ASCA-

RAMP application materials (where available) were analyzed as part of each narrative., I also asked participants to bring any artifacts that they wish to the interview. These artifacts could have included photos, emails, drawings, or anything else that served to trigger memories, and contribute to participants' telling of their stories (Bach, 2007; Creswell et al., 2007). For this study, I received four completed RAMP applications, and one set of Narratives from a full RAMP application. One participant also sent a picture of her advisory council working in collaboration, while another sent a copy of a presentation that she had done at a state-level conference regarding her RAMP experience.

Data Analysis

Reflexivity Statement. Researcher reflexivity is a staple of qualitative research and aligns theoretically with interpretivism and constructivism. Reflexivity, therefore, has a role in narrative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). I cannot separate who I am or my experiences from the study. Rather than rejecting the role of my own identity, recognizing it can provide my research with a source of insight and knowledge (Maxwell, 2012). Here I explore the ways in which my own perspectives and biases were recognized and controlled for throughout my study.

I entered this study with five years of work in public schools as both a teacher (two years) and a school counselor (three years). Despite my respect for the school counseling profession and belief in its larger mission, I worked with subpar, ineffective counselors, and witnessed school counselors fail to advocate for their profession. Additionally, as a counselor, I was sometimes asked to participate in inappropriate duties such as disciplining students, supervising lunch periods, and even breaking-up fights. School staff saw me as an administrator in some respects, but seldom and educator or

mental health professional. At times my schedule was filled with more administrative and non-counseling duties than actually meeting with students. Further, there were times that I actually found comfort in scheduling or clerical work, because it was more manageable and less daunting than considering how to implement systemic change. As a result, I sometimes failed to perform duties that would allow me to implement a fully comprehensive school counseling program or obtain RAMP distinction.

Altogether, my counseling experience showed me the reality of the barriers in place that hinder what counselors can do as well as the importance of counselors taking responsibility to advocate to change their roles. The result is a skepticism about the difference that school counselors can really make, and a possible over-admiration of counselors who obtained RAMP-distinction given how daunting the process seemed to me at the time. Concurrently, I entered this study with a skepticism about the legitimacy of RAMP distinction's claim of truly changing students given that only one study has investigated student outcomes (Wilkerson et al., 2013).

Alongside my bias regarding school counselors' willingness to sufficiently advocate for their programs, I recognize that I hold a slight bias against teachers. My work in schools showed me that teachers often complain. My experience teaching in a high needs school showed me how busy teaching can be, but I seldom complained despite the workload. This led me to believe that teachers find some comfort in their complaining. Further, I conducted a small qualitative study as part of my *Qualitative Research Methods* class in which I interviewed teachers about their perceptions of school counselors. The results of this study indicated that teachers saw their time as more valuable than counselor time, and did not value counselors as an equal member of the

team. Though I did not interview teachers for this study, they did come up in many of the conversations surrounding RAMP distinction. I was aware of my own assumptions and did not mention any of my own personal thoughts regarding teachers throughout my interviews.

In some qualitative methodologies (e.g., grounded theory; Charmaz, 2014) researchers make a concerted attempt to conduct data collection and analysis without preconceived notions about the topic. Narrative inquiry is not focused *creating* theory. Researchers may, therefore, explicitly interpret data within the light of themes influenced by extant research and theory on the topic (Riessman, 2008) in order to better understand or organize their data (Maxwell, 2012). I entered this study with recognition that I have preconceived notions about what influences the ability to gain RAMP distinction, which are highlighted in my literature review. These topics, therefore, influenced the questions I asked and some of the content of interviews, as a result. I made an effort to ensure that I was considering multiple interpretations of data, specifically through multiple conversations with others both on and outside of my dissertation committee (which will be discussed later).

Lastly, aside from my experiences, who I am physically may have had an effect on how stories were told to me. Because stories are co-constructed (Dwyer et al., 2017) my role as a partner in creation may have been influenced by the fact that I am a young, white male. Being a white male brings with it a number of societal privileges and worldviews that may cause me to miss or misinterpret aspects of counselors' stories. The vast majority of school counselors are female, and over the age of 30 (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011), my participants may, therefore, not feel as comfortable talking with me as

they would someone who they perceive is more similar to them. I used peer debriefing and member-checks as a means of ensuring that my analysis was open to multiple interpretations, but notably did not hear back from either of my African American participants during the member-check process. Given that the rest of my sample identified as white, and did respond to my member-check request, it puts into question the extent to which I was able to accurately capture the experience of my African American participants, and the possible effect that my identity as a researcher may have had throughout the phases of narrative construction and analysis.

Interview Transcripts. Recordings of each interview for this study were transcribed through Rev.com. Transcription is the process of converting spoken narratives into text (Riessman, 2008). Narratives are analyzed for their content (the ‘what’ of the story) (Bloom, 2002; Riessman, 2008) with a recognition that all ‘truths’ are partial and tentative (Clandinin, 2006; Patsiopoulou & Buchanan, 2011). Further, narratives do not speak for themselves—they require analysis and interpretation (Riessman, 2008). In analyzing interview transcripts and constructing narratives, I utilized Williams’ (1984) method which required that I read through transcripts multiple times. The first time that I read through each transcript, it was to ensure a holistic understanding of the experience, and to note the context in which the story and its effects took place (Riessman, 2008).

Writing narratives. Creating stories from transcripts sometimes requires a re-arranging and of interview data that provides a cohesive structure to the story (Cain, 1991; George & O’Neill, 2011). Additional readings of participants’ transcripts consisted of separating interview data out into common headings that were found across multiple

stories. I then provided context and information to help these data make sense, and read as a story. The resulting story for each participants, therefore, had common elements, though each a unique re-telling of the RAMP experience. Participants' full stories can be found in Appendices H-N (pp. 225-354)

Thematic Analysis. After gaining a holistic understanding of each participant's story and crafting full narratives, transcripts were re-read with a thematic lens, during which I looked for the underlying assumptions and commonalities across stories and coded them. I utilized Saldaña's (2009) guidelines for coding which includes First Cycle, Second Cycle (and possibly Third, Fourth, etc. Cycle) coding.

First Cycle coding consisted of preliminary analysis that included exact words or terms used by informants of a study, or large chunks and/or images as initial units of meaning. Second Cycle (and beyond) coding included to the creation and refinement of categories or groupings of meaningful data from earlier coding cycles as well as the recoding, and reclassification of data. Data for this study were coded using NVivo 11 software. Final analysis included 20 coding categories (known as 'Nodes'), with some codes being nested in as many as three 'Levels' of hierarchy.

Codes and categories were eventually grouped into Themes with the assistance NVivo's 'Queries' feature, and through conversations with advisors and peers. NVivo's 'Queries' feature allowed me to see data that were coded across multiple nodes and helped develop some of the larger ideas being brought forth in the data. For example, one of themes has a subcategory regarding perceptions of the 12-step RAMP application (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(b) Fight through the rigidity of the application*). In looking through data, I noticed that many of these, in addition to being coded as 'Application

Process’ were also coded as ‘hindrance’, which helped me see that for many of the counselors in this study, the rigidity of the application process, and the requirement to fit everything into ASCA-specific templates was a hindrance to obtaining RAMP distinction.

Thematic analysis of interview data required a deeper understanding of interview data than what is on the surface. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that a common pitfall of qualitative research includes researchers simply providing common elements across cases, but not providing deeper analysis. The data for this study yielded two major themes each with additional subcategories. Themes and subcategories arose through both the ‘Queries’ feature as well as through review of fieldnotes and memos, and conversations with other researchers and colleagues. The specifics of these findings will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Memos. Memos are an important source of data and often assist the data analysis process by providing a bridge between raw data and thematic codes (Hesse-Biber, 2011). For this study, I kept a log of memos that represented my thinking about data throughout the process. In essence, whenever an idea struck me in relation to my data, I took a note of it in a moleskine notebook that was dedicated for this purpose. Memos served to help me organize the relationships between my data (Maxwell, 2012), and acted as an audit-trail for the decisions that I made throughout the process. Memos were an important step of pre-coding and preliminary jotting, during which I put important thoughts or ideas down during and just after data collection (Saldaña, 2009). A photo of my memo journal along with a typed example can be found in Appendix F (p. 212).

Archival Data/Artifacts. In addition to conducting individual interviews, I received multiple RAMP applications and related materials. The bulk of these data were ASCA-specific documents that served to verify the difficult and arduous nature of the RAMP application as reported by participants. The photo provided by one participant, which shows an Advisory Council working together, was used as further evidence for one of the subcategories that emerged under one of the themes of the data (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(e)Share the load*, discussed in detail in Chapter 4). In general, RAMP applications, the photograph, and the PowerPoint presentation were an important means of triangulating findings across multiple sources of data.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Narrative analysis is seen through a lens of partial truths (Clifford, 1986) interpreted differently by different audiences (Bell, 1999). The aim of qualitative research generally, and narrative research specifically was not to generalize to a larger population, but to demonstrate credibility of findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To that end there were a number of steps that I took throughout this study to ensure that my findings were strong, and represented the voice of my participants rather than my own voice (Riessman, 2008).

Rich Data

Utilized, in this study, were a sample of seven narratives utilizing eight participants, which is larger than many educational narrative studies (Creswell, 2013; Guetterman, 2015). Each participant took part in an intensive interview that yielded a transcript for analysis. Further, some participants also provided archival data and artifacts, all of which led to rich, thick data. The variability of my participants, and the

inclusion of non-conforming cases (i.e., utilizing school counselors that were members of a counseling team at the elementary school level, and utilizing a participant who had received RAMP at two schools) provided a multitude of perspectives that challenge my preconceived notions and prejudices (Maxwell, 2012).

Triangulation

Triangulation involves using multiple sources of information to verify the findings of a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In the case of this study I utilized interview transcripts, fieldnotes, RAMP application materials, and participant-chosen artifacts as sources of data. The analysis of these multiple data sources yielded agreement of themes and assumptions across stories.

Member Checks

In addition to my own analysis of data and creation of narratives, participants were sent copies of their transcripts and the narratives derived from them, and were asked to offer their perspectives. Narratives are co-constructions, therefore neither my own analysis nor the participants' responses constituted the final say on interpretation (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Member checks were an important way of helping me recognize biases or assumptions that I brought into my analysis of the stories (Maxwell, 2012), and ensured that I accurately portrayed the participant voices and stories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In total, six of the eight participants in this study responded to the member check. In all cases, they indicated that my interpretation of their stories were accurate. Three participants asked for no changes to be made, while the other three asked for minor changes to the story to be made to enhance readability and to correct contextual misstatements made in the initial draft.

Peer Debriefing

Peer reviews are typically done by individuals who are familiar with the focus of the research study who can provide support, challenge, or alternative points of view for an investigator's analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Throughout my thematic analysis of the data for this study I met with members of my committee, including a counselor educator, and a qualitative methodologist. Further, I met with two former school counselors. All four of these individuals acted as peer debriefers with me throughout the study.

I met with my dissertation advisor and methodologist both during preliminary coding and before final analysis as a means of being given a different perspective on participants' stories. I met with both former counselors before final analysis, as larger themes were being populated. Both former counselors were individually given unlabeled blocks of thematically similar quotes and asked to give their impressions of what overarching idea(s) connected the quotes. I compared their comments to my own analysis of the same quotes, which, in all cases were very similar, and indicated that the chosen themes were apparent in the data, even in the absence of additional contextual information. After both peer debriefers provided commentary on quotes, I shared my thoughts and labels for the blocks of quotes. Both individually agreed that my interpretations rang true to the data.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the ways in which interpretivist and constructionist viewpoints underscored my narrative inquiry. I have provided a rationale for the study as well as the methods used for selecting my participants. My data

collection, procedures, and analysis fall within narrative methodology which allowed me to co-construct meaning from participants' stories. I have outlined how I maintained rigor and credibility throughout this investigation through the use of multiple data sources, researcher reflexivity, member checks, and peer debriefing. This investigation aimed to provide insight into a relatively unknown area within the school counseling profession. The next two chapters will discuss the findings and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The intention of this study was to provide insight into the RAMP process as perceived by elementary school counselors who successfully gained RAMP distinction. Specifically, I aimed to provide a space for school counselors to discuss their experiences with the RAMP process beginning with before they started the application through to what they perceived as the consequences of gaining RAMP distinction. The interview protocol highlighted the importance of both individual characteristics of participants, and how those interacted with organizational/environmental factors to allow exemplary programs to be put in place.

I utilized semi-structured interviews to address a broad research question so as not to restrict the scope of participants' stories. In addition to interviews, I utilized archival data including RAMP applications, a PowerPoint presentation, and a photograph provided by participants to craft each narrative. In order to maintain anonymity, each participant and any other referenced individuals were given a pseudonym. A complete copy of each 'RAMP story' can be found in Appendices H-N (pp. 225-354). Readers will notice common elements of each story's structure. This is due, partly, to my role as the researcher both in the questions I asked, and in the re-arranging and grouping of interview data to create a cohesive story. Questions were broad, however, so the common structural elements of stories also speak to a shared 'RAMP experience'.

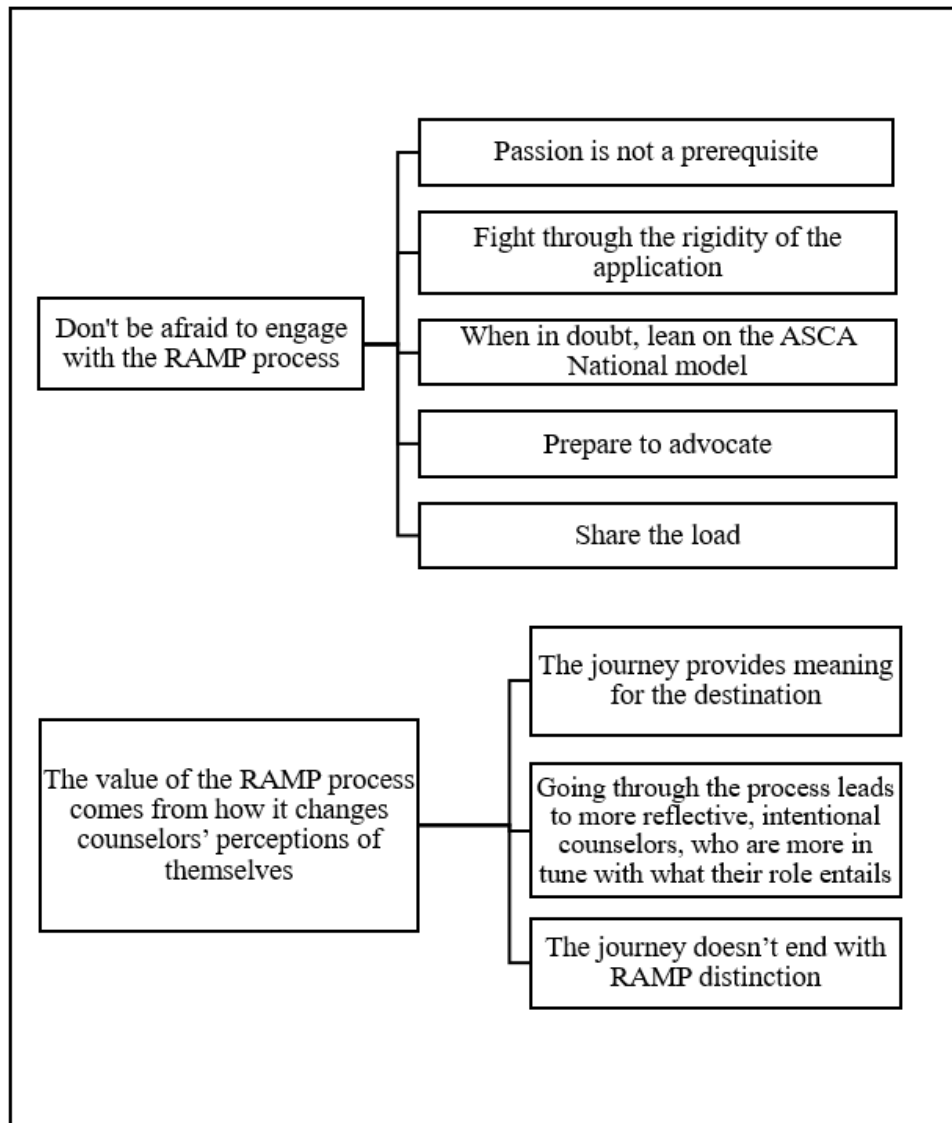
Rather than providing an overview of all seven stories, this chapter focuses on the results of the thematic analysis of the narratives. I yielded two major themes, both of which addressed the research question: *What do elementary school counselors see as important considerations throughout the process of successfully obtaining RAMP*

distinction? The first theme, *Don't Be Afraid to Engage in the RAMP Process* focuses mostly on important considerations of completing the RAMP application, whereas the second theme, *The value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors' perceptions of themselves* focuses primarily on the important considerations regarding the consequences of receiving the distinction.

Each theme also has subcategories that provide additional context and examples of the main theme. The themes are worded in a way that they speak to the ideal audience of this paper—school counselors-- and may also be viewed as recommendations for action. Importantly, the language of the themes is not meant to be read as a prescriptive recommendation from me, but rather, a distillation of the recommendations provided by participants. Additional implications for school counselors and other audiences will be presented in Chapter 5.

What follows is an explanatory overview of each theme and its related subcategories. The exact nature of subcategories nested under each main theme vary. Some address important contextual factors while others surround practical considerations. All are meant to help the reader more comprehensively understand the theme. Themes and subcategories will be explored and brought to life through the use excerpts from participants, none of which have been modified for grammatical correctness in order to maintain participants' voices. Table 1 provides a visual representation of each theme and its subcategories. An overview the themes, subcategories, and additional illustrative quotes can be found in Table 2 (pp. 214-224).

Table 1

Theme Map**Don't Be Afraid To Engage In the RAMP Process**

The first theme that I derived from the data focuses on the importance of school counselors choosing to undergo the RAMP process even in the face of uncertainty. The theme is: *Don't Be Afraid to Engage in the RAMP Process*. It has five subcategories that provide additional context and clarity to address common concerns or hindrances experienced by school counselors. These subcategories are: (a) Passion is not a pre-

requisite, (b) Fight through the rigidity of the application (c) When in doubt, lean on the ASCA National model, (d) Prepare to advocate, and (e) Share the load. The suggestion of not being afraid to engage with the RAMP process encourages school counselors to take a leap of faith, even if they do not know what they are getting into.

The RAMP application is arduous, and long. This may act as a deterrent, especially if counselors do not know what they are getting into. Though ASCA provides a general overview of the process (ASCA, 2018c), the specifics of the process remain unclear until it is undergone. The theme of *Don't Be Afraid to Engage in the RAMP Process* echoes the suggestions of participants in this study who successfully completed the application. For many of them, they too were unfamiliar with the RAMP application both before and during the process of completing it. They pushed through, however, and were able to complete it, even when the choice to do so was not self-motivated.

Passion Is Not a Pre-Requisite

The choice to undergo RAMP distinction may be viewed as a personal professional goal. One born from an individual's desire to engage in best practice at the highest possible level. And, in fact, there were some participants in this study whose choice to pursue RAMP was mostly personal. Maria, for example, despite only having “maybe six hours of ASCA model training ...in grad school” chose to utilize the ASCA National Model as soon as she began her career, eventually leading to her engaging in the RAMP process. As she recalled it:

My first year as a school counselor...I was tracking all the ASCA standards that I was doing in classrooms and that kind of thing, so I was using the model, or trying to as a new counselor...I was doing that because I was interested in it. I

knew it was best practice. I had the publication...with all the standards.... So I'd look at that and go through my lesson planning and see which standards I was hitting and all that kind of stuff. (Maria)

Alexis, knowing that she may be leaving her school, wanted to make sure that she left something meaningful behind. She also hoped to ensure that the counselor who replaced her had a better starting point than she had when she entered the school.

One of the things I thought about was, 'If I were to leave my school, what would I leave behind?' So that was a big reason, actually, why I RAMPed is I still was kind of on the fence about whether or not I was going to leave my school or not, but I still wanted something that left my mark with my counseling program. (Alexis)

But even when the decision to apply for RAMP is mostly personal, it's important to note the utility in it. For Maria, RAMP acted as a springboard for conversations about student to counselor ratios with the schoolboard, "I thought that if we had the RAMP designation that it would help. Because we had not a great ratio, and so I thought maybe it would help get more school counselors or more funding or something." For Alexis, it ensured that her programming was legitimate, and of high quality.

I guess the reason that I RAMPed is because I wanted to know, for my own personal reasons, how my counseling program stacked up against others nationally, to see, 'Am I on the right track? Is this what counselors that are professionals across the country ... Are they implementing similar things?' (Alexis)

Erica, who was also internally motivated to begin the RAMP process, mentioned how it helped define her role, which was especially important early on in her career.

I figured [RAMP] was going to be a good way for me as a new counselor to structure my program since I wasn't really receiving any guidelines from anywhere else...I figured at least if I structured my program from day one with the goal of applying for RAMP two years later, then at least I knew I would be doing something 'right.' (Erica)

In other cases, however, the choice to apply for RAMP was more of the counselor being “voluntold” to undergo the process by a superior, be it at the county or district level, or the individual school level. For some of the participants in this study, the impetus to apply for RAMP was not passion, and desire—it was a job requirement. Jasmine, for example, discussed how her role was designed such that she would have to go through the process.

I was required by my grant to go through the RAMP process. Not necessarily to gain RAMP distinction, but at least go through the process, because my actual position was heavily data based, so we needed some data-driven programs that were going on at the school. And so, since we were already doing it, our coordinator was like, ‘Everybody needs to apply for RAMP.’ So, that's how we started the RAMP process. (Jasmine)

Similarly, Phoebe’s initial decision to apply for RAMP was less of a decision and more of a job requirement, with her noting, “I was just like well [applying for RAMP] is something I just need to do, it's just another job requirement... I need to stay employed.” In her case, the end goal was to secure her position after grant funding ran out.

We came in on a three-year grant and it was saying we have a need for school counselors. Okay so now we have this need, we have to show what is this need for?... So our, he's now our assistant superintendent but at the time he was over student services, and he said, 'I want you guys to get RAMP.' So we were like, 'Oh, okay, he's gonna become assistant superintendent we really gotta do this and make it great.' And he said, 'You need to present to the school board.' And we were like, 'Present?' We need data to present to the school board and basically fight for our jobs.... It was our job and that's what they said they wanted us to do. (Phoebe)

In other cases, the external motivation for applying for RAMP was not always as clear or direct. In the case of Wendy and Hannah, for example, their main motivation was a new counselor-evaluation tool being introduced in the county. Wendy and Hannah's interview took place together, so their recollection was part of a back-and-forth conversation.

Wendy: we started [the RAMP application] because evaluations for counselors were starting. And in our meetings, we'd get together with the county counselors. Everybody was like, 'How are we going to pull data? What's that going to look like for our evaluations?'... And because we're not mandated, elementary counselors aren't mandated. So honestly, we did RAMP wrong because we didn't have a comprehensive program and then go for RAMP. We went for RAMP and so we created a comprehensive program, because we wanted to speak up for ourselves, we wanted to make sure that they knew what we were doing and why we were doing it.

They also felt like they wanted to prove their value to others in the district.

Hannah: And again, especially because we're elementary, a lot of times people don't think we do a lot down here. They say, and this is such insult to me, when they say, 'Ah well at least you're not at the Middle School or the High School, that's where it's really tough.' And we want to say, 'Live a day in our lives.'

Wendy: 'All you guys do is color, that's all you do.' Oh my goodness, we'd run like crazy people.

Importantly, the idea of passion not being a prerequisite does not mean that an initially external motivation for applying for RAMP will always stay that way. The very act of engaging with the process may also lead to a level of internal motivation that fuels counselors to persevere through it. For example, Phoebe discussed how her initial motivation for applying for RAMP was external, but eventually led to her feeling internally motivated to complete the process once she had a chance to look through her needs assessment data.

... When we surveyed the students...you have your career development questions, your social questions but then the last part was the questions about your counseling. 'Do you feel like my counselor cares about me? Do you feel like this?' And when I started reading the questions to them I was like, 'Wow, I really do want to know what they're thinking. Do they feel valued?' Or there was questions in there about bullying. 'Do I feel safe at school?' And I was like, 'Wow, do they not feel safe?' (Phoebe)

School counselors may not have a strong internal desire to complete the RAMP process, but this did not appear to be a hindrance for these participants beginning and sustaining effort throughout.

Fight Through the Ambiguity and Rigidity of the Application

A common area of hindrance and contention throughout the RAMP process was the completion of the application itself. Participants noted that there was a learning curve associated with completing ASCA-specific documents, especially in regards to gaining credit for aspects of their CSCP based on ASCA's rubrics. The process seemed to be paradoxically ambiguous and rigid. School counselors thought they were not provided a clear understanding of the expectations of what the application would entail. As Hannah put it, "[Information on the RAMP application] is so limited. Even when you look up on ASCA's website, you still just don't find a lot of information." At the same time, they were being scored harshly on the rubric. The level of training with the ASCA National Model, generally, varied among participants' graduate programs, with some counselors (e.g., Debbie) believing they received formal training, and others (e.g., Maria) thinking they received little to no training, which in turn affected familiarity with the documents when completing them for RAMP.

For some counselors, like Alexis, completing ASCA forms was aided by district expectation that counselors utilize the ASCA National Model in their role day-to-day, but there was still uncertainty in filling out the documents. She noted,

It took those first couple of years of submitting those ASCA documents to become comfortable enough, and getting that feedback of, 'Am I filling them out correctly?' Because that was one thing I feel like, even though, yes, I enjoyed [my

graduate] program, I did not feel very prepared in terms of what that looked like.

It was one of those things that I felt like when I first saw them as a new counselor that it was like, 'I had no idea what this stuff means.' (Alexis)

District expectation, though helpful for some, also contributed to the application feeling perfunctory, with a lack of clarity on its value. This was the case for Phoebe.

Even going to the [state-level] meetings [on RAMP] I still wasn't sure exactly what RAMP was. It was just like oh, okay you get the school RAMPed but what does that really mean? They are saying, 'Oh it's valuable. It's valuable. It's valuable.' But at that time, you don't know what the value is. You just know 'I should be doing this. Okay, my school district wants me to do this' but really, what is the true value? ...It's just like are we RAMPing because ASCA says RAMP? What does RAMP mean? What is the benefit of it?... (Phoebe)

Phoebe had the advent of completing the RAMP process at two schools, and noted how it wasn't until she began the process a second time that she truly understood its benefits.

I have to admit doing it for [my first school] was totally different than doing it for [my second school]. [At my first school] I felt like it's information, I get it, I'm understanding it but it was a lot of work. [At my second school], I appreciated it. And so I was like 'yeah, let's look at this, yeah let's talk more about this'. At [my first school] it was still like I'm fumbling through it and I'm trying to get through the process and I'm understanding the needs of it. But by the time I did it for [my second school], I understood it, I know why it was good, I was able to sell it...Because once you finish it you understand the value of it. (Phoebe)

On a practical level, the application process took a significant amount of time, such that some counselors saw it as a hindrance to their current programming, and a possible deterrent from Re-RAMPing in the future. During my investigation, I received 4 full RAMP applications, and one set of narratives that accompanied each portion of the RAMP application. Full RAMP applications ranged from 66-104 pages in length, which serves to reiterate the fact that it was a time-consuming process. Especially when counselors were in charge of that application entirely on their own.

Alexis shared that the amount of time and energy that went into completing the application took away from the quality of the program she was running the year that she applied.

[RAMP] is a lot of time and you don't get any monetary compensation for RAMPing...and it was taking away time from the counseling program I was trying to currently implement, because I spent so much time working on this plan from the year before that I felt a little bit that my program during the year that I was RAMPing suffered a little bit because I didn't have enough time to really do both. I mean I still implemented a program, of course, but was it with the data and fidelity that I had the year before? Probably not, if I'm being honest, because I didn't have the time... it takes a lot of time to turn in your ASCA forms...

(Alexis)

Debbie mentioned that if ASCA distinction lasted fewer than five years she likely wouldn't go through it again, due in part to how long it takes.

...I wouldn't sit there all the years in between and complete every one of those documents because of the sheer amount of time they take. I could see doing it

once every five years but, like I said, it was hundreds of hours outside of school. It was me sitting there almost every night working on RAMP or National Boards, and then I'm thinking that summer my daughter went to two summer camps, and one of them was a sleepover camp, that whole time I did RAMP and National Boards, and the other was just a half day, day camp, that whole time I was doing RAMP and National Boards, so I'm not willing to live my life like that every year. (Debbie)

The flexibility of the counseling role did not appear to be reflected in the RAMP the process, which had a one-size-fits-all feel to it. This was noted by multiple counselors.

Yes, just like any part of any school counselor's profession, it's like, the paperwork, the paperwork, the paperwork. Like, 'My small group action plan doesn't need to look like yours, I don't need to write all these other words on another piece of document.' My small group action plan, I pull it out of the folders and I have all the kids' things. You know what I mean? It's different, it doesn't have to look exactly like that... (Debbie)

ASCA is so specific that in order to get points on the Advisory Council it has to be a standalone just for the school counseling program, but I think that we don't work in silos in that way...my experience in the school has never been that I am a standalone body or that the school counseling department is a standalone entity...By the end [of the application] it felt like I was checking a box for that one particular piece. I understand why [ASCA] recommends it as a standalone

team. I understand why they would want the focus just to be on that, I just don't know how realistic that is in a school setting. (Erica)

Writing the narratives, getting everything done, was the...hardest part of [the RAMP process]. It was just putting that all into words exactly how [ASCA] wanted it and making sure we had data that matched how they ... We had data, but how [ASCA] wanted it. That was the most difficult part. And then submitting everything. (Jasmine)

It was a lot of work trying to do RAMP because you're at two schools and some of the things they're requiring it's like your daily ... every semester you had to turn in your time, like what your day would look like for a week, chart your week. Well, one day I'm here, another day I'm there. You know? So it was odd for us to do and it's like 'well should we count this time at this school? Should we count this time at that school'? So we had to finagle how to get a week's worth in when we're not somewhere a week, you're two days, three days. (Phoebe)

In the same vein, the format of the RAMP application did not necessarily allow the less quantifiable aspects of the school counselor role to shine through. Wendy and Hannah went back and forth in discussion of how aspects of their program weren't scoreable, but still proved that the work that they do as counselors was meaningful for students.

Hannah: That was probably one of the most challenging things for me is that I realized what I do on a day-to-day basis because I'm talking to the students, the teachers, the parents, I'm seeing the growth that the child is making, but I don't necessarily have data to reflect that.

Wendy: RAMP doesn't really reflect our greatest accomplishments. It doesn't.

No. That's because there's no way to put it in words I guess. I don't know.

Hannah: Yeah. You know to have, I think it was the beginning of the year, maybe the end of last year, [Wendy] had a student that she had had from a charter school reach out to her and email her and just tell her what a huge support she'd been and how much she meant to him. And this is you know, 8 years later, that is a win in our book. You can't put something like that in your RAMP application. So I guess that was probably the hardest part is we do so many things but you can't always prove it or show it in your data.

In addition to having difficulty finding time to complete the application, and the rigidity of the application limiting the ability to showcase all aspects of programs, ASCA rubrics were unclear. This was true for initial submission of the application, and for feedback counselors received after their applications were scored. In the latter, the feedback to counselors left more to be desired. Maria, for example, discussed how she tried to use rubrics during the creation of the application to ensure that she was hitting all of ASCA's requirements, but that it was still a subjective judgement.

[The application] was just a huge process. And that was after I had all the data from the year before. Doing all that, putting it all together, and then re-going over it that next fall just to make sure everything was there. It was a big job... And just going over the rubric deciding, 'do I have this?', and 'is this a four or a five?' And I mean, it's just so gray as to where 'it's good or is it exemplary?' And 'where am I going to fall on that?' And 'what's missing?' Argghh, it's stressful. (Maria)

Some of the counselors in this study (e.g., Debbie, Jasmine, Hannah and Wendy) did not receive RAMP distinction on their first run through, and were granted the opportunity of a re-submission. In trying to improve their application for re-submission ASCA provided little guidance.

In Debbie's case, she and another elementary school counselor in the district, Fran, both submitted their applications at the same time for their respective schools, and were both told that they would need to re-submit after making improvements.

Yeah, when we got our stuff back... it said, 'Hey, you're really close, so you're allowed to resubmit some things.' You get to see people's feedback... but I remember [Fran] and I were both talking to the feedback being like, 'What? That doesn't even, that doesn't even ... That's not even like, that doesn't help me in this part.' (Debbie)

Jasmine and her partners lost points due to formatting, even though she had submitted all of the pieces, and the error appeared to have happened on ASCA's end.

Even when we got our results back ... It's a point system. I went through all the points to see, like, 'Okay.' And then I went through all the comments and I found some mistakes on their part, and so I emailed right back. I remembered ... I was like, 'No, we do have this. It's right here.' And I would screenshot things. And they were like, 'Okay. You still have a chance to submit. So, just make sure you're submitting everything.' And I was like, 'I know. But I just wanted you to see that we have these things, though.' (Jasmine)

Wendy and Hannah put their initial "failure" into perspective after receiving feedback from ASCA, recognizing that at least some was due to the subjectivity of the

scoring process, coupled with the difficulty of showing all that their counseling program entailed within the confines of the application.

When someone is a person who is judging you, a lot of it is opinion. So if there is something that they don't like about, that I chose [to run a] grief [group]. Maybe they thought that we should have chosen a different type of group. I had to sit there and tell myself 'it's all on who's reading it'. Because it's an opinion, it's not fact.

And it's very easy to read something but not truly understand it because you're not seeing it. And we've talked about that even within our own district, it's very easy for higher-up people to make assumptions or to say something but until they're in it, living it every day with the students, you don't get a true picture of what's really happening. (Hannah)

In their case too, however, practical aspects of the application process were a hindrance that led to less than helpful feedback.

And honestly too, when we didn't make it that was really hard too. It sucked but if you look through the criticisms that they gave us, they were like, 'This graph was in the wrong place. And all that stuff.' That was something that was completely out of our control because when we submitted it all, it all looked like it was where it should be but then something happened... So that was something that really sucked because we did what we thought we needed to do and it got jumbled up. (Wendy)

For all of the counselors in this study, the actual act of applying for RAMP created some sort of a hindrance. In some cases, it was due to a lack of familiarity with

ASCA documents whereas for others the application's rigid requirements necessitated re-arranging and re-writing documents simply to fit within the correct format. Moreover still, the application did not necessarily allow counselors to showcase the true breadth of their programs. Still, all of the participants in this study were able to fight through that ambiguous rigidity and complete all parts, with some choosing to fight through it a second time after an initial rejection.

For one counselor, Phoebe, it was not until she was undergoing the process a second time that she truly understood the value of obtaining RAMP, which indicates that like passion, counselors need not already have an understanding of ASCA-specific documents and/or all of the expectations of a RAMP-worthy program before engaging with the application process.

When in Doubt, Lean on the ASCA National Model

An important contextual consideration for navigating the RAMP process surrounds the role of administrators within the process. Though some of the participants had district or county support that facilitated their completion of the RAMP application (see: Alexis' story (p. 221); Phoebe's story (p. 259); Debbie's story (p. 293)) others had little district or county level oversight of their role. More commonly school counselors were surrounded by administrators who supported their undergoing of the RAMP process, and were given free rein to craft their programs.

In line with extant literature (e.g., DeVoss & Andrews, 2006; Lieberman, 2004), administrators were not necessarily knowledgeable of the school counselor role. Instead, they trusted counselors' understanding of their own role, and ability to run a CSCP. School counselors, however, at times felt unclear about what their role should be, "For

me, I was fresh out of grad school and there wasn't any formal training in our district for how to be a school counselor or what the expectations were.” (Erica). The existence of supportive but unknowledgeable administration was found in many of the stories. Erica, for example noted, “My principal really wasn't providing a lot of concrete feedback in terms of her expectations.” In Debbie’s case, lack of administrative knowledge about the school counselor role was coupled with frequent administrative turnover, which required her to continually teach about the work that she did.

At the time I [went through the RAMP process] I had a new principal.... So, I was on my third principal the year we started it, so that created a hindrance. We started our advisory committee, I was with a different principal, different leadership, and so when we did our advisory committee it almost probably would have looked to RAMP like we were brand new because our agenda is like, ‘What is school counseling?’ Because at the first meeting that year all three of our principals were new, so they had no idea what we did. (Debbie)

A lack of understanding of the school counselor role meant that many administrators were also unclear the specifics of the RAMP application and what it would entail for the counselor. This is not surprising given the aforementioned difficulty that counselors themselves had with understanding the RAMP application. Alexis discussed how being the first counselor to RAMP at her school required her to teach about the process to her superiors, “I don't think anyone had RAMPed at our school before, so it was up to me to explain what that process looked like.”

Altogether, school counselors in this study often faced a situation in which they were given freedom to conduct their program as they saw fit, with administrators

deferring to them regarding what components were most important for the program. Faced with this uncertainty and freedom, school counselors used the ASCA National Model as a guide to ensure that they were performing appropriate duties. One of the benefits of this was that it was self-perpetuating. Principals were trusting of their counselors, but that trust was reinforced by counselors running good programs that affected students and showed a positive change for the school. By initially performing appropriate duties fewer inappropriate duties were given to counselors, due partly to there being less time to do inappropriate duties.

The interplay between counselors and their administrators was more complicated than simply “support but not knowledge”. Debbie talked about how being busy working with students made it difficult for her to be given other non-counseling related duties.

There was maybe 5% of my day I wasn't working with kids, wasn't somehow interacting with a child, so we were able to continue doing all that. So, administrative change can really change if they come in and try to ... Our second principal actually did try, they tried to put us on lunch duty all the time, and so that would have wrecked us if we were trying to do something like that too but we advocated and were removed off of that right away-- that we're overpaid for lunch duty. (Debbie)

Alexis relayed a similar experience.

With my [counseling] groups, [lunch] was the only time I could pull... I pulled kindergarten through fifth grade groups, I've had a group every single day during their lunchtime, K-5. So from like 10:50 in the morning to 2:15 in the afternoon, I

was with groups all day, and then when I wasn't doing that, I was teaching classes.

It was also very clear any time that one of the administrators came to see me, I was also with students, whether it was in the classroom, in groups. The only time I wasn't with students is if I was eating my lunch in like 10 minutes, or if I had some other meeting to go to... I guess they saw how busy I was, and how involved I was with the students, and never tried to give me additional duties... staying busy was probably the best way to [avoid getting non-counseling duties].
(Alexis)

In this way, the uncertainty that came with beginning the RAMP application was lessened by having the model as a guide, and had the added benefit of allowing counselors to continue performing appropriate duties, thereby reinforcing the ability to continue implementing CSCP. Though initially given trust and freedom, both were reinforced by quality programming taking place. This also aligns with Cottrell's *role theory* (Cottrell, 1942a; Cottrell, 1942b; Lopata, 1991), which posits that day-to-day interactions serve to change perceptions and understandings of roles over time.

Prepare to Advocate

The use of advocacy was also important in counselors' use of the National Model, and was an important piece of them being able to engage and sustain the RAMP process. As one of the themes of the ASCA National Model, *advocacy* is expected to be woven into all elements of the school counselor role. It often refers to school counselors advocating on behalf of students. In this case, however, the bulk of the advocacy came from school counselors advocating for themselves and their roles. Though it is true that

school counselors were given freedom to run their programs, there were incidents that required intentional advocacy to continue running appropriate programming.

Maria discussed how RAMP was an advocacy tool to try getting lunch duty off of her plate. In Maria's case specifically, she was the first counselor in her area to RAMP, so she was not provided a lot of district support or resources. One of her goals in getting RAMP distinction was being able to argue to the schoolboard that more school counselors were needed. With little district support, and a caseload of 400, she was able to gain RAMP, and wanted to make an argument for what could be done with fewer students and fewer non-counseling duties.

...I thought that if we had the RAMP designation that it would help. Because we had not a great ratio, and so I thought maybe it would help get more school counselors or more funding or something... if we had more counselors in schools, what could we do with the kids? How could the students benefit from? This is what one person did with a whole bunch of kids, what if we had more people doing more things with less kids?... [RAMP was] a good way to say, 'I can do this more if I don't have lunch duties,' or whatever. It's a really good advocacy piece I think. And it's good because you can tell parents that too. 'Well last year the kids that I had in a group were talking about, they showed improvement after one group. Teachers saw this.' (Maria)

Using the RAMP process as an advocacy tool also paved the way for more proactive counseling programs, as opposed to constantly responding to concerns that popped up. This, too, in line with the nature of CSCP (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Gysbers, 2013), and was one of the motivators for Phoebe. One of Phoebe's biggest

personal strengths was her ability to tie her counseling efforts to the values of her audience. She was very savvy in her ability to find the perceived needs of other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, schoolboard members), and craft her argument to address those. This comes across at the end of her discussion of how she used RAMP to address her administration's concerns related to behavior.

Part of our push too is showing [administrators] that [RAMP]'s another need because we want to be ahead of the situation, we want to be proactive. And instead of being proactive, we were always reactive. Because by the time you get to that school the next day well this happened, this happened, this happened, this happened. And you was trying to get a program worked in but you're always chasing the fire. And so we were able to show, 'hey if we're able to sustain some stability in one school, we could be proactive and the things that you're seeing could change.' (Phoebe)

The act of leaning on the ASCA National Model meant that counselors were also collecting data, which were often used in their advocacy efforts. This was the case for both Alexis and Debbie. In Alexis' case, her advocacy also extended to her finding time to actually attend district-level RAMP workshops so that she could work on her application. She advocated not only for her role, but also for her time to actually complete the RAMP application. This was aided through her use of data.

[RAMP] was an accountability tool, as well as an advocacy tool for my administrators. Again, I was very fortunate that my administrators were very supportive of the counselor role, but if I ever needed to advocate for different

reasons why I didn't want to be involved with a lot of indirect services, I had the data to show why I didn't need to be...

I was able to go attend like a couple of different workshops that were just mainly working workshops, but again, I had to advocate for that, and I had to share, 'This is all that I'm having to do. This is what it looks like. This is why I need an entire day or a couple of days uninterrupted to be able to work on this, because otherwise I don't know if I'll be able to do it.'

When I was sharing the data from the groups and classes that I did, it was very evident that what I was doing was having a significant impact on not only the social, emotional needs of the students, but also academically and I would say to support their attendance goals, as well. So I think using these documents, again, as an advocacy tool, it was very clear as to why I was never given additional duties. (Alexis)

Debbie, like Phoebe, tied her advocacy efforts to what administrators valued by using data to show what they would be missing out on if she were given non-counseling duties.

I feel like [we didn't get given as many non-counseling duties] because we had the data already, like, 'Hey, here are four groups that we have done that we will no longer be able to do during lunch time. Here's the number of students we provided groups to last year that we will no longer be able to do that, so you need to decide then as administration what is your priority?' I feel like we were just really confident and because we had stuff to show them. It's not just like, 'Hey, I won't be able to do groups but I don't have anything to show them that I've

actually done groups, and that they have been effective, and numbers of how many I've provided.' (Debbie)

Erica noted that advocacy is also not a one-and-done event. It often takes persistence and a willingness to be confrontational, as well as an understanding of when to advocate, which also serves to reiterate Bemak and Chung's (2008) discussion of the importance of school counselors taking informed risks.

I've gotten really good at picking my battles, I would say, over the last couple of years. There are definitely times that I'll advocate for things harder than I would for other times. I've been very frank in my advocacy about 504 being an inappropriate duty for counselors. To the point that I know that people don't want to hear about it anymore, but I also feel like I have a responsibility every time we sign our annual agreement and we go through the ASCA recommended use of time and then my actual use of time, to show that comparison and to say that 'this is what you've chosen and this is what you're losing out on by choosing to utilize me in this way'. I haven't been successful in getting it taken off my plate yet, but at the same time I'm going to continue advocating in that way. (Erica)

Erica's discussion of 504 duties still being on her plate also speaks to the reality of the school counseling role. It is not the case that because she has RAMP everything is perfect—an idea that will be discussed more deeply as an element of the next theme derived from the data of this study.

Like Erica, Debbie's advocacy entailed some level of confrontation, or at least a willingness for conflict. Bemak and Chung (2008) noted that a fear of confrontation may lead to counselors being unwilling to advocate. Brown and Trusty (2005) argued that an

understanding of systems would be an important tool for school counselor advocacy. These were both apparent in Debbie's discussion of how she and the part-time counselor that she worked with utilized their understanding of the county's power structure as a means to advocate for their role when it appeared that lunch duty would be added to their role.

I was just like, 'I'm not going to show up to lunch duty.'...I was already like, 'I'm just not coming, so you can't fire me. I know how this operates. I know how school systems and teachers operate, I know you can't....I know my county supervisor supports me. So, even if you do try to raise a stink or something it's not going to get you anywhere', so I felt supported because we both we were like, 'We're standing strong and even if they somehow say that we're still going to lunch, we're not going.'

Debbie also urged other counselors to do the same, echoing the recommendations of Bemak and Chung (2008) who noted that the assignment of non-counseling duties (such as lunch duty) are reinforced when counselors do not take a stand for their profession.

...I think it's ridiculous to hear other counselors like, 'I didn't get out of [lunch duty].' Well, why didn't you get out of it? You did something wrong. You missed an opportunity to argue for your profession. We're powerful too, you know? It's that nice thing of not being able to be fired easily that makes you feel powerful. You just have to remind yourself of that and not be worried if maybe something not nice is written in your folder because what does it really matter? Where does that folder even go?

The counselors in this study indicated that advocacy played an important role in their experiences. Advocacy, therefore, is an important tool in helping counselors maintain the ability to continue providing effective programming. This means that if school counselors utilize the ASCA National Model as a guide for their programming and collect data on the effectiveness of their services they will have the resources they need to sufficiently advocate for their ability to continue providing counseling services.

Share the Load

I sampled RAMP school counselors from the elementary school level in this study because of the fact that they are often the sole counselor at their schools (Bodenhorn, 2006). A major hindrance to counselors being able to obtain RAMP distinction was the ability to find time to do so. This was addressed in relation to the ambiguity and rigidity of the RAMP application. However, in addition to the time commitment of the application itself, elementary school counselors needed to implement CSCP that would allow them to apply for RAMP distinction. Some participants proved that elementary school counselors are not always singletons (i.e., Debbie, Hannah and Wendy, Jasmine), but even in the case of counselors who were part of a team, the ability to run a truly comprehensive school counseling program was difficult, and required help from others outside of the counseling department. Outside resources included practical pieces (e.g., templates, PowerPoints, etc.), but more often, counselors leveraged relationships. As Jasmine put it, “We just used people as our resources.”

The use of extant resources was an important component of being able to provide a CSCP, and of completing the actual RAMP application. Though the exact nature of the resources used varied, all counselors in this study leaned on others to help them

throughout the RAMP process. This section will cover common domains from which counselors pulled resources, with additional examples from some of the domains provided in Table 2 (pp. 214-224).

District/County. A common source of motivation to apply for RAMP came from school counselors being part of districts or counties that had expectations for them to do so. In addition to expectations, many of these districts and counties provided resources that counselors used in shaping their programs. They also provided social support through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Professional Learning Teams (PLT) made up of other district counselors, and/or through the existence of county-level supervisors who oversaw school counselors and their use of the ASCA National model. Some examples of these upper-level resourced were found across multiple stories.

Practical resources. Some districts had an infrastructure to support the completion of the RAMP process. This included databases with materials or templates that school counselors could utilize to lighten the load of having to create documents for their applications. In some cases, districts also provided money to counselors to help them get their programs started, as well as time to do so. Alexis discussed what this looked like in their district.

We [had a database of templates to pull from in my county], and I was not aware of it until probably like halfway through my first year. We had something ...that was just for counselors, and it was all levels, and they had different I guess master counselors submitted different lesson plans for group classes, excuse me, and all those kind of things. So there were some to pull from. (Alexis)

The very existence of the aforementioned workshops that Alexis attended in order to get her application completed also constitute a practical district-level resource. Phoebe, like Alexis, had an infrastructure that allowed her time to create her CSCP. She also was given a level of monetary support.

[All the counselors] met all together in December, we got hired in in December and they kept us in what we call our education center...So we stayed there for a month working with the superintendent developing the program... during that month we spent at [the education center], we were able to develop our counseling brochure, a referral form. And that referral form is universal so it goes from all schools. So we were uniform. We developed...our entire counseling program. So when we started we were able to present 'this is who we are and this is what we could do'.

Some of the other things that was helpful were a lot of schools didn't receive money, a lot of counselors don't have money. We were awarded, our first year I think we had \$500 to spend. So that was helpful, we were able to buy books, we were able to buy programming. And then even the next year we were able to look at bullying curriculums. So we were able to order different curriculums, which was super helpful (Phoebe)

Social resources. Social resources included people who provided support to school counselors throughout the process at the district-level. In some cases, this included other school counselors. Alexis was in a district that had high expectations of counselors' utilizing the ASCA National Model, and therefore had systems in place for counselors to receive feedback on ASCA documents.

I really heavily leaned on my PLTs [professional learning team] to really help me the first couple of years that I filled out the documents because I wasn't sure if I was doing it correctly, how to implement it correctly...I think without the support of my PLT, my regional PLT, that I would not have pursued RAMPing eventually because I wouldn't have felt comfortable (Alexis)

Hannah and Wendy also utilized the support of other school counselors throughout the implementation of their programming. Though not specific to the RAMP process specifically, this collaborative community played a role in their ability to implement a CSCP.

...We are lucky in that we make the effort as a district to get together and communicate with the counselors at all the other levels... So we get together as county counselors. And there's a very big group of us. And we meet at elementary level, middle school level, high school level, and then all together so that really gives us the opportunity to collaborate with people who have districts similar to ours as well as districts who may be very different but that have some great ideas that we might be able to incorporate into our own schools. (Hannah)

Other times social resources included county-level supervisors whose role it was to oversee the work of school counselors, and often their completion of aspects of the RAMP application.

I was lucky to work in a really big county that we had, a county level supervisor...he was our leader, our county leader, and he strongly believes in the ASCA National Model, and he really wanted us to live in that, so he helped us by saying, 'You have to do this, this year.' So, like, 'This year it's all about creating

your advisory committee. This year it's all doing the crosswalk, this year it's all about doing this component,' ... He just gave us ASCA's resources, so for example, the year he was like, 'You all got to crosswalk your program.' He gave us the cross walking program and told us when to turn it into the Google folder. And then, we got to see everyone else's too. Same thing with the advisory thing. He was like, 'Here is what ASCA says an advisory committee should be and now I'm ready to be invited to your advisory committee.' (Debbie)

Our grant coordinator was a district-level person. She was hired by the grant as well, so she was under the grant to help ... We have four grant schools ... Help us navigate what we're supposed to be doing and our impact in the schools. Before we even sent our ... Well, she helped us out with an abundance of other things, but before we even sent our application or our narratives to RAMP, she proofread them to make sure we were answering the questions, make sure we were going through the things that we were supposed to. She knew somebody who evaluated for the RAMP process, so she would ask them questions to help us along. (Jasmine)

Erica was an outlier when it came to the use of district-level resources. Her district had no expectations surrounding school counselors' use of the ASCA National Model, so they did not provide any practical infrastructure for her to pull from. Instead, Erica utilized her PLT as a means of support through the process on her own. She noted, "Our elementary counselor PLC was [a] huge [resource]. We're a pretty tight-knit group. We're pretty supportive of one another... We consult a lot."

National/State. Like Erica, other counselors lacked district-level support or expectations regarding ASCA and RAMP. For Maria, she was the first counselor in her area to receive RAMP, and did so with little support from her district. Instead, she utilized the ASCA National Conference as a means of understanding and beginning the RAMP process.

[At] the ASCA conference, I had gone to a few breakout sessions on RAMP, and they broke it down year by year what they did, because they did a slow implementation in their district. So that gave me guidelines to follow as far as implementing that way, year one they did these certain things, and then year two they did some more. So based on what I already had in place I just listened to those people that had already been through it, and just went from there and really baby-stepped it, because I didn't have anybody to call or email. So I just did it on my own, based on what ASCA put out and the breakout sessions that I attended there. (Maria)

Unlike Maria, Phoebe had a lot of district-level support, much of which came from the fact that her state had high expectations for counselors and their ability to RAMP. Her training, therefore, was state-specific, which provided a helpful means of support for her. That said, the existence of state-level support didn't ensure that counselors would receive RAMP. As Phoebe noted, there was a huge drop-off between counselors who began the process and those who were able to complete it.

At the beginning of the RAMP process you go through all the training, which I think it was just a two-day training. And it just kind of introduce you to what RAMP is. And like I said for us, we're coming in, it was very overwhelming...

And everyone is smiling and like, ‘You can do it!’ And you're in a room with all of these counselors and I promise it was probably like 60 counselors and then the next thing you know, it's maybe five of you guys doing it. That was everyone who came in. Like RAMP is saying ‘hey we're gonna have a training so come on down’. (Phoebe)

Community. Other counselors leaned on the communities surrounding their schools for assistance in building comprehensive school counseling programs and in completing the RAMP application. Some (e.g., Maria, Debbie) utilized their graduate school community as a resource.

Maria had little formal training on the ASCA National Model during her graduate program, but still followed it because she knew that it was best practice. When it came time for her to create a CSCP worthy of applying for RAMP, she turned to one of her former professors to help her with some of the practical aspects of the application, “One of my former professors ... I can call her, email her, text her anytime, and she helped me set up my needs assessments because I wanted to be able to quantify responses.” For Debbie, the connection with her graduate program provided her a means of both social support, and practical help with the application process through the use of school counseling students. A friend of Debbie’s, Kim, created a cohort of school counselors and school counseling students who worked collaboratively to complete the RAMP application.

[A friend of mine, Kim, came to] where my master’s program was, to do her doctorate program, and she also created this cohort to support schools in the area doing RAMP. ...So, I came to the cohort and they supported us by having her

grad students... critique parts of our RAMP process as we were creating ...they started having cohort meetings. So, once a month we'd go off campus and we were allowed to use that time how we wanted. Initially it was just they would tell us about the process and we would work on one part of the RAMP at that cohort but then it just became, you just come here and do what you need to do, and then we would submit parts of it to the grad class that Kim was doing with [another counselor educator], who's down there. And so, they would give a feedback, they used the rubric from RAMP to critique how well we did it and give us feedback, and that way we could change it if we wanted to or adapt it to better help us apply for RAMP. (Debbie)

Debbie's use of her graduate school community headed by Kim holds implications for the role of school counseling student and counselor educators in the RAMP process, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Rather than taking the entire load of the RAMP application on themselves, Maria and Debbie both utilized the expertise and workforce provided by their graduate programs to lighten the responsibility on themselves.

The use of community resources didn't just include graduate school communities. CSCP are collaborative by nature. Alexis discussed how parents on her advisory council also provided assistance and produced buy-in in ways that would have been difficult for her to do alone.

...The biggest support that I had, that I was surprised by, was the parent aspect... the year that I RAMPed, it was an Asian parent that was [on my advisory council]...and through the conversations through our advisory council, he was

willing to come in. Because we have struggled with a lot of our Asian families placing a lot of pressure on their students to academically perform well, and through these conversations, he was willing to come in and do like a partner workshop to talk to Asian families specifically about why placing all this pressure on your children is not beneficial for them. So I thought that was very interesting because just hearing from someone from their own culture I just thought was very interesting. (Alexis)

Like Alexis, Phoebe utilized parents to obtain buy-in for the work that she was doing.

So what I started going to is the parents that I worked with their kids. ‘Hey, you know what, your input would be so great. I know you were asking me a lot of questions. How about coming into this group. This group we’re gonna start talking about what improvements we need--we need in the school.’ So parents start to feel a little bit more empowered because they’re like, ‘Oh, okay. I might not know all about academics but I do know about my child. I do know what I want to see for my child.’ (Phoebe)

Phoebe also utilized community members to create a collaborative relationship between the school and its surrounding community that empowered everyone involved.

And that's the same with going out to community leaders. ‘Hey you said that you had a basketball program, you're going to the churches, you want more people to come in. You see things going on in the neighborhood, how about you come and talk to us about that?’ And ‘so we want to hear from you, what do you think we need in this community?’ So I did a lot of that kind of stuff, ‘I need your opinion’. ‘Come bring your opinion to the school’. And most people I found felt like the

school dictated everything to them. So now this gave them a choice of what could be said in their school, they never had a voice. And that's exactly why people bought into it and decided okay, 'I want to come to these meetings, I want to learn more about it'. (Phoebe)

School. The most common source of resources came from counselors' schools. For many, they included programs that were already running in their schools as part of their CSCP. As Erica noted, school counselors are not "siloed"—their role requires collaboration. A common source of support and programming came from other student services personnel.

I definitely think access to my student services team [was a resource]...they were pretty instrumental in the process. Our [student services team] is counselor, social workers, principal, assistant principal, school psychologist and special education program facilitator. We meet weekly, and so I think receiving feedback from them as well as the Advisory Council, so we had parent reps on that, and other teacher reps. Those were really big resources. (Erica)

I will say, my student support team ... Like, counselors, social workers, psychologists, they were all on board to help us do whatever we needed to do. Our social worker even ran some attendance groups for us. So, they were a really big support in this whole process. (Jasmine)

Or from school-wide initiatives.

We were a PBIS school, so we had SWIS [School-Wide Information System]... SWIS provides this wealth of data, and then because we're a PBIS school we're

already working in data and have other ways to get it. So, having those kind of systems at a school, that was huge help as well and being a part of a big county that looked at data was helpful. (Debbie)

Other counselors leaned on the support of their administrators and/or teachers to help share the load.

My school was very supportive, so I was lucky in the fact that, of course, my administrators, as soon as told them that I wanted to RAMP, of course they were like all for it. ‘Oh, just let us know what you need.’... I had an administration that had my back, and was like, ‘Of course, we support that 100%.’ (Alexis)

Alexis’ description of her staff being supportive was also reinforced by a photo that she provided of her advisory council during a meeting. The photo depicts Alexis and five other people sitting at a table, broken up into three groups of two. According to her RAMP application, she had a grade-level representative from each grade at her school, which ensured that the advisory council could have adequate representation from all levels. In the photo, each of the three pairs is looking at a paper in front of them and appear to be actively engaged in collaborative work. The candidness of the moment captured in the photo serves to indicate that Alexis had truly obtained buy-in from her staff throughout the RAMP process. Buy-in from staff was also aided by the effectiveness of school counseling programs, and counselors’ ability to show data of effectiveness to others in the school.

I had really supportive teachers. They really, really like the fact that I could show them how effective a group was. They really like the numbers, where you could

say, ‘when I have kids in an impulse control group’, or ‘when I have kids in this type of group, here are the results’. (Maria)

Though the exact nature of resources ranged from the national level to the individual school level, school counselors’ ability to draw upon existing resources helped them to complete the RAMP process and helped it be less daunting of a task. This indicates that while district-level support is helpful, it is not a necessity. School counselors have the ability to form and leverage relationships such that they do not need to have the entire responsibility of creating a CSCP and completing the RAMP process on them alone.

In summary, the experiences of the elementary school counselors in this study served to illuminate some of the specifics of the RAMP process. Though it is formidable and time consuming, school counselors need not feel that it is entirely unfamiliar or unobtainable. RAMP requires school counselors to demonstrate that they are implementing a CSCP. Counselors can, therefore, truly use the ASCA National Model as a guide when they find themselves unsure of how to begin the process.

For the counselors in this study, the ASCA National Model served to both organize and strengthen school counseling programs as well as provide a means of advocacy against inappropriate counseling duties. Though school counselors are the champions of CSCP (and the RAMP application), there are always means of sharing the load. Some of the participants in this study began the RAMP process out of job necessity, rather than desire. School counselors can rest assured that even if they are not incredibly passionate about the ASCA National Model or the RAMP process, they likely have the

aptitude to create a RAMP-quality program if they utilize the National Model as a guide, and advocate for themselves and their position throughout the process.

The Value of the RAMP Process Comes From How It Changes Counselors'

Perceptions of Themselves

The second theme I derived from the data was: *The value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors' perceptions of themselves* and it focuses more on the “consequences” of obtaining RAMP distinction. Importantly, the perceived consequences of obtaining RAMP were not contained to after the distinction was granted. For that reason, this theme also looks back at the process. The theme has three subcategories which are: (a) The journey provides meaning for the destination, (b) Going through the process leads to more reflective, intentional counselors, who are more in tune with what their role entails, (c) The journey doesn't end with RAMP distinction.

As the name of the theme and its subcategories suggest, much of the value of obtaining RAMP distinction came from the changes that came along the way for counselors. While the distinction itself held value in that it was an external validation of the hard-work counselors were doing, and was contingent on them being able to show the existence of a CSCP that led to positive effects for students and schools, the experiences of the counselors in this study suggest that one of the most valuable aspects of the entire RAMP experience surrounds the ways that it changes counselors' view of themselves, their school counseling program, and their future work with students and schools. The value of RAMP is not necessarily in the accolades of the award, but in the lessons learned along the way.

The Journey Provides Meaning for the Destination

Successful completion of the RAMP process required a lot from counselors, especially when considering that the majority were the sole counselor in their schools. It required the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program with enough supporting documentation to indicate positive changes for students academically, socially, and personally. The application itself was, using participants' own words, "a beast" (Alexis) "difficult" (Jasmine) "stressful" (Maria), and "a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of work" (Wendy). So at the end of it all, it begs the question of whether or not counselors felt like the process was worth it—if they were rewarded for their hard work.

A common experience for many of the counselors in this study surrounds the response they received at the school-level upon informing their administration that they had achieved RAMP distinction. That common experience is most aptly described by Erica's one-word description of the response at the school level: "nothing". Like Erica, a number of the counselors shared that they received a lackluster response from their schools upon informing them of the distinction. Erica continued with her description of what happened:

I got a high five. Yeah. Our district just had a counseling audit a year ago where they paid a whole bunch of money for a local consulting firm to come in and audit all of our counseling programs K-12, and the results were not awesome district-wide, and I think it's because we were audited on are we implementing ASCA, and [implementing ASCA] has never been an expectation so of course the district scores are going to be low. Yeah, yeah. I was congratulated by my administration, and then it really was just kind of going about the same routine. Like I said, until

this audit report came out, [the fact that I had received RAMP] hadn't been really brought up again. (Erica)

Jasmine shared a similar experience.

We shared with our stakeholders that we were RAMP and what it meant to be RAMP, but I'm not ... They were just like, 'Okay. Good job. Thank you for being good counselors.' But I don't think they understand, not being school counselors, how big it is to be a RAMP school. (Jasmine)

Jasmine also touched on the ways in which RAMP, though an important distinction for school counselors and an important step in the right direction for schools, is not a cure-all. Similar to the previous discussion of Erica's continual advocacy to get 504 duties off of her plate, Jasmine described how working at a school post-RAMP can feel very similar to working at a school pre-RAMP.

Especially our school being a RAMP school because we have ... Our kids are great kids, but we have kind of a stigma with our school. We are very low performing. We have low socioeconomic status at our school, so we have a little stigma. So, bring us something ... Like, we're trying to make it a big deal. It's RAMP school. I don't know... (Jasmine)

The disappointment evident in Jasmine's response was found across others as well, "We put a banner up in the entryway, that's it. I don't think the [RAMP distinction] plaque is up in my former school yet. It was very anticlimactic" (Maria). "...Nobody knows what the heck RAMP is. Nobody. They're not impressed by that at all. They don't know" (Wendy). "We were so excited to tell our district and they had no clue what it meant." (Hannah).

Debbie's experience was similar, though with a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which going through the steps of creating a program worthy of RAMP, and utilizing the ASCA National Model was what made a bigger difference than the distinction itself.

When we actually said, 'Hey, you got RAMP,' [my principal] already knew she was moving to a middle school that year and they have a new principal now who's a first time principal...it's that constant battle at schools for practitioners who do want to follow the ASCA National Model... and for principals who don't really know what that is. Do I feel like they had a better idea because we were doing RAMP or that changed anything? I don't think RAMP changed anything at our school. I think that we, as practitioners, are continuously advocating. I don't feel like RAMP would have helped that. I don't [know] if specifically having that [RAMP] plaque made a [difference]...I almost want to backtrack because I don't want people derailed from it. I want to say, 'Yes, RAMP made such a difference at my school and now that we have it there's all this prestige, and all this freedom. And, look, I have a bigger office and I get a bigger budget.' No, we've never had a budget in the seven years I've worked there, never... I didn't even get to put [the RAMP plaque] on the wall because after the dinner, because you don't get it until that summer at the awards ceremony, and then so my colleague took it back... (Debbie).

Though the responses at the school-level were consistently uninspiring upon the reception of RAMP distinction, there were some counselors who felt that going through the process did make a big difference in how they were viewed by others. However, as is

evident in their quotes, this was usually the result of the work that they did throughout the journey to get RAMP, not because of the distinction itself.

Maria, for example, discussed how teachers utilized her more once she started using data to show the effectiveness of her groups, and how they also changed their perceptions of what she could do with students.

[With RAMP] you got to demystify...your role, and [teachers] really liked it, and they utilized me a lot more too. After I was doing the collecting data and reporting it to them, they utilized me as a counselor a lot more. And rather than, 'Fix this kid,' it was, 'What can we do?' or 'what are you already doing that would benefit this kid?' You know? It kind of shifted a little bit, which was really nice... I think I got a lot more street cred with the teachers, if you know what I mean. Where I'm not just going and playing games with them and we're just going to color. (Maria)

Maria also felt that going through the RAMP process allowed her role to be better understood by other stakeholders, including administrators and parents. The process also allowed for her to feel like she was more confident in knowing that the programs that she was running were important and worth her time.

...I think all of the perceptions of the counseling program improved through this process...from everybody. Because with my advisory board, there were parents. Then I was invited to speak at a PTA meeting about my role as the school counselor, and so I got to talk about different things there. I don't know, parents, administrators, I think just that piece where you can say that you have a nationally recognized program. It's just nice to be able to say, 'Should you be doing this?' 'Yes, I should be doing this, I'm nationally approved right now.' (Maria).

Phoebe also experienced changes to the way she was perceived by other stakeholders in the school community and felt like the RAMP process granted her some legitimacy, causing a ripple effect throughout the school.

I had teachers come up to me and say, 'Phoebe, I didn't realize that you do all of this stuff.' I had parents saying, 'Wow, I didn't realize that every time I talk to you you had to take a note on it. I didn't realize you have to chart every time you see a student.' So I think a benefit was that they actually got to know what a counselor does. For me, I got to actually see what parents and teachers really wanted...So for me, I think that's what was helpful. It was eye opening and I think that that's what the school 'cause then it became schoolwide like the teachers were talking to other teachers about it. And they starting thinking oh, Phoebe's more than just this counselor that's just talking with kids. (Phoebe)

The RAMP process also led Alexis to be perceived differently by teachers. When Alexis came into her school, she did so as the replacement of a school counselor who split his time 50/50 between teaching math and acting as a school counselor. Given the constraints of his position, he was unable to implement a CSCP. Alexis believed that going through the RAMP process and showing the effectiveness of her program changed teachers' preconceptions of what a school counselor's role is, and their capabilities.

It took me a while, but I felt like [getting RAMP] was the final cherry on top for teachers, because I think everybody has their preconceptions about what a counselor does and is...I think sometimes there are other educators that don't understand the gamut of things that counselors do, and that it's not I pull something out of the air and I just do it. There's a reason for everything. So

having that nationally recognized program, for me I felt like it validated my counseling program to my staff...So I think that that helped to show, too, that I am an effective counselor, and that the program is purposeful and data-driven, because I think that they were very, not scarred by the previous counselor that was there before me, but they definitely had their own preconceptions based on what he did before I got there... due to the restrictions of his roles. (Alexis)

The response to school counselors' successfully completion of the RAMP process varied. It was common for them to feel that their school's reaction to their reception of the distinction paled in comparison to the amount of time and effort that went into the process. For half of them, it felt like the act of implementing a truly comprehensive school counseling program changed how they were perceived and granted them more credibility with other stakeholders. For the other half, after the initial celebration of the distinction (or lack thereof), it was back to business as usual at the school-level. Another common experience, however, was the perception that the process led to internal change for themselves.

The Application Process Leads To More Reflective, Intentional Counselors, Who Are More in Tune with What Their Role Entails

Despite the difficulty of the process (that is, the creation of a CSCP, and the completion of the 12-part application, and the resubmission of artifacts if necessary), school counselors said that it was worth it. What made it worth it was that they believed that the process led to them becoming more reflective and intentional practitioners. Going through the experience of implementing fully comprehensive programs coupled with the

necessity to truly evaluate said programs made participants better school counselors who ran stronger programs that reached a larger number of students.

Something else to note is that, with the exception of Wendy and Hannah, all of the school counselors who participated in this study had a comprehensive school counseling program before making the decision to apply for RAMP. Wendy and Hannah noted that they did things “backwards” in that they chose to apply for RAMP, and then decided to make a CSCP that would be the basis of their application. All of the other counselors began the application with some elements of a CSCP in place. Maria even provided herself a ‘practice year,’ in which she went through and completed the application but did not submit it. This was a means to ensure that she had all of the necessary components of a RAMP program and give her a higher likelihood of receiving the distinction on her first try. Even so, the act of going through the RAMP process and actually submitting the application is what led to the biggest change for counselors. It did not make them have a comprehensive program—it made them have a more intentional, data-driven, effective comprehensive program.

Jasmine addressed the internal changes that RAMP brought during a discussion of how some aspects of the program that she and her team ran (e.g., and attendance group) exceeded their expectations, whereas others (e.g., and academic group) proved to be ineffective. It wasn’t until completing the RAMP artifacts for these respective groups, though, that this was made clear. The RAMP process helped her recognize the difference between programs that she and her colleagues enjoyed running versus those that actually made a difference for students. It also served to re-inform future iterations of the program.

Like, our attendance group, we were proud of that. We actually met and exceeded our goal. Very proud of that. We had some [academic] groups that ... We did not meet our goal. However, we figured out why we didn't meet our goal, and it wasn't because of us. It was some other factors that ... And so, we were like, 'Okay, we're going to keep doing this.' Because it was a good route. It was just other factors. So, just knowing of the things that we were putting into place weren't just foo foo counselor things that we wanted to do, but they were actually making a difference.

Through the process, one of the groups we were doing was an academic group. And not necessarily concerned with [standardized tests], but connected with it. We found out ... Like, 'No. Don't do that.' It's just something we like to do. The students didn't particularly benefit from it. We just like to do it. So, just coming to those realizations. Like, Okay. This group first. This group ... 'You like it, but it's not beneficial'. We can see those changes. So, we would have to sit down, regroup, figure out, 'Okay. What does the data say? Are we making a difference? We don't need to do it or we do need to do it?' So, I think that was very helpful for us, one, in eliminating some of the groups that we were doing, and two, the groups that we decided to keep, they were more effective because we could focus more on what we were doing in that group instead of being spread so thin in other groups. (Jasmine)

Similarly, Phoebe mentioned that she thought that she was a great counselor prior to undergoing the RAMP process. This is not to say that she wasn't, but having to evaluate each aspect of her program piece-by-piece made her really able to see the

relative weak points in her program. Phoebe had one of the most positive viewpoints of the whole process—when asked to describe it, she called it, “Triumphant”, and then went on to say:

I mean goodness, you are in the trenches with RAMP. I felt like ‘oh I’m a great counselor’, ‘oh I know what I’m doing’. And when you start off you realize ‘what I’m doing is not really working’ or ‘what I thought I was doing I’m missing a lot of points to it’. And then you start going through it and you realize ‘this is a lot of work, do I really want this?’...

Just when you think if you’re like me you think that ‘hey I’m serving kids, I’m doing the right thing’, you realize that you might just be tipping the iceberg and it’s so much more in depth doing it. You find out more about your students, you find out more about your parents, your community. It really changed, for me. And I think even with the other counselors who have gone through it with me, it has really changed our program.

I did not appreciate data--I didn’t. I was like ‘oh no, we gotta collect something else?’ I love data now. I love it, I feel like I collect it, I share it. When the teachers put up their data posters, I put up my data posters. So now I feel like I could show my work in the school. I could show exactly what a counselor does just not people here to talk to the kids that you feel like are bad or misbehaving or, oh I just need some help. You see the value that I can come before these behaviors...So I would say if nothing else it seems overwhelming, push through it, it’s a benefit. (Phoebe)

Like Phoebe, Maria also felt like going through the helped her become more comfortable using and presenting data, and gave her a better understanding of all aspects of her role. In fact, Maria is clear that the distinction itself gains much of its meaning and value through the process.

[After RAMP] I was a lot more comfortable with getting data, such as compiling data, and reporting it. It really demystified the role of a school counselor by leaps and bounds. I could send somebody my RAMP application and say, 'This is what school counselors do. This is what we are able to do'. . And then they'd reply, 'Oh really, yeah I didn't know that.' ...I think if you're a school counselor you should do it. I don't think there's anything negative that could come from doing this.

Yeah, you get a little stressed out, but if you slowly implement it, and I mean, you don't have to apply for RAMP either. But if you just systematically go through what you would need to do to be a RAMP school and put those things in place, you will be able to reach so many more kids. (Maria)

So, too, did Debbie. Debbie was originally encouraged to apply for RAMP because she was, "doing it anyway" according to her friend Kim. Debbie, therefore, entered the application process with what she believed was a very strong program. Like Phoebe, this isn't to say that Debbie's program wasn't strong. Rather, it's to note that even in the face of a strong program, going through the formal process of having to reflect, evaluate, and intentionally think about the program that is being run and why it's being run is an excellent opportunity to become a better, more professional practitioner.

Gosh, doing this process is really a professional development opportunity, so I felt really strong about my program entering into that year, however actually having

to fill out all of the forms with the thought somebody else was going to be evaluating me this time... you're really doing a lot of meta about your process, about like, 'Why do I offer these groups?' And then, like, 'How am I differentiating in these groups? How successful are these groups? And why I should continue or not continue to offer them.' Do you know what I mean?

There's a lot in those rubrics that really is professional development. And so, for me, that year was really reflecting on every piece of the program, and if its benefits are not beneficial, and how would I change it. So, 150% going through the RAMP process, I would say, 'Whether you get awarded it or not really helps you to be a reflective practitioner and can help strengthen your program.' So, there's people in [my RAMP] cohort that we were in who just did parts of RAMP and didn't submit and maybe will later but it really was a professional development opportunity to be a reflective practitioner, to help the program be the best it can be... it was helpful to really critique our program and to really look it in the face. Are we really providing the best services we can as a counselor and are we also meeting the standard? (Debbie)

As previously mentioned, there were a number of counselors in this study who were not awarded RAMP distinction the first time that they applied. The counseling team consisting of Wendy and Hannah was one of these. They, like the others, continued to persevere and resubmit, indicating that the process itself was valuable. It gave them confidence that what they were doing was legitimate, and motivation to branch out even more to become ambassadors for the profession.

Hannah: And had we not really been looking at that data so specifically and so in depth, we would have maybe not realized all that we are doing in the school.

Wendy: Definitely rewarding. Yeah.

Hannah: I mean when you think about it some, there's nothing that's really, we're not in this profession for all the accolades. There's not much out there...So the data piece sucks, but in the end it is worth it. I think though, that is truly why a lot of people don't move forward with it, because it is daunting, to read everything that you have to do and to show. It's just a lot of work. That's all we keep saying is it's a lot of work, but it is. ...I would say even though we didn't necessarily get the response that we were hoping [from our school], once we received RAMP, people didn't fall over us and just say congratulations and do all these things. We didn't get anything big when we got it...It's still worth it in the long run because it changes you I think as a counselor and it makes you become better. And I don't know how you want to put that into words but ...

Wendy: Well I think, like I said, it gave us more confidence, like we were validated a little bit. And so then we're like, 'Okay I do know what I'm doing and now I have this to prove I know what I'm doing.' And so you feel more comfortable to try new things. And I'm telling you what, there's been very little that we tried we haven't been successful at, it's really been wonderful from celebrating her award to presenting [for our state], to presenting at other colleges. Going on TV and speaking to the news about the things we do. Getting all the community counselors together for drug symposiums. That confidence I think,

has just opened so many other doors. It's just, and I think that all came from RAMP, I really do.

As Hannah mentioned, it wasn't about the praise or recognition, as if it were, they may have otherwise chosen not to resubmit. In addition to building their confidence, going through the RAMP process allowed them to truly all aspects of their program, namely the "career" piece that often got overlooked. Despite having to contend with the initial "failure" of their first RAMP application, Wendy and Hannah ultimately felt positively about having not received the distinction on the first try—feeling like they didn't deserve it.

Wendy: ... We didn't deserve the pass the first time, it was a lot of work. It took us every bit of any spare moments of a school year, but we started it because evaluations for counselors were starting... we had to make our program comprehensive so that means we had to hit academic, personal, social, done, and career. And we were like, 'What the heck do you do for elementary kids for career?' So that forced us to look at programs that would hit that, and we have had huge success with that. And we probably wouldn't have done it before because it was just one more thing when you've got 40 million. But it's really been beneficial for us, the program that we do for career.

Hannah: ... [RAMP] really caused us to be very reflective. When we did not get it the first time, I was pissed. I'll be honest. I was like this is stupid, we deserve it. I can't believe they didn't give it to us. But then [Wendy] said, 'let's read over this, let's look over their comments'. And as we started to look at their comments, we said 'oh, okay. I get it now'... After that initial anger was able to settle a little bit,

it really did cause us to be very reflective, it caused us to make the changes we really needed to change. And I think it was good. It was probably better that we failed in the first place actually.

Wendy: I think so too.

At the end of it all, it appears that going through the RAMP process did make a difference, and was worth it, though not only because it was a national recognition of counselors' hard work. Much of its value came from the internal validation that counselors felt, and changed the way that they viewed themselves and their role. RAMP was not a cure-all, nor did it necessarily change how all the counselors were viewed in their schools. In line with the idea that the process was more important than the destination, RAMP distinction, even on a practical level, is not truly a destination.

The Journey Doesn't End With RAMP Distinction

In many ways, the lukewarm response from schools was to be expected. The subcategory of *when in doubt lean on the ASCA National Model* from the first theme served to show that many administrators were unfamiliar with the school counseling role, and especially of the RAMP process. It would be unreasonable to expect, therefore, that the reception of the distinction would warrant a huge school-level response. This lack of school-level response also relates to things being 'business as usual' for many school counselors after the distinction. For that reason, RAMP distinction became an important tool for advocacy and programming after it was awarded. Rather than being a distinction on which counselors hung their hats and stop working, it served instead to set the stage for future work, and (when need be) future advocacy.

The very nature of the RAMP application requires data that show the effectiveness of school counselor programming. The same tools that counselors used (i.e., the National Model) to advocate to get their programs off of the ground continued to be of value to them the years following distinction. In a similar vein to the previous subcategory, *the journey doesn't end with RAMP distinction* highlights the ways in which the distinction would hold little importance without the actions that led to it.

In noting how her role changed as a result of RAMP, Debbie mentioned that it didn't really, that utilizing the National Model changed her role more so than RAMP distinction, and that the National Model will continue to be important after the distinction.

Did RAMP [change how I was utilized in the school]? No. But following the National Model, being a National Model school counselor does. It does have an impact but RAMP's just that other, did that really change anything we did? No, because we were really, authentically, I always felt like we were following the ASCA National Model and we were doing things, we were collecting data, we were assessing our groups, our classroom guidance lessons, we were doing those things. So, I feel like it's more like thinking is being a National Model school counselor going to affect your school and your program? Yes, it will... Doing the components of being a National Model, yes, they are going to help you advocate for your program. They're going to help you eliminate tasks and things that aren't falling under the National Model, that aren't beneficial to students. (Debbie)

Other counselors noted the practical benefits of RAMP, namely in how it would help them to get inappropriate duties off of their plate should they need to. Erica was in

the midst of a change in her administration. Because of this, she was worried that her role might change with a new principal who had different visions of what the school counselor's role should be. She saw RAMP as an opportunity to keep her programming intact through the transition.

Whoever my new principal ends up being. I don't know who that person will be yet, but when they come on ... The direction in our district right now is towards putting elementary counselors on the specials rotation, and part of my advocacy for not being put on the specials rotation would be well look, we have a great program the way it is, and here's why, and here's all my data. (Erica)

In a follow-up to her discussion of her continued fight to get 504 duties off of her plate, she mentioned how her RAMP data had been an asset to her in the past, when she was given the role of testing coordinator, and how she utilized the data to get that off of her plate. Hoping to do the same in the future.

I think that parts of RAMP, I'm trying to think of any other examples [of inappropriate duties assigned to counselors] aside from 504. Testing was a big one back years ago before that got taken off of counselors' plates. I think that my first year I was the testing coordinator, and so as I was going through RAMP, and I do remember giving feedback to my principal about the challenges of 'this is what a fully-implemented program looks like, and when I'm testing coordinator and I'm essentially not the counselor for two months of the year, here's the challenge'. Same thing, 'here's what you're missing out on'. (Erica)

Hannah and Wendy's use of RAMP to fight for future aspects of their role had more urgency than either Debbie's or Erica's. Many school counselors were being

eliminated from schools in the state where they worked. Their conservation suggested that they may use RAMP being an important tool in fighting for job security, noting that a similar ousting of school nurses had already happened.

Hannah: I think there's going to be a lot of changes that happen in the future and I think when there's changes that happen in the building, you obviously have to change some of what you're doing. So I foresee us looking at some of the processes in this building and maybe some of the programming and making some changes just to fit our needs at that point. You know, I think we're going to have some administrative changes, I think we're going to have some teacher changes. So I think we're always going to have to be constantly changing and so I think again like [Wendy] said earlier, RAMP helps keep us in check, it helps us make sure we've got our checks and balances and we're doing what we need to do.

Wendy: And we don't just get lost in putting out fires all day every day. You know, like stop and think about what we should be doing... But again with like [Hannah] said, evaluations coming, at least for [our state], I think we could potentially see more people going for [RAMP] because who's going to get a bad evaluation if you've got RAMP? You really proved yourself there... And I know that we're supposed to do RAMP our hearts are so big for children, but really it was because our district outsourced nurses. We don't have nurses in our buildings anymore, we have ...

Hannah: Medical assistants and then we have a district nurse who travels buildings.

Wendy: And if they started looking our way towards doing some of those things. And honestly that's not best for the kids, it just wouldn't do. And so we made sure they knew what exactly we were doing. And how are you going to get rid of a school counselor here who [received a national distinction]?

Hannah: And I was going to say honestly I think there's a time and a place for mental health counseling and it's not in a school environment. It's not fair to these students to bring them out of the learning environment, into an environment where they can potentially become very upset and then have a hard time going back. And as school counselors, it's our role to give them resources in the community where they can get those services outside of school. So again, if you're not a school counselor, you don't understand that, and I think that was difficult because we can tell them until we're blue in the mouth, 'this is the difference. You need school counselors'. But when it comes down to the bottom line, that's what they're looking at. 'What's going to be cheaper, what's going to be better'?

And I think you see even now, with everything that's going on with all the school shootings. Now I think there's a big push to get schools to recognize the importance of school counselors versus all of these other things. Whether it's the social worker or the mental health counselor, you still need a school counselor in that school. And we have personal connections with these students. And when you have someone outside of your school coming in, they don't have that personal connection with the student, they don't have that connection with the teacher, and they don't understand what the schedule is like or what the school environment is

like or what you can and can't do. So we've had some other people come in and it's honestly created more work for us because we've had to teach them what they need to do. But again a lot of people, unless you're a counselor, and I so appreciate that you are, you don't get it. Until you're in it, living it, that's when you understand it.

Wendy: Those are two completely different jobs. Outsourced mental health and school counselors are just-- what we do is completely different. They're completely different. And RAMP I think gave us a voice to tell our school board what we thought should happen.

An important consideration for counselors considering going through the RAMP process is the recognition that the journey does not have a set destination. Well-informed school counseling work requires constant re-adjustment and re-evaluation. For these reasons the journey, ultimately, has no endpoint. Only more intentional, reflectively paved roads.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the RAMP process was a valuable experience for school counselors who successfully completed the application, even if the impetus for doing so was external. Though RAMP distinction itself did not garner a strong response from schools or districts, it still held value for the counselors who went through it. First, it acted as an external validation of the work that went into implementing and evaluating a truly comprehensive school counseling program that showed positive change for students. In addition to the distinction itself, the value came from how it changed counselors' perceptions of themselves and their school counseling

programs.. The findings also suggest that counselors should engage with the RAMP process even if they do not feel a strong internal desire to do so.

A common experience for counselors in this study was a sense of uncertainty at times, as well as the presence of freedom without clear expectation of direction. In these cases, counselors found that the use of the National Model as a guide helped to organize and structure their school counseling program, and had an added benefit of buffering them against non-school-counseling related duties. Despite the laborious nature of the application itself, counselors should feel confident in their ability to leverage extant relationships to share the responsibility of creating comprehensive school counseling programs worthy of national distinction.

The next and final chapter will discuss these findings as they relate to the larger body of school counseling literature and knowledge. It will also address the fit of the proposed theoretical model based on Cottrell's *role theory* and Schein's *organizational leadership and culture*, and provide implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and the American School Counseling Association.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A platform for elementary school counselors to share stories of their journey through the RAMP process was provided in this study. I investigated and told the stories of eight school counselors across seven schools, highlighting the perceived important considerations in applying for and obtaining RAMP distinction. In line with narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), each individual's story remained intact, and was a co-creation between myself and participants. Further, I conducted thematic analysis using Saldaña's (2009) method, which allowed me to derive two important themes from the data. Data for this study included in-depth semi-structured interviews with counselors, as well as RAMP application materials, a PowerPoint of a presentation done by one of the participants, and a photograph of an advisory council working collaboratively.

In this chapter I discuss these findings including how they relate to the larger body of school counseling literature. I also address the fit of the proposed model (Figure 1, p. 44), and the implications of these findings for school counselors, counselor educators, and the American School Counselor Association. This chapter ends with the strengths and limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and a final reflection on the effects that going through the research process has had for me, personally.

This study was guided by the research question: *What do elementary school counselors see as important considerations throughout the process of successfully obtaining RAMP distinction?*, and two themes 1) *Don't be afraid to engage in the RAMP process*, and 2) *the value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors' perceptions of themselves* were derived from the data. Together, these themes served to

illuminate the specifics of the RAMP process, including the roles of motivation, community, district and school resources and leadership, counselor characteristics and actions (i.e., advocacy), the use of the ASCA National Model, and perceived consequences of obtaining RAMP distinction. The findings provide stakeholders (e.g., school counselors, counselor educators, ASCA) with a more-informed understanding of what the RAMP process entails from start to finish.

Discussion and Model Fit

Extant literature on Comprehensive School Counseling Programs has found that ASCA-aligned programs correlate with positive student outcomes (e.g., Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2011; Lapan et al., 2001; Salina et al., 2013; Sink & Stroh, 2003), more positive school climate (Rock et al., 2017), and higher levels of school counselor satisfaction (Clemens et al., 2009; Pyne, 2011). Despite their apparent benefits, CSCP have been criticized for promising more than they can realistically deliver (Brown & Trusty, 2005) and for being inadequately evaluated (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2011). Other studies have found that school counselors recognize the importance of using data, but feel apprehensive doing so, and may lack the skills to adequately evaluate their programs (Astramovich, 2017; Sink, 2009). Concurrently, the most recent changes to the ASCA National Model (2012) focused on increase data usage by counselors, while the school counseling literature has seen a relative halt in empirical studies of comprehensive school counseling programs.

In response to this, the current study examined counselors' experience with the RAMP process, which includes the initial motivations for applying for RAMP, the implementation of a CSCP, the completion of the RAMP application, and the perceived

consequences of achieving the distinction. To date, only six published studies have addressed RAMP programs or their counselors, and only two (Goodman-Scott, E., & Grothaus, 2017a, 2017b) have focused on counselors' experiences.

The findings of this study do not constitute a groundbreaking or unique new approach to school counseling. Rather, they reinforce what has been said for years: implementing a CSCP is not only possible—it has positive effects for counselors. What is unique, however, is that these findings are relayed through the voices of RAMP counselors. The tendency for people to connect with and find meanings in stories (Dwyer et al., 2016) and narratives' ability to persuade (Riessman, 2008), make these findings more human and accessible, in contrast to what is often perceived as the faceless nature of quantitative research (Poplin, 1987). In addition to being more accessible, the thematic analysis of stories in this study serve to inform the profession and demystify the RAMP process.

Summary of Findings

Don't Be Afraid to Engage in the RAMP Process. One of the major themes of this study was the suggestion that school counselors engage with the RAMP process. All of the participants in this study had some apprehension surrounding what applying for RAMP distinction would entail. Some didn't feel particularly passionate about applying for RAMP, rather, they were doing so as a job requirement. Others chose to undergo the RAMP process as a personal goal, or as a means of organizing their programs. Regardless of their motivations, participants experienced some frustration with the RAMP application itself in terms of its paradoxical ambiguous and rigid nature. Counselors in this study often found themselves working under administrators that were supportive of

their decision to apply for RAMP, but not necessarily knowledgeable of what the school counselor role or the RAMP application would entail. In times of uncertainty, counselors found direction and guidance through the use of the ASCA National Model, which helped to clarify and shape their roles. Some needed to advocate for their role along the way, both to avoid inappropriate duties (i.e., lunch duty; e.g., Debbie), and for time to complete their application (e.g., Alexis). Being elementary school counselors added an additional hindrance for some in that the responsibility for obtaining RAMP fell entirely on their shoulders. RAMP, though a recognition of school counseling program rather than individual counselors, ended up being one-in-the-same for the counselors that were the sole member of their department (e.g., Alexis, Erica, Phoebe, Maria). In all cases, though, participants were able to lean upon existing programs in the school, often through other student services personnel, to fill in aspects of their comprehensive programming that eventually earned their school RAMP distinction.

The stories and experiences of counselors in this study were both unique and common. There were many characteristics that differed between them. For example, training and familiarity on the ASCA National Model varied greatly, with some counselors believing they had received formal training, and others being mostly self-taught. In addition to National Model familiarity, counselors entered their schools and positions with varying levels of CSCP in place. The process also included organizational characteristics that were helpful, but none were necessary. For example, district support and resources, including tangibles (e.g., templates, letters, documents, work samples) and intangibles (professional learning communities, supervisors, use of ASCA National Model throughout district), were helpful for some of the participants (e.g., Alexis,

Phoebe, Jasmine), but others (e.g., Erica, Wendy and Hannah, Maria) made do without them.

In a similar vein, supportive school administrators were helpful, but even their presence often required intentional advocacy. And counselors' advocacy was effective. In line with school counseling literature, relationships with administrators were malleable (Duslak & Geier, 2017), advocacy for appropriate duties begot more appropriate duties (Clemens et al., 2009), and school counselors were more satisfied with running ASCA-aligned programs (Pyne, 2011).

A common aspect of counselors' stories was their outcome. No matter the starting point, all were able to implement a RAMP distinguished CSCP largely through a willingness to engage with the process and persevere through uncertainty. Regardless of the specifics of their particular schools, all school counselors in this study created important partnerships with parents and communities (Cook, Hayden, Bryan, & Belford, 2016), and with other student services personnel within the school (Kury & Kury, 2006). For every important resource that one participant had, there was another counselor who did not have the same resource, but their outcomes were the same: RAMP distinction.

This study also examined the personal characteristics of participants. Though some of the characteristics that participants described themselves as (e.g., direct, assertive, driven, competitive, and perseverant) are in line with the literature (e.g., Bemak & Chung, 2008; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young et al., 2015), no two participants had the exact same personal characteristics. Aside from their outcome of receiving RAMP distinction, the only commonality that all participants in this study had throughout the

process was the ability to make do with what they had, and a willingness to try. Through that, every participants in this study was able to create a RAMP-quality program.

The findings of this study become more interesting in light of school counselors' perceptions of themselves. Participants in this study (e.g., Hannah and Wendy, Phoebe, Maria) admitted that going through the RAMP process boosted their confidence in themselves and their understanding of their role. This, too, is in line with extant research on school counselor confidence. It is not uncommon for school counselors to believe that they are inadequately trained (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011) or that their understanding of data are insufficient (Astramovich, 2017). Brigman and Campbell (2003) found that school counselors had low confidence in their ability to successfully run a student-centered program, but that over time and with repeated practice this confidence rose. Similarly, Bryan and Griffin (2010) found that counselors' level of self-efficacy had a significant effect on their willingness to engage in collaborative partnerships. Bodenhorn, Wolfe, and Airen (2010) indicated that counselors' self-efficacy correlated with their awareness and programming around academic achievement gaps, and level of engagement with the ASCA National Model.

School counselors' perceptions of themselves has a real effect on the quality of programs they run. Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) found that factors like student to counselor ratio, administrative support, and the ability to create vision and mission statements were seen as very important in the ability to implement comprehensive programming, but these factors were not tied to any data related to student programming. It may be the case, therefore, that school counselors' belief about environmental factors hold more importance than the environmental factors themselves. The lack of CSCP

nationally, and of RAMP distinguished program may be due more to confidence and self-efficacy than external factors such as training, district, or school support. It appears that when an attempt is made, school counselors can be successful. They truly have all the training and skills that they need to create RAMP distinguished programs.

The findings of this study suggest in conjunction with school counseling literature present a sort of chicken or the egg conundrum, in which school counselors' beliefs about themselves may hinder their willingness to engage in programming while engaging in programming may serve to change their beliefs about themselves. These findings also connect to research on the role of self-efficacy and self-actualization. One components of the role of self-efficacy was found by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014), who showed that teachers' self-efficacy was associated with higher levels of job engagement and satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Broader employment literature (e.g., Lisbona, Palaci, Salanova, & Frese, 2018) also indicates that self-efficacy and work engagement lead to higher personal initiative and work performance. For this reason, the theme of *Don't be afraid to engage with the RAMP process* holds importance not only for school counselors, but for professionals across other realms as well. In this case, it may act as a call for school counselors to push through the possibly negative beliefs that they have about themselves, and engage in creating a CSCP even if on a small scale, piece-by-piece. In line with this, the second theme of this study *The value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors' perceptions of themselves* serves as a means of saying that regardless of the changes that may or may not be apparent at the school level, going through the RAMP process can be a valuable experience for school counselors.

The Value of the RAMP Process Comes From How It Changes Counselors'

Perceptions of Themselves. The second theme I derived from the data of this study addressed the consequences of completing the RAMP process. Participants' reception of RAMP distinction was often met with little celebration or recognition at the school level, especially in relation to how much work and effort went into the process. On a positive note, some of the counselors in this study (e.g., Maria, Alexis, Phoebe) believed that going through the process changed how they were perceived and utilized by other stakeholders in their schools and communities. For the others, though, the RAMP process and reception of RAMP distinction didn't have any major effect on how they were utilized in their schools.

The most impactful change that came as a result of engaging in the RAMP process was how it changed counselors' perceptions of themselves, and the work that they did in the school. Specifically, participants reported that going through the process helped them gain a better understanding of their role, allowed them to feel more comfortable utilizing data, and ultimately led to them being more reflective and intentional in the programs that they ran. The act of having to complete the RAMP application provided a greater understanding of their program's effect on student outcomes, and helped future iterations highlight services that were beneficial and jettison those that were not.

For these reasons, the second theme of this study suggests that RAMP distinction, as a title gained importance and meaning through the act of going through the process itself. This was a point explicitly made by two of the participants, Debbie, "It wasn't

really getting RAMP, it was just being an ASCA National Model counselor, using data, and trying to create change...” and Maria:

If you slowly implement [a CSCP], ... you don't have to apply for RAMP either.

But if you just systematically go through what you would need to do to be a RAMP school and put those things in place, you will be able to reach so many more kids. (Maria)

The value, therefore, of going through the process is in the process itself, rather than in the end goal. In fact, recent research on goal pursuit posits that the means of pursuit (i.e., the process) hold more importance for individuals' subjective well-being than the outcome (i.e. goal attainment) (Kaftan & Freund, 2018).

Further, though the reception of RAMP distinction constituted an endpoint for counselors' RAMP application, it was not truly an endpoint for their programming, which makes sense. Given that the most impactful result of the RAMP process was that it changed counselors' level of reflectivity and intentionality, it is natural that they would continue to craft their programs and adjust their practice. There were a few tangible benefits of RAMP distinction including the ability to become a RAMP reviewer, free ASCA membership, and for some counselors (e.g., Maria, Phoebe) the procurement of grant funding for their schools, but more common was the use of RAMP distinction as a means of continued advocacy for programming and role (e.g., Erica, Maria, Hannah and Wendy).

The theme of *The Value of the RAMP Process Comes from How It Changes Counselors' Perceptions of Themselves* in some ways serves to address whether or not going through the RAMP process was ‘worth it’. And for every counselor in this study,

the answer was that ‘yes. It was,’ with most noting that they would renew their RAMP distinction if given the opportunity to do so. This finding should be considered in light of the fact that RAMP schools, nationally, dropped in number from 631 in the summer of 2017 (ASCA, 2017b) to 242 in the fall of 2018 (ASCA, 2018a) at the end of the RAMP-renewal cycle. A drop of nearly 62%. Another finding was that four of the counselors in this study were no longer at the schools where they received RAMP distinction, with two having left the school counseling profession altogether. In conjunction, these two pieces of information serve to indicate that there may be other common RAMP stories that differ from the ones told here. This study only investigated counselors who were successful in their RAMP journeys, and while three of the schools necessitated a revision and resubmission of RAMP applications, all were ultimately successful. It is possible, then, that the RAMP process having ended on a ‘positive note’ (i.e., RAMP distinction being awarded), influenced how positively participants retroactively evaluated the process (Hoogerheide & Paas, 2012).

For this group of counselors, the RAMP process (i.e., the initial motivations and decision to apply for RAMP, the completion of the RAMP application, and the consequences of receiving RAMP distinction) constituted a positive experience, but not one in which the reception of national recognition for the school counseling program led to large changes in role perceptions or expectations. Instead, the most important changes came through the process, during which school counselors leaned upon their skills and training to create collaborative CSCP. The end result of the process (i.e., receiving RAMP distinction) was less meaningful than the changes that counselors believed about themselves, and their role. Participants’ experience with the RAMP process led to them

feeling more confident in their ability to run intentional, data-driven CSCP, to adjust their program to meet students' needs, and to advocate for themselves when necessary.

Model Fit

The theoretical foundation of this study consisted of a combination of Cottrell's (1941, 1942a, 1942b) *role theory* and Schein's (2004) *organizational culture and leadership*. In conjunction, these frameworks served as a basis for understanding the means by which some counselors were able to implement a CSCP worthy of RAMP distinction while others were not. For example, *role theory* posited that day-to-day interactions between school counselors and other members of the school and community influenced perceptions and expectations of the school counseling role. At the systems-level, *organizational culture and leadership* (Schein, 2004) viewed beliefs and assumptions as a largely top-down phenomenon, in which the beliefs of a leader become embedded within subordinates and guide behavior.

Figure 1 (p. 44) conceptualizes the interplay between these two frameworks as a series of concentric circles with the school counselor (and his or her role) at the center. School counselors' interactions with individuals at the school and with school-level characteristics are proposed to have a bi-directional effect wherein school counselors' actions influence expectations of their role with other individuals in the school, and in the larger school climate. Concurrently, other individuals' expectations of the school counselor and elements of the school climate serve to influence the counselor and his or her role. Further, district, and larger community are expected to simultaneously influence the school counselor role unidirectionally, wherein school counselors' actions do not affect these levels.

The design of this study allowed me to explore the extent to which portions of the proposed model fit the experiences of participants. There were elements of the proposed model, however, that were unable to be properly tested due to limitations of the study's design, which are discussed in the *Strengths and Limitations* portion of this chapter. Overall, the theoretical foundation of this study fit well with the results. The model did not take into account the possible far-reaching influence or school-counselor action, nor the presence of supportive, but unknowledgeable administrators. This section will provide an overview of the findings related to the model, and a discussion of areas where the model did not adequately portray the results garnered from this study.

School Counselors' Actions Affecting Perceptions and Expectations

The innermost circle of the model includes the school counselor. One level out from this holds individual interactions between school counselors and other stakeholders. Interactions between school counselors and other members of the school building will naturally be influenced by personality characteristics of the individuals taking part in them (i.e., the school counselor, and others). Literature on school counselors' personal characteristics (e.g., Lochman et al., 2009) indicates that individual qualities (e.g., organization, planfulness, adaptability, kindness) play an important role in school counselors' engagement with programming. Similarly, ASCA members believed individual characteristics such as flexibility, adaptability, time management skills, compassion, assertiveness, cooperation, and knowledge, among others, were important for school counselors to have (Lochman et al., 2009). The findings of this study serve to support existing literature on school counselors' individual characteristics and also provide insight into the means by which school counselors are able to change what is

expected of them within the school building (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(d) Prepare to advocate*).

Common individual characteristics of participants in this study included being direct, assertive, driven, competitive, and perseverant. Counselors re-telling of going through the RAMP application also indicated that they had a level of flexibility and adaptability, as well as organizational, time management skills, and advocacy skills. The personality traits and skills of counselors in this study played a role in their ability to continue through the difficulty of the RAMP application, even when it was ambiguous or tedious, and support the literature surrounding important individual characteristics of schools counselors (e.g., Bemak & Chung, 2008; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young et al., 2015). At the same time, some of the counselors (e.g., Jasmine, Phoebe, Hannah and Wendy) were influenced to pursue RAMP in large part by external motivators. Passion, therefore, was not a necessary component of being an effective counselor as suggested by Corey (2009) for this group of counselors (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(a) Passion is not a prerequisite*).

Some of the counselors in this study did not believe that going through the RAMP process changed how they were viewed by others within the school. However, others did. For those who did, the means by which these expectations changed lend support to *role theory*, as well as indicate that change can happen more suddenly than *role theory* suggests.

For example, Debbie and Phoebe indicated that their use of the ASCA National Model served to change the way that they were viewed by parents, teachers, and administrators. Both noted that this was more of a gradual change—that it was the day-

to-day use of the model that changed perceptions more so than RAMP distinction did. Debbie and Phoebe's experiences support the idea that school counselors can, over time, change how they are viewed and utilized by other stakeholders in the school through intentional action. Interestingly, Phoebe was the first school counselor that her school ever had. She, therefore, may have built expectations of her role from the ground up, rather than changing pre-existing expectations, though literature suggests that school personnel may draw upon personal experiences as a means of conceptualizing the school counselor role (Burnham & Jackson, 2000)

For other counselors (e.g., Maria and Alexis) changes in expectations were more sudden, and based on early actions at their schools. Both Maria and Alexis discussed how actions of the previous counselor influenced perceptions of their role. This, too, is in line with extant literature (e.g., Bickmore & Curry, 2013; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). Both of these counselors shared that they made a conscious effort to shed the previous counselor's role.

I was really the first counselor that used ASCA documents...When I got to my school as a brand-new counselor, I advocated for myself and said, 'I don't know exactly what [my program] is going to look like, but I know that I'm going to need a lot of training. I know that what I want to do, and what other counselors [in the county] before me have done, and I want to implement the same thing¹.'... I was very upfront about that from the beginning, like, 'I'm not a disciplinarian. If you're a teacher and you're calling me to come pull a child from your classroom,

¹ Here, Alexis was referring to the fact that the use of an ASCA-aligned program was an expectation within the district. The "counselors before me" that she refers to here are other counselors in the district, rather than the counselor who worked at her specific school before she did.

I'm going to have a counseling conversation with them, and my ultimate goal is to get them back in the classroom as quickly as possible, because I don't want them missing out on academic time, of course, within the parameters that they are in the right mindset to go back to learning.' (Alexis)

In Maria's case, teachers had expectations for her to provide direction in their classroom. This was the result of her school consisting of the combination of two, previously separate elementary schools. She was the only counselor at the school, but teachers from one of the previous schools had experiences working with another counselor who provided them a template for what the counselor's role entailed. Maria was quick to shirk this expectation, and make it clear that she would support the work that teachers did, but would not be following in the same pattern of telling them what to do as the previous counselor had.

[When people told me what my role 'should' be], I would smile and nod and reflectively listen. Because in one building the counselor said to the principal, 'Well [teachers] need to have morning meetings every day.' If you want to do a morning meeting that is great, by all means do that in your classroom, but I'm not going to tell you how to run your classroom. That's a great choice and if that works for you that's great, but as for me, being new here, I'm not going to tell you what to do in your classroom. I think that's wonderful.... I'm just going to do what I need to do, and whatever you think is best for your kids I'm totally going to support what you do in your classroom rather than me telling them. Especially as the newbie, I don't know your kids. (Maria)

The results of this study suggest that persistent interactions with school personnel may serve to change role expectations for school counselors á la *role theory* (Cottrell, 1941). They also suggest, however, that expectations can be changed quickly through immediate action.

The experience of participants influencing decisions and actions beyond the school-level also indicates a non-fit between the model and the results. Specifically, counselors in this study were able to present to schoolboard members at the district level, and PTA members at the community level to secure funding for their positions and programs. Phoebe, for example, discussed that she and her colleagues used RAMP as a basis of a schoolboard presentation that led to additional funding being provided to hire more school counselors in the district, whereas Maria secured \$3000 in funding through her PTA. Similarly, Hannah and Wendy presented to their schoolboard and participated in television interviews within the community as a means of educating others about the role of the school counselor. These findings serve to show that the influence of school counselors and their actions can go beyond the school-level.

Organizational Culture's Influence on the School Counselor Role

The two outermost circles in the theoretical foundation focus on district and community level factors. In line with Schein's (2004) *organizational culture and leadership*, the framework suggested that leadership at the district and community would influence the roles of school counselors at the individual building level to either facilitate or hinder their implementation of a CSCP.

By and large, the findings of this study supported the notion that district-level and community (i.e., state, region) factors played a role on school counselors' implementation

of a CSCP. Counselors who had high levels of community and district/county support for the RAMP process (e.g., Alexis, Phoebe, Jasmine, Debbie) fared better throughout the application than those who did not, in terms of having clearer expectations and practical materials. Phoebe, for example, had a state-level training and materials that provided her templates for implementation of her CSCP. Though specific principal-expectations varied, they were all at least aware of what RAMP was, and encouraged counselors to go for it. Alexis shared a similar experience and had a storehouse of RAMP materials to pull from throughout the application. She also had the opportunity to attend district-level workshops to complete application materials. Even prior to her RAMPing, she had an infrastructure for getting feedback on ASCA documents. Alexis, Debbie, and Jasmine all worked under a district-level representative who oversaw the work of school counselors who could provide assistance with their CSCP and RAMP application materials. The very existence of this position indicates that somewhere within district leadership was someone who believed in the importance of the work of ASCA-aligned school counselors, thereby leading to an organizational culture that supported counselors going for RAMP.

District-level support wasn't a necessity, though. Maria and Erica, for example, were the first counselors in their areas to pursue RAMP distinction, and therefore lacked district and community level resources. The findings of this study suggest that district and community level factors are helpful, but not necessary for obtaining RAMP distinction, and further serve to reiterate the idea that school counselors should not fear engaging with the RAMP process. Even in the absence of strong community or district support, all

counselors in this study were able to lean on existing programs and relationships to help them complete the process (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(e) Share the load*).

Some support for Schein's (2004) *organizational culture and leadership* was present in the findings related to administrative support of school counselors pursuing RAMP, though not as directly as the framework suggests. All of the participants in this study had administrative support for their CSCP, however, it did not appear to be based on administrators' strong belief of the importance of school counselors. This is evidenced by the fact that many administrators, while supportive, were unknowledgeable of the school counselor role, and especially of RAMP. Additionally, some of the counselors (e.g., Debbie, Jasmine) experienced administrative fluctuation during the RAMP process (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(c) When in doubt, lean on the ASCA National Model*). Though, importantly, both Debbie and Jasmine were in districts/counties with high level of RAMP support, which may serve to buffer the influence of administrators at the building level.

The findings of this study, therefore, do not directly align with *organizational culture and leadership's* assumption that everything that happens at the subordinate level is directly due to the belief of a leader, though the multiple levels of leadership present in school districts (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000) make this relationship less direct in general.

Summary of Model Fit

The theoretical foundation of this study, which is based on Cottrell's *role theory* and Schein's *organizational culture and leadership* provided a mostly accurate representation the multiple influences on school counselors' ability to implement a CSCP worthy of RAMP distinction, as well as the reciprocal nature of these relationships. The

model failed to recognize the sometimes far-reaching consequences of school counselors' actions, and the possibility of administrative turnover that may occur during the RAMP process.

The most important take-away regarding how this study's findings related to school counselors influencing systems aligns with the findings of Duslak and Geier (2017) and Clemens and colleagues (2009), and that is that relationships with other school personnel and perceptions of school counselors are both malleable.

Even when school counselors inherit inappropriate role expectations or a non-comprehensive school counseling program the willingness to engage with the process, and use of the ASCA National Model when unsure can lead to more ASCA-aligned and comprehensive programs (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(c) When in doubt, lean on the ASCA National Model*). Further, the very act of going through the RAMP process will change how counselors view themselves, thereby influencing future iterations of their school counseling program (Theme 2, Subcategory: *(b) Going through the process leads to more reflective, intentional counselors, who are more in tune with what their role entails*).

Implications

School Counselors

The findings of this study hold practical relevance for practicing school counselors. First and foremost, the themes of the data and their subcategories may be seen as recommendations for school counselors in and of themselves. This section will outline how the findings of this study relate to the whole of school counseling literature, and provide further suggestions for practicing school counselors.

Extant studies (e.g., Nelson, Robles-Pina, & Nichter, 2008; Poynton, Schumacher, & Wilczenski, 2008; Studer et al., 2011) have found that school counselors are not always able to implement CSCP, and that many dedicate only a small portion of their time towards creating them (Nelson et al., 2008). This lack of engagement with CSCP could have multiple explanations. It may be due in part to administrators assigning non-counseling duties to counselors (Studer et al., 2006). It may also be the result of school counselors feeling apprehension collecting and utilizing data (Sink, 2009).

Participants in this study had similar experiences, yet were still able to adequately complete the RAMP process, which reiterates the importance of the first theme of this study: *Don't be afraid to engage with the RAMP process*. Astramovich, (2017) found that school counselors understand the importance of using data for program evaluation, but often lack the skills and confidence to effectively do so. Similarly, Sink (2009) noted that school counselors' apprehension with data may hinder them from implementing a CSCP. These sentiments were echoed by multiple counselors in this study (e.g., Maria, Alexis, and Phoebe), all of whom indicated that they too didn't feel comfortable collecting and analyzing data upon starting the RAMP process. The importance, therefore, of *sharing the load* was amplified for these counselors in relation to data-usage.

In line with the findings of Young and Kaffenberger (2011), going through the RAMP process had a positive impact on counselors' understanding and use of data in planning their program. The findings of this study reinforce the idea that it is okay *not to know*—the more important element is counselors' willingness to try, and to fight through the ambiguity in times of uncertainty. The findings suggest that this fight can be aided

through the use of the ASCA National Model (2012; Theme 1, Subcategory: *(c) When in doubt, lean on the ASCA National Model*).

Another dimension of this study's findings, though not explicitly stated, surrounds student to school counselor ratios. In my literature review, I discussed the role of ratios, specifically that they have been associated with positive outcomes for students (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012; Pham & Keenan, 2011) and argued to be especially important for, but not often seen in high poverty schools (Lapan, 2012). Additionally, Hatch and Chen-Hayes' (2008) survey of school counselors found ratios rated as the second most important factor in the ability to implement comprehensive programming services. One of the criticisms that I made of the Hatch and Chen-Hayes study is that it looked at school counselors' beliefs about ratios in absence of any corroborating evidence on programming. It could be argued, therefore, that school counselors' *belief* that higher ratios impede comprehensive programming is actually more of an impediment to CSCP than ratios themselves. Based on the findings of this study, ratios did not play a large role in counselors' ability to implement a CSCP, as only one of the eight counselors in this study (Jasmine) had a caseload under ASCA's recommendation of 250:1 (ASCA, 2012). Caseloads for the other counselors range from 405 (Erica) students to 900 students (Debbie)². Further, five of the schools in this study were Title I schools, which indicates that even in high-poverty environments, counselors can implement CSCP with a high student to counselor ratio.

² Debbie's caseload was 900 students on the days that the part-time counselor wasn't working. On the days that she was, her caseload would be 450, which is still 200 students more than ASCA's recommended ratio. Regardless, she was still only full-time school counselor, meaning that her caseload likely never felt like it was fully evenly split, even when the other counselor was working with her.

The findings of this study also support recent publications in school counseling literature (e.g., Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2016; Mason, 2016; Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donohue, 2016) which call for school counselors to partner their school counseling services with existing school initiatives (i.e., PBIS, MTSS) as a means of enhancing CSCP. Participants in this study indicated that utilizing existing school-level programs (e.g., communities in schools, PBIS, programs run by the social worker) provided important services and data that were included in RAMP applications. This further supports the notion that school counselors should trust their ability to leverage relationships to adequately complete the RAMP process, and need not feel that as though they must go through the process alone (Theme 1, Subcategory: *(e) Share the load*).

A final implication of the findings of this study as it relates to school counselors involves the timeline for implementing a RAMP-quality CSCP. Some counselors (Erica, Alexis, Jasmine) in this study applied for RAMP early in their careers, with fewer than five years of experience. Others, however, took a slower approach (e.g., Maria, Debbie, Phoebe, Wendy, Hannah) and waited until they had more experience. Both of the counselors who went through the process early, and in Title I schools, Alexis and Jasmine, noted that the RAMP process contributed to feelings of burnout. In Alexis' case, she ended up leaving the school counseling profession the year that she received RAMP distinction. Similarly, Debbie suggested that school counselors wait until they are at the same school for three to five years before they "can even think about trying to get them RAMP."

Aside from Wendy and Hannah, who created a CSCP in order to apply for RAMP, the counselors in this study generally took a slower approach to implementing a RAMP quality CSCP. Maria even gave herself a ‘practice-year’ to familiarize herself with the process. Based on the findings of this study, school counselors should feel comfortable taking a slow, multi-year approach to implementing a RAMP-quality CSCP. Easing into the RAMP process may serve to prevent counselor burnout, while leaning on the ASCA National Model when in doubt will lead to a more ASCA-aligned program, which has been correlated with higher levels of job satisfaction for school counselors (Clemens et al., 2009; Pyne, 2011).

Counselor Educators

The use of the ASCA National Model as a teaching tool is common for counselor educators (Pyne, 2011) and considered the profession’s highest standard of best practice (Sink et al., 2008). The findings of this study, therefore, hold implications for counselor educators who train school counselors. In line with the subcategory of *Share the load*, multiple participants in this study leaned upon their graduate training institutions (Maria, Debbie), or internship supervisors (Alexis) in navigating and completing the RAMP process. The findings of this study suggest that graduate programs can have an important impact on school counselors’ willingness to engage with the RAMP process, and can offer critical practical support for school counselors.

Given counselor educators’ research competence (Wester & Borders, 2013), they may be able to provide school counselors with means of conceptualizing and collecting accountability data, as this is an area where school counselors have been shown to struggle (Astamovich, 2017). Counselor educators may also familiarize themselves with

the RAMP application so that they can be of further assistance to practicing school counselors, and counselors in training. ASCA provides resources and examples that counselor educators may use to become familiarized with the RAMP application and its components (ASCA, 2018e; Appendix A, p. 205).

Counselor educators may also consider creating partnerships with local schools and their counselors. Pérusse, Poynton, Parzych, and Goodnough (2015) found that university-school partnerships have become more common over the last decade. These partnerships may entail matching master's level counselors-in-training with practicing school counselors through the completion of the RAMP application. Maria and Debbie both reported that school counseling interns were an important source of support through the RAMP application, even insofar as providing proofreading and another set of eyes on application materials.

The benefits of university-school partnerships would include school counselors being able to share the load of the RAMP application and allowing counselors-in-training to become familiarized with what the ASCA National Model and specifics of the RAMP application. In this study, Alexis shared that one of the hindrances to her applying for RAMP was the lack of familiarity with the components of the application. Given that the RAMP application utilizes ASCA-specific documents (ASCA, 2012), partnerships between interns and students could serve to provide students insight into the RAMP process as well as familiarity with the ASCA National Model.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

The ASCA National Model (2012) is currently in its third edition following a push for national standardization of the school counselor role that fully took hold over

twenty years ago. Despite this, education literature suggests that administrators (Bickmore & Curry, 2013; Fitch et al., 2001; Reiner et al., 2009) and teachers (Power & Boes, 2013) may hold inaccurate perceptions of school counselors' roles. Further, school counselors themselves have been wrought with role ambiguity (Pyne, 2011), and only six studies have been published on RAMP schools and their counselors despite the distinction having existed since 2004 (Wilkerson et al., 2013). In conjunction, this all suggests that ASCA has a PR problem in relation to its ability to adequately inform educational stakeholders of the role of school counselors.

All of the counselors in this study were trained after the introduction of the ASCA National Model. Still, many claimed that they felt uncertainty when going through the RAMP application, which is based on the National Model. One participant, Phoebe, even indicated that it was not until she went began the process a second time that she fully understood its benefits and completely bought into it.

Though ASCA does provide some resources for school counselors looking to RAMP (see: ASCA, 2018e: RAMP Resources), this page was only recently updated (in Fall 2017) to include the voice and stories of counselors who went through the process. In fact, despite being an ASCA member since 2012, I was unaware that this page even existed until I stumbled upon it through the RAMP main page in trying to find additional information on the RAMP application. This all speaks the fact that ASCA has inadequately informed its membership of the specifics of the RAMP application and what to expect when undergoing it. ASCA, therefore, should consider being more intentional highlighting the RAMP process and counselors who have gone through it to their membership.

On a practical level, ASCA may provide more clearly-filled examples and templates for school counselors to utilize in their RAMP applications. Participants in this study indicated that the RAMP application took a lot of time and effort, and that completion was aided by the existence of templates and materials that they could use for reference. Currently, the ASCA website provides blank, fillable templates for counselors to download. Then, on a separate page, provides examples of exemplary RAMP applications. In order to make these materials more usable for school counselors, ASCA may consider combining these two, such that school counselors can visit one location to download a blank copy of templates for their application while also being provided an example of what an ideal submission of that template would entail. Participants in this study indicated that one difficulty they encountered was a lack of feedback from ASCA throughout the process. In many cases, former RAMP recipients score RAMP applications on a volunteer basis, so the lack of consistent feedback may be due to a lack of dedicated workforce to do so. Providing more transparency on RAMP-application expectations may serve to alleviate some of the stress that applicants feel throughout the process regarding receiving little feedback. Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that the ability to obtain RAMP distinction came, in part, from counselors' persistence. Halper and Vancouver (2016) found that self-efficacy, coupled with specific feedback led to higher levels of persistence, whereas ambiguous feedback did not. Feedback during the RAMP application may therefore play a role in counselors' willingness to persist in its completion, and warrants ASCA looking into how to provide more specific feedback and expectations.

ASCA may also consider providing funding or a sliding-scale in regards to the cost of the RAMP application. Over half of the schools in this study were Title I schools, and therefore had a high population of students coming from low SES families. Title I funds are also falling (Leachman & Mai, 2014), meaning that counselors in these schools likely have less access to monetary support for their programs. The cost of the RAMP Application, therefore, may pose a real barrier to counselors applying for the distinction. In this study, only one counselor (Phoebe) indicated that she received funding for her CSCP, while another (Jasmine) reported that she had to pay out of pocket for the cost of the application. If ASCA believes in the importance of reaching all students, they should consider allowing schools to pay less for the application process when financial need is a factor.

Lastly, ASCA may facilitate more accurate understanding of school counselors through partnering with training programs for administrators and teachers to provide pre-service principals and teachers with an overview of school counselor roles and responsibilities. Research (e.g., Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009; Cholewa, et al., 2016) has found that administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school counselors may influence the duties that school counselors undertake, so having a more informed faculty may lead to more ASCA-aligned activities being undertaken by school counselors.

Strengths and Limitations

This narrative inquiry of elementary school counselors' perceptions of important considerations throughout the RAMP process has strengths as well as weaknesses. The main strength of this study comes from its design—narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiries aim to tell stories rather than answer research questions (Chase, 2010). Therefore, the

flexibility and semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed participants to feel in control, and have a chance for their voice to be heard and understood which has been a shortcoming of the school counseling literature. Additionally, the thematic analysis of participants' stories allowed for the creation of a common 'RAMP experience', and provided meaning to be attributed to counselors' RAMP journeys. The themes derived from the data of this study serve to begin filling the gap in the school counseling literature regarding the experience of engaging with the RAMP application and the perceived consequences of gaining RAMP distinction. This study is the first of its kind to explore the experience of the RAMP process as perceived by school counselors who successfully gained the distinction. It is the first to truly investigate the RAMP process (i.e., the motivations to apply for RAMP, the important considerations and resources necessary for obtaining RAMP, the specifics of the application process, and the consequences of successful attainment of RAMP distinction), and provide insight for counselors to make informed decisions on whether or not to pursue the distinction in their own schools.

Another strength of this study surrounds the variability of participants. Though literature suggests that elementary school counselors are typically the sole counselor in their building (Bodenhorn, 2006), four of the eight participants in this study were part of a counseling team, which helps the transferability of these results to other school levels where counseling teams are the norm. This study also surveyed counselors from a multitude of states, and from schools with varying student demographics including developed environment, SES, and race/ethnicity. Four of the counselors in this study did not receive RAMP on their first try, which provided further insight into the specifics of

the process. Finally, one of the participants completed the RAMP process at two schools, which allowed her a nuanced perspective that she shared in this study. Ultimately, the findings of this study hold implications for school counselors, as well as for counselor educators and the American School Counselor Association.

In addition to having strong elements, this study also has limitations that warrant future investigation. For one, the design of this study did not allow for a thorough exploration of all aspects of Schein's *organizational culture and leadership* (2004). Specifically, I was unable to get an adequate understanding of organizational culture of the schools in which counselors completed the RAMP process because interviews were conducted via phone or video-call. The use of remote interviewing did not provide an opportunity for me to see artifacts of school culture as I did not have a chance to visit schools. Moreover, the short-term nature of this study wouldn't have allowed me to truly understand the meaning of artifacts even if I had conducted site visits, as this would require longer-term observation of the school (Schein, 2004).

Additionally, *organizational culture and theory* (Schein, 2004) focuses heavily on the role of leaders in shaping the behavior of individuals, and argues that beliefs become abstracted to a level that they are invisible to members of the organization. Though I was able to ask about counselors' perceptions of organizational culture, it would be unrealistic to expect school counselors to accurately articulate this, as it would be invisible to them by their very nature of being part of the organization. Further, no participants had an understanding of the origins of the beliefs that influenced district/county and/or school culture, thereby facilitating or hindering their ability to apply for RAMP. In order to truly understand the influence of communities, districts, and schools on the role of the school

counselor, investigations would have to center on the leader(s) whose original beliefs became *basic underlying assumptions* (Schein, 2004) within the district. The complex, nested nature of school district leadership makes this investigation difficult, and out of the scope of this study, but still constitutes a limitation of the current design.

Another limitation of this study is that none of the school counselors interviewed worked in a rural setting. This limits the transferability of this study's findings to other schools as rural school counselors may be faced with unique challenges (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009), given that rural communities often have higher levels of poverty and fewer community resources than rural or urban neighborhoods (Robinson et al., 2017). This study also had a sample of only women. Though generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research (Leung, 2015), having a sample that also includes men may serve to enhance the transferability of these findings and could possibly provide a different perspective on the RAMP process given that men hold societal privilege (Case, Hensley, & Anderson, 2014).

A limitation of this study was the inability to explore how school counselors who obtained RAMP distinction utilized diversity and social justice competencies in doing so. Given that social justice and diversity are important elements of the ASCA National Model (2012), the protocol could have included questions that directly related to these constructs, especially given the diversity present in the counselors and schools utilized in this study.

Lastly, the participants in this study all had less than a decade of school counseling experience, and were trained since the introduction of the ASCA National Model. The findings of this study could have been strengthened through the inclusion of

counselors with more years of experience and/or who had been trained prior to the introduction of the ASCA National Model. This could have provided additional insights into motivations for attaining RAMP distinction.

Future Research

Given the findings, strengths, and limitations of the current study future research could more specifically investigate the role of district and community leadership on RAMP attainability. Specifically, a future study could look to explore what factors influence some districts' adoption of the ASCA National Model across all schools, versus having a singular school with RAMP distinction (e.g., Erica, Maria). Talking to district leaders who played a role in district understanding and utilization of the ASCA National Model may hold implications for policy that would make seeking RAMP distinction more common.

Future studies may also investigate the RAMP process at other school-levels, where counselors are part of a team. While the exact effects of a team-mentality on RAMP attainment are unknown, it could be the case that having the ability to divide aspects of the application across multiple members would serve to make the RAMP process feel less daunting and more attainable. At the same time, the division of responsibility may also lead to a lack of ownership of a CSCP, and therefore act as a hindrance to pursuing RAMP. Extant literature on school level (e.g., Dahir et al., 2009; Rayle & Adams, 2007) also indicates that elementary school counselors are most likely to participate in activities related to a CSCP than their secondary school counterparts. Middle and High school counselors may have unique challenges that were not able to be

highlighted in this study even with the inclusion of counselors on teams, which warrants further study of RAMP schools at other levels.

Given the recent drop-off in the number of RAMP schools from 2017-2018, additional studies could look into what factors lead to school counselors choosing to Re-RAMP. For example, a follow-up study could be done with this sample in five years' time to see how many followed through with the decision to Re-RAMP, and why or why they chose not to do so.

Lastly, additional research could be done to investigate what factors hinder school counselors from pursuing RAMP. Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) investigated school counselors' beliefs about necessary components for implementing CSCP, but having an understanding of what school counselors perceive to be specific barriers to RAMP may serve to inform district-initiatives, ASCA professional development, and counselor educators' use of the National Model as a training tool. This study represents the first of what could be many investigations of school counselors' experiences with the RAMP process.

Final Thoughts

As I finish this dissertation, I can't help but think about where it started—as a subject of curiosity in my Graduate Assistant office. The impetus for this study came from a reframing of how I perceived what research had to be. I found myself stuck, feeling like I wasn't, “passionate” about anything, and I could, therefore, never be a quality researcher. As I close this dissertation, I recognize the important lessons that I learned throughout it, and the ways in which the findings of this study (which focus on school counselors and their programs) speak to me in my journey to becoming a

counselor educator. Like the participants in this study, much of my journey involved my ability to engage with the process, even when I was unsure. In essence, I needed to take the same leap of faith that my participants' recommended other school counselors take. And, in fact, it is those same leaps of faith that I've taken throughout this Ph.D. journey—recognizing that good work doesn't come from having all the answers. It comes from a willingness to seek them out, even when uncertain.

I learned a lot through this process, especially in terms of the specifics of qualitative research. I gained a more thorough understanding of allowing the data to speak for themselves while also taking an active role as the investigator. Some of the findings were truly surprising. I came into this study assuming that district and school level resources would be important in attaining RAMP, and that rang true. But what I also came in with, which I hadn't realized, was the assumption that RAMP Distinction constituted an endpoint. The stories of my participants helped me understand how my own propensity to work towards attainable goals—to have something to show for my hard work-- blinded me to the perspective that RAMP Distinction was simply a title within the continual journey towards relevant, impactful student programming. I guess in a similar way, my eventual title of "Dr." will also be just a title within a continual journey. Though it technically marks the endpoint of my graduate program, it truly represents a new beginning as a researcher and counselor educator. It is also important to recognize the similarities between my journey throughout this program, and the journey of my participants. It is possible that the parallels between them are the result of myself coming into the interpretation of the data, as is the case with all qualitative research. Though steps were made to allow the data to speak for themselves (i.e., member checks,

peer debriefs, triangulation), it's possible that my findings were heavily influenced by my current journey.

I hope that in my future role, whatever it may be, I continue to let myself be humbled and open to new perspectives, and recognize that the internal changes we make for self-betterment have a higher value than any title or accolade ever could.

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Appendix A: Link to Exemplar RAMP Applications

<http://www.schoolcounselorawards.org/ramp/example>



RECOGNIZED ASCA MODEL PROGRAM (RAMP)
THE AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

[Login](#)

RAMP Application Examples

- [Couch Middle School](#)
- [Dothan Brook School](#)
- [J. Nelson Kelly Elementary](#)
- [Kersey Creek Elementary](#)
- [Lake Braddock Secondary School \(HS\)](#)
- [Parkview High School](#)
- [Shenendehowa High School](#)
- [Simpson Central School](#)
- [Southwood Middle School](#)
- [Twin Rivers Middle School](#)

[Return Home](#)
[Request Support](#)

1101 King Street, Suite 310
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asca@schoolcounselor.org

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Hi [COUNSELOR NAME],

My name is Kevin Duquette, and I am a third-year doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program at Penn State. I am also a former School Counselor who is conducting a dissertation about the experiences of RAMP Elementary School Counselors.

I am hoping that you would be willing to be a part of my study, which would consist of taking part in an interview that will last about an hour. (Some interviews may go a little bit longer, but we would check-in at the 1 hour mark to see if you'd like to continue).

Interviews will be conducted in the manner most convenient for you (e.g., Skype, FaceTime, phone, Google Hangouts). I am also hoping that you may be willing to review my thoughts on our interview to see if I have accurately portrayed your "RAMP Process" story. If possible, I would also like a chance to look at your RAMP Application materials if you have a copy.

My goal in completing this study is to increase understanding of the RAMP process as a means of helping School Counselors nationwide provide more comprehensive school counseling their own schools.

I am seeking participants who are Elementary School Counselors who successfully applied for and obtained RAMP distinction for their elementary schools. Ideally, participants would also have at least three years of school counseling experience, this year included.

I am hoping to interview six participants for this study. All participants will be entered into a drawing for one of two \$50 gift cards to the store or service of their choice. Winners will be notified once all interviews have been completed.

This study is going through the review process of Penn State's Human Subject Institutional Review Board (IRB) and will be approved before interviews begin.

If you are eligible and willing to take part, please contact me at kxd5295@psu.edu. I would be glad to answer any questions that you may have. Additionally, if you know any other School Counselors who fit my sample criteria, I would sincerely appreciate if you sent this e-mail to them as well.

Thank you so much!
-Kevin

Appendix C: IRB Approval/Exemption Determination Letter



PennState

Office for Research Protections

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research.psu.edu/orp

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

Date: January 18, 2018

From: Lindsay Kowalski, IRB Analyst

To: Kevin Duquette

Type of Submission:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	A Narrative Inquiry of Elementary School Counselors' Experiences Navigating The Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) Process
Principal Investigator:	Kevin Duquette
Study ID:	STUDY00008868
Submission ID:	STUDY00008868
Funding:	Not Applicable
Documents Approved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP-591 - Protocol for Human Subject Research. RAMP.Counselors.1.15.2018.pdf (2.01), Category: IRB Protocol • RAMP Interview Protocol (1).docx (2), Category: Data Collection Instrument

The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.

Continuing Progress Reports are **not** required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual ([HRP-103](#)), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (<http://irb.psu.edu>).

We would like to know how the IRB Program can better serve you.
Please fill out our survey; it should take about a minute: <https://www.research.psu.edu/irb/feedback>.

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Appendix D: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research: The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary School Counselors' Perceptions Of Important Considerations During The Process Of Gaining Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) Certification

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1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to explore elementary school counselors' experiences in applying for and obtaining RAMP distinction. The goal of this study is to increase understanding of the RAMP process as a means of helping School Counselors nationwide provide more comprehensive school counseling their own schools.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in an individual interview. Interviews will be audio-recorded (and video-recorded, if applicable). You can choose not to answer certain questions.

3. Duration: Interviews will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

4. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. All data will be stored on the primary investigator's computer and will be password protected. Only the primary investigator will have access to these files. Recordings will be destroyed by the year 2023. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no identifiable information will be shared.

5. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Kevin Duquette at (518) 956-0150 or at kxd5295@psu.edu with questions or concerns about this study. You may also contact my advisor—JoLynn Carney—at the number above if you have concerns about this study. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. However, the ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

6. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Elementary School Counselor RAMP Experience

PROMPTS, FOLLOW-UPS, ETC.

- Could you tell me a little bit more about...?
- Can you think of a time when...?

Opening:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate your help. I'm trying to understand the experience of school counselors in RAMP schools, which there are only about 250 of nationally. This means that you are one of the few counselors who has been able to obtain this designation. I want to hear about your experiences through the RAMP process.

The study is a narrative, so I'm really interested in the story the process—the important things that you had to consider along the way.

The questions I will ask are broad, but they will all focus on two levels. The first level will look at you, and how who you are interacted with and affected the RAMP process. The second level will look at how everything played out at the school level, and how the RAMP process was influenced by, or affected happenings within the school or district.

In an attempt to make sure we cover all the areas of the study, I may interrupt, ask clarifying questions, or suddenly shift topics. It's just to make sure that we get a fuller picture of everything. Just a reminder that none of the answers you share will be shared with anyone else who works at your school. I'd invite you to be honest to the extent that you feel comfortable sharing.

Before we get into your RAMP story I'll ask you a few questions about your experiences...

1. How long have you been a counselor?
 - a. How big is your caseload?
 - b. What year did you first apply for RAMP distinction?
 - c. And what year were you awarded RAMP distinction?
2. How do you identify culturally, in terms of gender, race & ethnicity, and age?
3. **Briefly**, what did you do before you were a counselor?

Interview Questions: All interview questions will be asked broadly, and then followed up with the following prompts:

- a) Can you help me understand how *you*, as the person who you are, fit into that?
- b) And what was that like for *you*?
- c) Can you help me understand what that looked like at the *school-level*?

- 1) If you were to imagine the RAMP Process as a story, what would that story be?
- 2) Could you tell me a little bit about some of the key resources that helped or hindered you during the process?
- 3) What changed after getting RAMP Distinction, for you and your role, or for students, or just in general?
 - a. Do you have an example that would help me picture what that change looked like?/ Help me understand what that looks like in action.
- 4) What is the likelihood of you Re-RAMPing? Why?
- 5) Anything else that would be important for me or other counselors to know about the process?

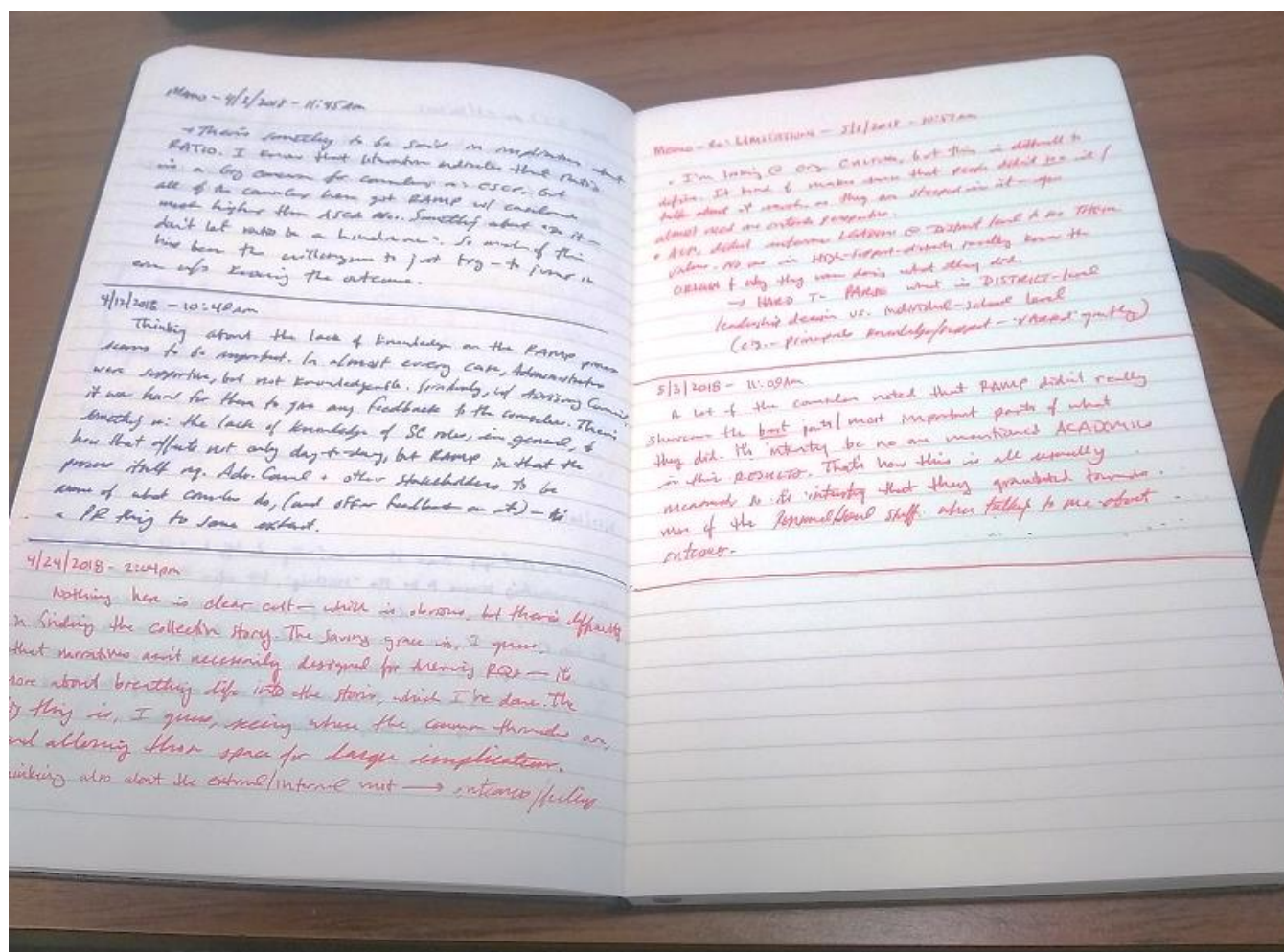
Possible Follow-Up Questions/Directions

- 6) What were the MOTIVATIONS to apply for RAMP Distinction?
 - a. How did you hear about the RAMP process?
 - b. What was easier about the process than you expected?
 - c. What was harder about the process than you expected?
 - d. Did you have any doubts before or during the process?
- 7) Were there any unexpected CONFLICTS during the process?
 - a. What were those like for you, personally, how did it/they make you feel?
- 8) Who would be the MAIN CHARACTERS in the story of your RAMP journey, and what would their roles have been?
- 9) Can you help me understand the role of SCHOOL or DISTRICT CULTURE on being able to start and sustain the RAMP process?
- 10) What do you think are important CHARACTERISTICS for school counselor who want to work towards getting RAMP distinction?
- 11) What has been the response from others to you gaining RAMP distinction?
 - a. How did that feel for you?

Closing:

Thank you again for your time and honesty. I really appreciate you allowing me to come learn a little bit more about the RAMP process, and all that it entails. If I have any follow-up questions, is it okay if I contact you? If so, how would you prefer that I get in touch (email, phone, skype)?
Thanks again!

Appendix F: Memo Example



4/27/2018

2:46pm

There's something here about the importance of viewing RAMP as a professional development opportunity. This was said explicitly by Debbie, but many of the people did not get RAMP the first time, but chose to persevere (which may also say something about the counselors themselves). For everyone, even when they "failed" it was a real learning experience, which made them want to keep going—it's a continued look at the importance of really trying to use all parts of the model. At least *trying* to use all parts of the model. Many people got rid of what didn't work for them in the years following RAMP, but the fact is that they *tried it*. It's about jumping in, even when uncertain. I really think that's one of the bigger pieces here.

Appendix G: Participants' Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Yrs. experience when applied	School type	Counselors on counseling team	Developed environment	Caseload
Alexis	27	White	Female	3	K-5	1	Urban Title I	545
Erica	32	White	Female	2	K-5	1	Suburban	405
Phoebe	42	African American	Female	5	K-5	1	Urban Title I	700
Maria	38	White	Female	5	K-4	1	Suburban Title I	400
Debbie	37	White	Female	5	P-5	1.5	Urban Title I	900 (2x/wk) 450 (3x/wk)
Wendy	44	White	Female	8	K-2	2	Suburban	600
Hannah	35	White	Female	8				600
Jasmine	32	African American	Female	4	K-5	3	Urban Title I	200

Table 2: Themes, Subcategories, & Illustrative Quotes

Theme	Subcategory	Additional Illustrative Quotes
<p>Don't be afraid to engage in the process: The implementation of a fully comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP) that would warrant RAMP distinction can be a time-consuming and difficult process, as can the actual RAMP application itself (which consists of twelve parts). This may act as a deterrent to school counselors, especially if they do not have a strong understanding of their role, or what the RAMP application entails. The results of this study indicated that multiple participants felt similarly, but were still able to adequately complete the process and earn RAMP distinction for their schools. Fear, therefore, should not be a reason that school counselors choose not to at least engage with the RAMP process (including beginning a CSCP,</p>	<p>Passion is not a pre-requisite: Multiple counselors in this study were not, at least initially, internally motivated to obtain RAMP. Instead, going through the RAMP application was catalyzed by an external force (e.g., district request or requirement; state-level evaluations). Counselors, therefore, need not feel particularly passionate about their CSCP to engage in the process and possible achieve RAMP distinction.</p>	<p>“Again as elementary school counselors, even within this district, people don't always look at us as valuable as the counselors at the upper grade levels and we wanted to prove to everyone, not just in our district but in our community that we are doing a lot of good work with the students. But that I think was the underlying goal always. But again with like she said, evaluations coming, at least for [our state], I think we could potentially see more people going for it because who's going to get a bad evaluation if you've got RAMP. You really proved yourself there.” (Hannah)</p>
	<p>Fight through the rigidity of the application: Many counselors felt frustrated with the specificity of the templates and documents that they were required to submit, and in some cases, felt like the act of having to format everything in order to receive full-credit actually hindered their implementation of a good CSCP. This subcategory acts as a means of informing counselors that this may happen, and illuminates an otherwise-unknown experience of going</p>	<p>Time to complete the application presented a challenge: “I was the only full-time counselor during my seven years there. With me I had a three day a week counselor, they call them itineraries there and they share other schools. So, it's hard to say what my caseload was because two days a week they were my 900 kids ...I did National Boards and RAMP [applications when my daughter was at summer camp, outside of school. Because I didn't do any of the work inside of school, let's be honest, not in a school like that, 70% of your time is response time at a busy Title 1 school, so you have to be willing to give 100 to 200 hours outside of school easily to RAMP if it's not conducive to get it done during the work day... You can't lesson plan, and do RAMP, in 20% [of your time]. If you're going to do it, it's going to take a lot of time. So, RAMP, it's like you're either lying about your hours if you're getting it done during the day or, like me, you just do it all outside of</p>

<p>and possibly the application)</p>	<p>through the RAMP application.</p>	<p>school. So, I want to say, for an elementary [school counselor]... being alone is a huge hindrance because you don't have anybody to check in with..." (Debbie)</p> <p>"I think just time always being a challenge... the actual typing all of the things up and compiling it all took some time." (Erica)</p> <p>"It was a lot more work I think than what we thought. I think had we realized, I don't know, that might have been a deterrent at the beginning too... But I don't know. I was just a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of work. It was a lot of time putting words down on paper."(Wendy)</p> <p>"My narratives and all that, but it ended up being 88 pages long, but when I submitted my application, these were all things that I had to print out before I submitted it because [ASCA] said that it wouldn't save it, if that makes sense. So I had to print all this, and then scan it, and save it." (Alexis)</p> <p>Flexibility of Role Not Reflected in RAMP Application (Rigidity)</p> <p>"They asked to put out a timeline I guess, where it's a guideline where September you should work on that, and then October work on this, guidelines as to application-wise, which sections you could do and you could finish and all those types of things. And just doing that and going through and having every single thing that you needed for your application, and then it's like, 'Oh man, I had to have lesson plans for all those written out?' Because I just jot down a sentence, 'We're gonna do this,' instead of the whole lesson plan, because I already know what I'm going to do. So, I have to type eight lesson plans out for this group, and all the data. Just trying to keep all those where they needed to go and keep it all straight, and get the narrative written, and proofread, and then go over it again..." (Maria)</p> <p>Feedback from ASCA Not Helpful</p>
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		<p>“I do feel like it was pretty clear in how they're scored, the numbers. I do feel like we knew, ‘Hey, if you didn't turn in this you're not going to get ... The most you could possibly get is a three,’ or that kind of stuff. That's why when I did turn in a separate agenda and a separate minutes, that I was like, ‘Oh, that's why we got a two in that category.’ I guess I was thinking they would know that the agenda were the minutes, so I just submitted the agendas and really gained us three points. So, I feel like we were pretty clear. I feel like part of me, being that overachiever was like, ‘What?’ When I didn't automatically get it, I was like, ‘Are you kidding me? I think of how we're breaking our backs at our school and I really am sure we're offering this comprehensive program and you're telling me that I'm not.’ (Debbie)</p>
	<p>When in doubt, lean on the model: School counselors interviewed in this study were often unclear about what their role should specifically entail within their schools. This was usually accompanied by administrative support for the counselor to craft a program as they saw fit. Counselors used the ASCA National Model as a guide for their programs. Doing so led to more intentional, data-driven programs, and provided a buffer against non-counseling duties being assigned to them.</p>	<p>Presence of supportive, (though sometimes unknowledgeable) administration:</p> <p>“I feel like I'm in the situation too where, again, we're talking about a Title 1 school, so I had a new principal the year we were doing it. She didn't know anything about school counseling, in the elementary level.” (Debbie)</p> <p>“My principal really wasn't providing a lot of concrete feedback in terms of her expectations either, and so I figured that was going to be a good way for me as a new counselor to structure my program...She was very supportive of the counseling program, but not very knowledgeable about what it should look like. Her feedback was always positive. It was always, "I'm just happy you're doing anything." Which I found uplifting, but not terribly helpful.” (Erica)</p> <p>“[In terms of how knowledgeable they were about the counselor role or the RAMP process?] Not very. And unfortunately they're still there. They just ... ‘Hey our counselors’ are great and that's it.” (Wendy)</p>

		<p>“My first principal, he knew an abundance about the school counselor role. He didn't really know what RAMP was; he just knew it was a high distinction. Once we explained it to him, he was all on board about it. He was very excited about it. He would even come to our Advisory Council meetings just to make sure we were on track and things like that. However, our second principal, he was a great principal, but he was also an interim principal, and he had other fires to put out. So, he wasn't as ... I won't say he wasn't supportive. He just let us do our own thing, and was like, ‘Let me know what you need.’” (Jasmine)</p> <p>“Each person had a different principal whose expectations was different. Like some counselors had to do lunch duty every day and that took away from your time. So it became a little wiggle room with that. So I was lucky enough one of my principals used to be a counselor so she understood, and the other one he was just like, ‘hey do whatever you want, I need some help I don't care what you do’.” (Phoebe)</p> <p>“... We came in on a three year grant and it was saying we have a need for school counselors. Okay, so now we have this need, we have to show: ‘what is this need for?’ What better way for that than data? So the principals and assistant principals were like, ‘oh yeah they're pretty cool, yeah this is pretty great, oh, oh, we have counselors now’. But still, like I said, not all the teachers understood, not a lot of principals understood.” (Phoebe)</p>
	<p>Prepare to advocate: There were times during the RAMP process and application that counselors were required to intentionally advocate for their time or programming.</p>	

	<p>Share the load: The RAMP application (and the act of putting a CSCP worthy of RAMP distinction in place) is time consuming and difficult. This can act as a deterrent from engaging with the process, especially for elementary school counselors who are often the only counselors in their school. Despite being the champions of their programming, and the individuals responsible for the RAMP application, school counselors can leverage existing relationships and programs to ensure that the responsibility of creating a CSCP and obtaining RAMP does not fall entirely on their shoulders.</p>	<p>District:</p> <p>“We just used people as our resources. Like, my grant coordinator, the elementary person over us. Since we're elementary, we have a person over us at a district level. She evaluates for ASCA. We just used people that we knew to help us” (Jasmine)</p> <p>“So our, he's now our Assistant Superintendent but at the time he was over Student Services. And he said, ‘I want you guys to get RAMP.’ So we were like, ‘Oh, okay, he's gonna become assistant superintendent we really gotta do this and make it great.’ And he said, ‘You need to present to the school board.’ And we were like, ‘Present?’ We need data to present to the school board and basically fight for our jobs.” (Phoebe)</p> <p>“Well, and really even whenever I submitted [ASCA] documents, I'm not sure if this is how other counties do it, but at least in [my county], there were other counselors within [the county] that would review the documents that I sent in, and give me feedback. I don't think that was the case for RAMP. I think obviously it had to be one of the ASCA-certified people. So technically, I guess it would still be my peers that were reviewing my normal ASCA documents...” (Alexis)</p> <p>“So I think another person that was very helpful was our elementary [county] person that's over all the elementary counselors...She was a really big support, as far as she worked with all the schools that she knew wanted to RAMP. She took time that I could submit different narratives or documents that I had to her, and she would proofread them and revise them for me. So that's another thing that I was very fortunate that I had someone who was experienced in reviewing different RAMP applications, who could look through that application through a reviewer's eyes, and give me feedback. So I think, for me, the process</p>
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		<p>wasn't as bad because I didn't have to resubmit it.” (Alexis)</p> <p>Community: “I found a lot of parents upset with the schools like, ‘Oh they only like this. Or all the teachers don't care about my students.’ Well here’s your voice, here's a time where you can talk really how you feel and let's really look into this. The same with the community. Well you were here in our community and you have a community center and no one really knows what the community center does. Come in and talk to us about it and let's hear how we could blend the two. How the school can help the community center and how the community center can help us.” (Phoebe)</p> <p>... I was fortunate that my internship supervisor did believe in using ASCA documents, so I got to see it, because I can't even imagine if I hadn't had any exposure to it at all entering into the position in [my county], and then being expected my first year to fill out all of these by October. So not only as a new counselor am I trying to figure out what I'm doing, and trying to get to know the students, staff, now I'm expected to submit this information at a brand-new school when I don't know anyone... Otherwise, you're starting from scratch with nothing. So I think that that's another important element, too, because then again, you already have something at least for the first year that you're completing these ASCA documents, that you have something to go off of, rather than having to create an entire new program from scratch. So I think that that's something that we didn't really talk about in our program, but luckily my internship supervisor was like, ‘Let me give you all this stuff.’” (Alexis)</p> <p>School “I recognize that not all counselors get that same support [from their administration]. So I was able to take a couple of days to go to workshops that were just like working</p>
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		<p>workshops, that I was able to work on my RAMP application all day... I think I would not have been able to RAMP without those couple of working days to be able to sit down and knock it out, and with some teacher workdays.” (Alexis)</p> <p>Wendy: During the process I would say to her, ‘I can’t do this anymore, we’re done’. And she’d pick me up and the next day she would say it and I would pick her up.</p> <p>Hannah: I think it was the same thing that happened even during the initial [RAMP application] process, it was one day she would say, ‘no I’m done, I’m mad we’re not doing this again’. And I’d say, ‘well come one let’s try it’. And then the other when I said ‘you know you’re right, let’s just not do this’, then she would maybe have a change of heart.</p> <p>“I didn’t have non-counseling duties. So I had time to actually do the things that I wanted to do. I didn’t have any lunch duty because she knew that I was doing lunch groups at that time. Every once in a while I’d have to cover, maybe one day a week. I think it was my last year there that I actually did have a lunch duty because our numbers were just so high, that yeah, fair share, that’s cool. But otherwise I wasn’t asked to do anything inappropriate for school counselors. I mean, I was really a school counselor, which was really nice.” (Maria)</p>
<p>The value of the RAMP process comes from how it changes counselors’ perceptions of themselves: The reception of RAMP distinction did not always have an impact on how counselors were seen by other</p>	<p>The journey provides meaning for the destination: The amount of time and work that went into counselors’ CSCP and RAMP applications was not always met by an equal amount of recognition by other stakeholders. For some school counselors, going</p>	<p>Response from school personnel upon receiving distinction: “From seeing other people who have RAMPed, I know the way that [my county] does it, usually is that at the beginning of the year at counselor celebration kickoff, that they do at the beginning of school, they recognize those schools, and they come up to the front. They receive their plaque and have their picture taken, but outside of that, it just ... Like I went to visit my school the other day, and the plaque’s just sitting in the counselor’s office,</p>

<p>stakeholders. It did, however, change how they saw themselves and the work that they did. The biggest benefit of the RAMP process (i.e., implementing a CSCP and completing the RAMP application) came from how it changed counselors' view of themselves and their program, as well as how it influenced future iterations of their CSCP.</p>	<p>through the RAMP process did not change how they were seen or utilized in the school. For others, it did. The act of going through the RAMP process (i.e., creating a CSCP and completing the RAMP Application) influenced how they were seen differently more so than the actual act of receiving RAMP distinction from ASCA. Though the distinction provided an external validation for the work that went into counseling programs, much of the value came from the steps that were taken to be able to obtain it.</p>	<p>which is fine, but it's one of those things that I almost wish I had stayed another year to like, not to toot my own horn or anything, but it would've been nice to have that displayed maybe more prominently in a different area, to show that our school does have it. I don't know..." (Alexis)</p> <p>"[The administration] don't want [the RAMP distinction plaque] in the building. I mean it's in my office because nobody else cares." (Wendy)</p> <p>"I think [the response from my school] was disappointing. I mean, I guess I was expecting, I don't know, something, but now having, I mean I know I'm still relatively new, only it being my sixth year, but now sort of understanding more of how it works in education. Now I'm unsurprised that that is what happened." (Erica)</p> <p>"I don't feel like [teacher and administrators] would have been like, 'Oh, because you guys are RAMP I'm going to take you more seriously.' I think that we were just that type of practitioner who would use data and things... So, it wasn't really getting RAMP, it was just being an ASCA National Model counselor using data and trying to create change, create that change...us saying, 'Here, I offer groups at school because I need to see that students are improving their reading level, improving their attendance. They are decreasing their number of visits to the principal's office.' And having that data is important and saying that, 'These are lessons I teach because my National Model, these are the mindsets and behaviors, and these are how they fall under it, and this is why I'm teaching this lesson to these kids.'" (Debbie)</p>
	<p>Going through the process leads to more reflective, intentional counselors, who are more in tune with what their role entails: The counselors in this study</p>	<p>"But I guess during the process, it was stressful, but by the end of the process I was glad that I did it because I think as counselors, even though it takes a lot of time to turn in your ASCA forms, it's helpful because for me, even though it was a lot of front-loading work at the beginning of the year, I felt very organized for</p>

	<p>felt that the most meaningful and impactful result of the RAMP process was the way that it changed how they saw themselves professionally. They believed that having gone through the process and earning RAMP distinction led to them being more intentional in the work that they did as well as more reflective in ensuring that their work had meaning for their students.</p>	<p>the rest of the year, and felt like I had a very clear vision of what I was going to be doing, how I was going to be collecting data, and how I was going to be analyzing data. So...I'm glad that I did it, and it made me reflective as a counselor.”(Alexis)</p> <p>“... I really feel like [the RAMP process] becomes that idea of, ‘If you view this as an opportunity for professional development to critiques your program, to check it out, to make sure you're doing all the things to really look at data, to have that time.’ I feel like it's an important process. I do, I really think school counselors should go through it at least once. ... I feel like, while I hated them, the amount of time they took you to think, I feel like the reflections were a huge part of accomplishing this and maybe sometimes the most impactful for you to reflect. So, while I almost feel like, I wish they just didn't have them, because if they didn't have them, like, ‘Why do I need to write 750 words on this group action plan?’ Like, ‘Just look at it.’” (Debbie)</p> <p>“Yeah. [RAMP] is like anything else, like, ‘What does a plaque even mean?’ You know, it's ... I don't know. It's not money.” (Debbie)</p> <p>“[Will I re-RAMP?] That's where I'm kind of unsure. I definitely drank the ASCA model Kool-Aid though. I'll stick with that. That's a good question. I guess it is nice to have that small level of validation that at least I'm doing something the right way, at least according to ASCA. That is nice to have that kind of mental validation.” (Erica)</p> <p>I do still really believe that [getting RAMP] was helpful in structuring my program. I think that having that goal as an end point helped to keep me accountable, and so I do think that even if nothing else, it was really useful in that. I think that for a new counselor who's straight out of grad school, having that as their end goal</p>
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		<p>could really help I think in the absence of other support.</p> <p>...RAMP definitely required feedback from a lot more stakeholders. That's not to say that [National] Boards didn't, but I think that RAMP definitely forced me to be more reflective in a team kind of way. (Erica)</p> <p>“I think [doing RAMP] was worth it. One, because it made us ... Not that we didn't self-evaluate at the end of the school year, but we kind of were like, ‘Hey, we did a good job this year. Let's do this again.’ With this process, it was different because we had to have the data, the numbers, the perception data. We had to make sure everything was in align with ASCA. And if it didn't, then we knew, ‘Okay. We need to really look at this and go back and work on it.’ So, that was the kind of annoying part because it was like, ‘Hey, we were doing a good job before we had to do this.’ But it was good because we figured some programs that were effective and programs that we just liked, so ...I want to re-RAMP just to make sure that ... Again, re-evaluating our process just to make sure we're doing everything that's effective. Not that we like it, but it's effective for our kids.” (Jasmine)</p> <p>Wendy:... [RAMP] was just a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of work. It was a lot of time putting words down on paper. But it was really fun and it was really motivating to see the attendance go down and to see the bus referrals go down.</p> <p>Hannah: And had we not really been looking at that data so specifically and so in depth. We would have maybe realized all that we are doing in the school.</p> <p>Wendy: Definitely rewarding. Yeah.</p>
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	<p>The journey doesn't end with RAMP distinction: Despite having a national distinction, and recognition for a model program, many counselors were still required to continue advocating for their role, and their time.</p>	<p>“So I think that was eye-opening for me, that I was like, ‘I said I was going to do all these wonderful things, and then I did about a quarter of them.’ So I think that was a big personal change for me, was that sometimes I feel like it's so much work to submit this, and it's so data-focused, but for me the most important part is the reflection part, and how to make changes for the following year... Instead of counselors having to sit at a bunch of beginning of the year meetings that aren't relevant for us all, [why can't they be] able to have the opportunity to opt out, and say, ‘You know what? I'm going to look at the data I have from the year before to strategically plan and make changes for what I'm going to implement.’” (Alexis)</p>
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Appendix H: Alexis' Story

Alexis' RAMP story truly began prior to her applying for RAMP or even becoming a school counselor. Alexis knew that she wanted to work with children, but it was during the student-teaching portion of her undergraduate education that she realized that school counseling may be the correct career path for her. In her words:

I was majoring in elementary education, because I knew I wanted to work with kids, and I thought that would be in a teaching capacity. I took all my requirements for elementary education but it was actually when I was student teaching ... I was student teaching in a second-grade classroom my senior year, and I just had a realization that I loved working with the kids, but that I was more concerned about their social, emotional needs than I was about the academic side.

I actually had met... a counselor that I was just so impressed with, and so I picked her brain about like, 'What did you do to become a counselor? How do you feel about it?' It was pretty funny because that counselor that I talked to ended up being in my [professional circle] once I started working. So she gave me the rundown about counseling, and I just realized that I felt like it was a better fit for me.

...It was one of those things that I debated about whether or not to take a break from going to school, and maybe working to earn money, but honestly, I knew how, and this sounds bad, but I knew how miserable I felt as a teacher.

So I didn't want to start working as a teacher, and then know in my heart that I wanted to do counseling instead. So for me, it was just easier to go ahead and transition...as far as...becom[ing] a counselor that was really my first job. I had like part-time jobs in college but as far as my first adult job.

The county where Alexis got her first job as a school counselor was familiar with the ASCA National Model, and the RAMP process. It was pretty much immediate, then, that she began thinking about undergoing the process herself, though she wasn't officially allowed to until she had a few years of experience under her belt. Now a few years removed from the experience, the specifics of it are blurry,

I don't remember if it was a county recommendation or if it was ASCA, but I was told that I could not RAMP until I had three years under my belt of submitting ASCA documents, so I waited until after the third year that I had ... I guess it was the results from my third year that I sent in to RAMP...

Motivations for RAMP

There were many motivations for Alexis to apply for RAMP. On the one hand, she had personal reasons for wanting to apply—that it helped her stay organized, and in control of her role. Additionally, there were the aforementioned county-expectations that school counselors use the ASCA National Model.

I guess the reason that I RAMPed is because I wanted to know, for my own personal reasons, how my counseling program stacked up against others nationally, to see, 'Am I on the right track? Is this what counselors that are professionals across the country ... Are they implementing similar things?' So by the end of the process, I did feel very accomplished, but it was definitely a long road to get there..., even though it was a lot of front-loading work at the beginning of the year, I felt very organized for the rest of the year, and felt like I had a very clear vision of what I was going to be doing, how I was going to be collecting data, and how I was going to be analyzing data.

[My county had an] expectation that all counselors submit ASCA documents...I was always too scared to never do it. And I liked having it because it kept me organized, but I know that there were some counselors that just never submitted anything. I don't know if there were any ramifications for that, but it was something that I liked, too, because it was an accountability tool...

Moreover, on a different level, somewhere between the personal and professional was an idea of the legacy that she would leave behind for the counselor who came after her. In stepping to her first role as a school counselor, Alexis noticed the disconnect between what her expectations were of the role, and what the reality of the role were. The ways in which she did and didn't feel ready for the reality of being a school counselor based on her training.

[In my] experience ... with [my master's program]...I was prepared on the counseling side, but the logistical side of things I did not feel prepared at all... I think it took those first couple of years of submitting those ASCA documents to become comfortable enough, and getting that feedback of, "Am I filling them out correctly?" Because that was one thing I feel like, even though, yes, I enjoyed [my master's] program, I did not feel very prepared in terms of what that looked like. It was one of those things that I felt like when I first saw them as a new counselor, that it was like, 'I had no idea what this stuff means.'

I was really the first counselor that used ASCA documents, so I think the counseling before me had, but it was interesting because his position was split 50% math teacher, 50% counselor, the counselor that was there before me, which obviously we know is a huge no-no...Technically, as a county employee, he was 100% employed as a counselor, but within my school they divided it. It was odd. So that was another barrier I

had to overcome, that he was a good counselor, but he didn't do as much due to the restrictions of his roles... But it was something that I think they didn't feel that counseling was effective because at the time it wasn't being implemented 100% with fidelity, with data.

Alexis also faced some struggles with understanding what good data looked like, and how school counselors can use data practically. Her graduate training hadn't necessarily completely prepared her:

I know [my graduate program] talked about different kinds of data to use but I felt like we didn't really see any examples...when I came in I had a meeting with the previous counselor for about 20 minutes, and he shared a little bit about what he did.

Based on her own experiences in stepping into the role, and having to build a program from the ground up, Alexis wanted to make sure that things were different at her school for future counselors. Interestingly, Alexis received RAMP distinction just before she left her school. She cited burnout as part of the reason she left, some of which came from the sheer number of responsibilities she took on so early in her career. She enjoyed her job as a counselor, and often took on additional roles on a volunteer basis.

...There was one year I signed up to help out with the talent show and, again it wasn't something that someone gave me. It was something that I volunteered to do, which may have also attributed to my burnout, but I have always been a believer in being a team player, and so they needed someone to help, and so I volunteered to help, but a lot of the additional duties that I had were counseling-related. For example, I had a mentoring program that met after school on Tuesdays, but again, obviously that's directly related to counseling. I also was involved with different PBIS assemblies every quarter, but again,

also directly involved with the behavior goal. So I'm not saying I didn't have additional duties, but if I did, it was counseling-related so I didn't feel any sort of resentment or like, 'Why am I having to do this? I don't understand.'

... One of the things I thought about was, 'If I were to leave my school, what would I leave behind?' A big reason why I RAMPed is I still was kind of on the fence about whether or not I was going to leave my school or not, but I still wanted something that left my mark with my counseling program... I wanted to take some of the pressure off of the counselor that came in after me, to give them a few years to be able to get acclimated like I had a few years to be able to get acclimated...When I left my school, I had like eight to 10 pages typed out for the [counselor] that came in, and I met with her for like four hours. So it was probably very overwhelming but I also provided her with ... She was brand-new... She hadn't gotten an opportunity to do groups, or classroom guidance... so I gave her pretty much everything that I had, shared through Dropbox and everything.

Alexis made an explicit effort to ensure that the counselor who came after her was better prepared and would have an easier time navigating the many aspects of the role than she did herself.

Important Resources

Alexis' RAMP Story had many moving parts that often intertwined. Some resources came from the county whereas others were present in her school, or within herself. The boundaries created by noting the "setting" from which each set of resources came can make the distinctions between feel rigid when, in reality, they were quite fluid.

County

Many of the key resources that Alexis used came from the county-level. The county had an expectation that counselors would use the ASCA National Model, and possibly apply for RAMP, which Alexis mentioned acted as an accountability tool. In addition, there were other county-specific resources that she leaned upon, ranging from human-capital to more practical or tangible materials. For example, the county utilized a counselor-evaluation tool that rated school counselors' performance based on the many roles that counselors play. This, and other county-level resources indicated that the county valued school counselors and the work that they do, and provided some assistance to Alexis throughout the process.

[My county] had a new evaluation tool that came out maybe a year or two after I started working, and it was very specific about the counselor's role in a variety of different facets. So with the evaluation tool, I also used these ASCA documents to be able to provide different artifacts for these different standards and objectives that I was having to meet.

The county's expectations, and value given to counselors, also provided Alexis some much needed time to work on her RAMP application, albeit not without obstacles.

...I was able to take a couple of days to go to workshops that were just like working workshops, that I was able to work on my RAMP application all day. I had a couple of days where I was able to do that because that year I believe we had a lot of snow, so there were workdays that I was planning to do RAMP things, but then those workdays got turned into normal schooldays because we ran out of schooldays, so that was challenging, as well... I think I would not have been able to RAMP without those couple of working days to be able to sit down and knock it out, and with some teacher workdays

Alexis was also afforded an opportunity to complete and receive feedback on ASCA documents, even in the years prior to submitting for RAMP distinction. This gave her practice presenting her data in the same format as the RAMP Application required. As she told it, “Whenever I submitted [ASCA] documents..., there were other counselors within [the county] that would review the documents that I sent in, and give me feedback.” Because of the county’s focus on the ASCA National Model, other counselors had RAMPed as well, which provided an infrastructure of resources for counselors to pull from, to see what RAMP-quality documents looked like, even if not enough for an entire school year.

We had [a database within the county] that was just for counselors, and it was all levels, and they had different I guess master counselors submitted different lesson plans for group classes, and all those kind of things. So there were some to pull from. It was some, but again, it's not enough to cover an entire year.

In addition to practical, infrastructure based resources that provided her guidance and much needed time, Alexis’ professional learning team (PLT) played a key role in the process on a human-capital level.

I really heavily leaned on my PLTs to really help me the first couple of years that I filled out the documents because I wasn't sure if I was doing it correctly, how to implement it correctly. So that would be I would say the start of the story for the RAMP process because I think without the support of my PLT, my regional PLT, that I would not have pursued RAMPing eventually because I wouldn't have felt comfortable.

Alexis’ county also had someone to oversee all elementary school counselors, who assisted in the RAMP process.

...Another person that was very helpful was our county person that's over all the elementary counselors. [That person] was a really big support, as far as they worked with all the schools that wanted to RAMP. I could submit different narratives or documents that I had to [them], and [they] would proofread them and revise them for me...I was very fortunate that I had someone who was experienced in reviewing different RAMP applications, who could look through that application through a reviewer's eyes, and give me feedback.

In addition, Alexis leaned on former colleagues, including her internship supervisor. Alexis ended up getting a position in the county where she'd completed her internship, and was therefore able to continue this relationship.

My internship supervisor, she was great in showing me what those ASCA documents looked like... I was fortunate that my internship supervisor believed in using ASCA documents, so I got to see it, because I can't even imagine if I hadn't had any exposure to it at all entering into the position in [the county], and then being expected my first year to fill out all of these by October... I took probably the last week of my internship at my school like making copies, getting resources from my internship supervisor, so I would have something to start with... luckily my internship supervisor was like, 'Let me give you all this stuff.'

School

At the school-level, other members of the faculty and staff were an asset. One of the most difficult parts for her was the fact that she was the only counselor, and therefore in charge of every aspect of the RAMP application. Further, the county-expectations of counselors using the ASCA National Model and applying for RAMP trickled down to individual schools such that

administrators had heard of the distinction. According to Alexis, “When I first started at my school, my principal did ask me pretty much from the beginning like, ‘Oh, do you plan on RAMPing at any point?’” She also felt lucky to have the staff that she did—administration and teachers played a key role in her ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program through moral support, and in some cases, monetary support.

My school was very supportive, so I was lucky in the fact that, of course, my administrators, as soon as told them that I wanted to RAMP, of course they were like all for it. ‘Oh, just let us know what you need.’ I recognize that not all counselors get that same support... I was very fortunate that my administrators were very supportive of the counselor role...my school ended up paying for the application fee for RAMPing. I didn't have to pay for it because my administrators were so onboard with wanting that, and again, it looks good for our school, but it was a personal goal that I had, and they realized that. They were very supportive of me personally, and so there wasn't really any pushback from them at all. They were immediately very supportive of it.

Teachers were [also] great. I had a representative from pretty much every grade level, [and] I asked them to share the [ASCA] documents ... with their team for feedback, initially at the beginning of the year, and also for the data at the end of the year.

Alexis' RAMP experience was truly collaborative. She drew from the services provided by other specialists within the school, which was especially important given her position as the sole school counselor.

I collaborated with the social worker, and psychologist, and all that, [because] as far as actually implementing the program, I'm on my own. So it's nice to have some sort of sounding board to be able to see if what I'm doing is effective, or if it's best practice, or if

there's things that needed to be changed... With the [RAMP application] attendance goal specifically, I was very fortunate that the social worker that was there at the time. We had a great working relationship, and collaborated constantly. I would help her with attendance groups. We went on home visits together. She actively involved me in different things dealing with attendance, so that also helped.

In addition to school personnel being a big support, a somewhat unexpected resource was the parent representatives on Alexis' Advisory Council. One parent in particular was able to connect with other members of the community in ways that she couldn't, so she therefore leaned on the connections that he would be able to make with other parents.

The majority of our population was Asian students, and so we had a lot of families who came from [surrounding areas], that would ride the bus for over an hour to get to our school... Probably the biggest support that I had, that I was surprised by, was the parent aspect... that I it was interesting to get the parents' perspective as far as what they wanted the counseling program to be for their children. So it was interesting because the year that I RAMPed, it was an Asian parent that was there, but he was willing to come in... [We had] struggled with a lot of our Asian families placing a lot of pressure on their students to academically perform well, and [this parent] was willing to come in and do a "partner workshop" to talk to Asian families specifically about why placing all this pressure on your children is not beneficial for them. So I thought that was very interesting because just hearing from someone from their own culture...

Personal

In order to successfully obtain RAMP, Alexis needed to pull from multiple environmental (i.e., county, school, community) resources. But it was not a one-way street. It

was a reciprocal process. There were elements who Alexis is, as a person, that influenced these interactions and her ability to create and maintain a comprehensive program. If it were simply a matter of environmental resources, then counselors before her would have been able to gain RAMP distinction, but they did not. Alexis personally shaped her role within the school, even within the first few days of arriving.

When I got to my school as a brand-new counselor, I advocated for myself and said, ‘I don't know exactly what this is going to look like, but I know that I'm going to need a lot of training. I know that what I want to do, and what other counselors before me have done, and I want to implement the same thing.’ from the beginning when I got to my school, I was very clear that my job was to be the counselor.

I was very upfront about that from the beginning, like, ‘I'm not a disciplinarian. If you're a teacher and you're calling me to come pull a child from your classroom, I'm going to have a counseling conversation with them, and my ultimate goal is to get them back in the classroom as quickly as possible, because I don't want them missing out on academic time, of course, within the parameters that they are in the right mindset to go back to learning.’

Because this process was interactive, there were elements of the ways in which people other than Alexis played a part in this, which she recognized, and acknowledged, “I think it was easier for me to be able to advocate for myself because from the beginning I had an administration that had my back, and was like, ‘Of course, we support that 100%’”.

Alexis used her time wisely, and stayed busy each day, working towards creating a comprehensive school counseling program. Given everything she undertook so quickly, it is not surprising that she succumbed to some level of burnout within the first few years of her career.

Her ability to remain busy also had a lot of utility and played a key role in her being able to implement a program and keep non-counseling duties off of her plate.

It was also very clear any time that one of the administrators came to see me, I was also with students, whether it was in the classroom, in groups. The only time I wasn't with students is if I was eating my lunch in like 10 minutes, or if I had some other meeting to go to, so I think I didn't really allow them the ... I guess they saw how busy I was, and how involved I was with the students, and never tried to give me additional duties.

Alexis' ability to stay busy with school-counseling related activities also allowed her to avoid a common "inappropriate duty" often given to school counselors, that of lunch monitoring.,

...With my groups...the only time I could pull kids was during lunch, and so that was another advocacy tool, as well. I pulled kindergarten through fifth grade groups, I've had a group every single day during their lunchtime, K-5. So from like 10:50 in the morning to 2:15 in the afternoon, I was with groups all day, and then when I wasn't doing that, I was teaching classes...I know I'm very fortunate because I am probably one of very few counselors that can say that, that they're not given additional duties...I would say that staying busy was probably the best way to do that. Not to say that other counselors aren't busy, but if your administrator comes in the room and you're answering emails, which you have to do sometimes, but if it looks like that you're not actively engaged with students, they may give you something else to do.

Her ability to self-advocate using what administrators valued (i.e., data) also helped her shape her role early on.

When I [shared] data from the groups and classes that I did, it was very evident that what I was doing was having a significant impact on not only the social, emotional needs of the students, but also academically and I would say to support their attendance goals, as well. So I think using these documents, again, as an advocacy tool, it was very clear as to why I was never given additional duties, and I think for me, also, I also stayed busy. Further, Alexis was a very intentional counselor from the get-go, and based her programming on the needs of her particular students year-by-year, even when it was difficult.

I didn't want to implement the exact same program. And again, this may be partially my own fault, but I, again, set the bar pretty high for myself. I never really implemented the same thing from year to year. I always tried to take the data and the feedback that I received the year before from teachers, my advisory council, and I tried to adapt my program and change things, which is what you're supposed to do, but within the parameters of trying to do that and RAMP at the same time, it just was pretty difficult.

Alexis' ability to obtain RAMP distinction for her school came from a combination of county, school, community, and personal factors. Her tendency to be upfront about what her role was (and was not) proved to be valuable as she navigated the many aspects of her role, and where she fit within the school. This laid the groundwork for her to be able to complete the RAMP application, which in and of itself brought a number of challenges.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

An important part of Alexis' RAMP story is the reality of actually completing the RAMP process itself—despite having county and school-based resources and support, there were elements of the actual application process that were not specific or clear, including the

aforementioned confusion about whether or not the three-year wait period was a function of the county of the American School Counselor Association.

In addition, there were logistical pieces that made the process less smooth than it could have been. Further, even though she had support and resources from within the county, Alexis received some mixed messages about whether or not she should. Members of her PLT, including her former internship supervisor, who had been an asset, questioned Alexis on why she was choosing to undergo the RAMP process.

My internship supervisor...RAMPed before...she said she was glad she did it, but it was also a big use of time. [She said] 'I'm not sure why you're RAMPing. It's a lot of time and you don't get any monetary compensation for RAMPing. Why don't you just get your National Boards instead?'... that was pretty difficult for me because I knew that I wanted to...

When Alexis actually began the RAMP process it was done through a new online portal. One of the drawbacks of the portal was that it would not save documents for future use and/or review, requiring her to create a paper copy of all of her materials in the case she wanted to reuse them in the future or if she were to move to a different school.

...The year that I RAMPed, or maybe even the year before, they implemented some online portal. I want to say it was ASCA's online portal. I'm not sure... But I know it was an online portal that I had to upload all my documents into, and all my narratives, and then submit it online, my application, and that part, too, was a little bit frustrating because... these were all things that I had to print out before I submitted it because they said that it wouldn't save it, if that makes sense. So I had to print all this, and then scan it, and save it...if I wanted to keep it for my own records when I submitted it, then I had to

print it out and save it. So of course I wanted to save all this because now I don't have access to it, since I'm not in the county anymore.

Given that ASCA's RAMP designation is a school-distinction (rather than a counselor-distinction), this may provide some insight as to why the documents would only be accessible while Alexis was at that school. That said, this also created additional barriers in terms of Alexis' ability to actually complete the artifacts necessary to finish the application:

The portal that [the county] used, I couldn't access it from home. So the only way I could access the portal or work on any of it was when I was at school on [county] intranet. So it's not like I could go home and work on it because that I think would've made a major difference, too.

The process itself was also long, and difficult, and required negotiation along the way.

There was another added layer of difficulty being an elementary counselor and doing it, because at a middle or high school, you can divide and conquer different sections, but as an elementary counselor I was responsible for the entire process by myself.

Because RAMP documents are due in October, and use data from the previous school-year, filling out of the RAMP application ended up taking away some time and energy from Alexis' current year's program:

[Filling out the application] was taking away time from the counseling program I was trying to currently implement, because I spent so much time working on this plan from the year before that I felt a little bit that my program during the year that I was RAMPing suffered a little bit because I didn't have enough time to really do both. I mean I still implemented a program, of course, but was it with the data and fidelity that I had the year before? Probably not, if I'm being honest, because I didn't have the time.

There were also times when, though supportive, her administration did not have a clear understanding of the RAMP process, requiring her to teach about the process, and advocate to ensure that it was completed:

[My administrators] had somewhat of an understanding, but I don't think anyone had RAMPed at our school before, so it was up to me to explain what that process looked like... My administration was onboard, and through the advisory council and through different [presentations] or sharing at different staff meetings, eventually my staff came to realize what it was, but otherwise they would have no idea what it meant... Like I said earlier, I was able to go attend like a couple of different workshops that were just mainly working workshops, but I had to advocate for that, and I had to share, 'This is all that I'm having to do. This is what it looks like. This is why I need an entire day or a couple of days uninterrupted to be able to work on this, because otherwise I don't know if I'll be able to do it.'

Alexis and her principal had different ideas about how goals should be created and tracked. Alexis knew that for the RAMP application, her goals had to address the personal/social, career, and academic domains of the ASCA National Model. She ran into some difficulty in crafting an academic goal that she could realistically have an impact on, while also satisfying the needs of her administration. This required multiple conversations between Alexis and other members of the school.

My principal [wanted] more data, but I felt like some of the goals it's tricky to come up with data. For example, like I had a goal relating to [standardized test] scores. For me, I always struggled with that because unless I addressed it from a test anxiety or self-esteem

aspect, I'm not directly working with the kids academically day-to-day, so I don't have direct influence on how they're going to perform.

So I think that was where [my principal's] data focus was, was with [standardized test] scores, and I wrote [that in my RAMP application], but that was a little bit of a struggle as far as I don't know what other data other than test anxiety and self-esteem that I can bring to the table, because I don't feel like it's reflective of the work that I'm doing... we had extensive discussions about it as a faculty, that it's hard because when you're comparing [standardized test] scores based on grade level, it doesn't make sense to compare it from year to year. Why don't we follow students like from fourth grade to fifth grade, as opposed to like ... Because you're not comparing the same group of students. So that also kind of [confounds] the data, as well, because it's not the same group of students.

In terms of the actual application, the *narrative* portions of her application were sometimes, though notably not often, completed, or elaborated upon in a perfunctory way, as a means of ensuring that she received enough points on the scoring rubric rather than as a means of truly helping her program or students.

I know why the narratives are important, but I also feel like, and I don't know if I just wrote like way too much, but I think ...that you can pretty easily summarize what you're doing within a paragraph, but almost every single one of my narratives is at least a page long...The frustrating part was... going back to documents I had already completed, and adding more information because I felt like it wasn't going to meet the criteria... that was pretty tedious, going back and fixing forms I had already done... It is just a beast to submit all this...

In addition to having to create a comprehensive school counseling program on her own, Alexis ran into some difficulty with the actual application process laid out by ASCA. Though she had some resources within the county to lean on, she also received mixed messages, and needed to continually advocate for herself and her role throughout the process.

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

Though the process was difficult and time consuming, Alexis looked back on it positively. Her recollection to receiving RAMP distinction was interesting. On the one hand, there was an element of not much changing after her receiving the distinction—it was business as usual. The county-celebration of her receiving the plaque from ASCA congratulating her on receiving RAMP was conducted at the start of the year:

...Usually is that at the beginning of the year at counselor celebration kickoff, [the county] recognize[s] those schools [that received RAMP distinction], and they come up to the front. They receive their plaque and have their picture taken, but outside of that, it just ... Like I went to visit my school the other day, and the plaque's just sitting in the counselor's office, which is fine, but it's one of those things that I almost wish I had stayed another year to like, not to toot my own horn or anything, but it would've been nice to have that displayed maybe more prominently in a different area, to show that our school does have it. I don't know. That's just maybe my own personal opinion.

Though, part of the reason that Alexis did not see much of a change after receiving RAMP distinction is that in order to get RAMP in the first place she had to implement programs and services that were within the purview of a comprehensive school counseling program. For Alexis, the value was less in the end-point, but in the process of building a program that would allow her to go through the RAMP process.

...I did so much so soon as a counselor there, that I think a lot of the programs that I'd already been implementing fell within the [RAMP] category, but again, I was probably doing too much... I knew my administrators knew everything that I was doing because I was constantly having observations, conferences, conversations about RAMP, so they were well aware of what I was doing. Also, my student support team at my school, like the social worker, the nurse, and the psychologist also knew, but as far as teachers, other than seeing me teach in a classroom and knowing I was pulling groups, that was really the scope of what they saw as the counseling program. They saw additional activities, too, like I did different holiday programs, like I mentioned, the mentoring program. So I think it helped that I was very active within the school community.

And though the distinction wasn't necessarily recognized, and the plaque remained in the counseling office, it still had some utility:

...Within the remaining school year after I was RAMPed, I think ... It took me a while, but I felt like [RAMP] was the final cherry on top for teachers, because I think everybody has their preconceptions about what a counselor does and is, and obviously most of the teachers saw me pretty much running around our school building all day long, so I don't think that [they] felt like I didn't do anything, but for those last few that may have felt like...I don't know. I just feel like sometimes, and through no fault of their own... there are other educators that don't understand the gamut of things that counselors do, and that it's not 'I pull something out of the air and I just do it'. There's a reason for everything. So having that nationally recognized program, for me I felt like it validated my counseling program to my staff, as well, and again, I was very fortunate that the majority of my staff was very supportive of the program, really felt like that I was helping a lot of the

students, that it was effective... I think that [RAMP] helped to show, too, that I am an effective counselor, and that the program is purposeful and data-driven, because I think that ... [some teachers] definitely had their own preconceptions based on what [the previous counselor] did before I got there.

Even in the face of a nationally recognized program, Alexis realized that some teachers, though few, would never truly have an appreciation for what she did and the amount of work that it took. But despite that, she still strived to see things from their perspective—to not fault the teachers themselves, and instead to assume the best, and recognize that her program had benefits even if it did not lead to a change in how she was viewed by 100% of the staff in her building. Much of the motivation to apply for RAMP in the first place was driven by personal reasons, as opposed to a desire for recognition and accolades:

[RAMP] aligned with a professional goal that I had for myself... it was stressful, but by the end of the process I was glad that I did it because I think as counselors, even though it takes a lot of time to turn in your ASCA forms, it's helpful because for me, even though it was a lot of front-loading work at the beginning of the year, I felt very organized for the rest of the year, and felt like I had a very clear vision of what I was going to be doing, how I was going to be collecting data, and how I was going to be analyzing data.

In the end, it was worth it in helping Alexis become more intentional, and more reflective as a practitioner, a trend that also did not stop when she received RAMP distinction. If given the opportunity to re-RAMP again she would do so. Importantly, though, the receiving of RAMP distinction itself was valuable because of the changes that came as a result of building the program that earned it. School counselors are tasked with providing ever-changing comprehensive programs for their students that address needs in real-time. Looking back at it,

Alexis realized that in some cases there was not enough time to actually implement the changes that she wanted to. The areas that going through the RAMP process allowed her to see as needs of additional programming and improvement. But there needs to be a balance as well—it's nearly impossible to have a program that can change completely year-by-year.

I think that [going through the RAMP process] made me realize that sometimes, and I'm just being very honest, sometimes we submit ... Well, I'll speak for myself. I submit these documents, and then don't really reflect as much on how to make changes for the following year. I was looking through my RAMP application that I've submitted, and the different recommendations or implications that I said that I would change within the program, and I realized that I did maybe a quarter of it... So I think that was eye-opening for me, that I was like, 'I said I was going to do all these wonderful things, and then I did about a quarter of them.' So I think that was a big personal change for me, was that sometimes I feel like it's so much work to submit this, and it's so data-focused, but for me the most important part is the reflection part...

I think it was the fact, just me personally, that I always wanted to do something new, so maybe a learning lesson for me is that I probably could've kept some things and just tweaked them. I'm not saying that I got rid of everything. There were certain lessons that I knew were effective, that I did continue to use in groups and class, but I mean you have to change things up because I can't read the same story, or do the same activity with the group of kids as I did the year before. So you're kind of forced to come up with something different. But yeah, I think [time] was probably the biggest factor, but I'm not sure.

The irony of Alexis' story is that she obtained the distinction just before she left the school, and in reflecting on it in preparation for our discussion, saw the ways in which some of the changes that she wanted to make weren't possible. There's something to be said for how quickly one year goes—how hard it is to finish the RAMP process by October while simultaneously running a comprehensive school counseling program based on the needs of a new set of students. If nothing else, Alexis is a testament to how following best practice á la RAMP can be a double edged sword—she knew that her program was effective and helpful for students, but the stress of going through it made it unsustainable for the long-term. That said, despite Alexis' choice to leave the school where she RAMPed, she left behind a legacy of comprehensive, meaningful school counseling work that will hopefully continue in the absence of her as the counselor.

Appendix I: Erica's Story

Erica's RAMP journey, like others', has its roots in her life prior to becoming a school counselor. Trained as a Social Worker, working with people was always the plan. It was during her social work internship that the idea of becoming a school counselor began to take shape.

I had my license as a school social worker as well. That was my foot in the door, but when I was doing my internship for that I really found myself connecting more with the counseling role. I had that in the back of my mind as I was doing the social work and then made the decision to go back to school for counseling... I'm definitely where I should be. I mean, this was the right path for me, but I was struggling with, 'well gosh, I just got this MSW. I don't want to drop everything and go get another one'.

Motivations for RAMP

Upon getting her first position as a school counselor, Erica didn't find an infrastructure within the district or a storehouse of resources. She didn't even necessarily have clarity about what her role was. So she turned to the ASCA National Model as a means of helping her shape and guide her role, of ensuring that she was using best practice.

I was fresh out of grad school and there wasn't any formal training in our district for how to be a school counselor or what the expectations were. My principal really wasn't providing a lot of concrete feedback in terms of her expectations either, and so I figured that was going to be a good way for me as a new counselor to structure my program. I wasn't really receiving any guidelines from anywhere else [and] my graduate program really pushed ASCA. I figured at least if I structured my program from day one with the goal of applying for RAMP two years later, then at least I knew I would be doing something 'right'. For me, it was a way to sort of self-monitor my own work.

In addition to a model for self-monitoring, ASCA also provided some timelines.

[My] ‘two year’ goal was really just because that was what ASCA's website at the time had said, was that it takes an average of two years for full implementation [of the National Model]. I had kind of some benchmarks that I knew I wanted to hit. I knew that I wanted to have the Advisory Council in place by halfway through my first year. I sort of set timeline goals for when I wanted action plans to be written and how I wanted to do that. I sort of just set two years because that was the recommendation.

Important Resources

As the sole counselor in her school, Erica lacked the ability to consult with others in the building that had extensive knowledge of the school counselor’s role. Instead, she had to lean on other resources within the district as well as other, non-counseling personnel in her school. Further, Erica brought with her a number of personal qualities that helped her succeed throughout the RAMP process.

District

As mentioned, there wasn’t an infrastructure or strong ASCA expectations at the district level. A big source of support for Erica came from the other school counselors in the district, particularly those also at the elementary level. Because Erica is an outlier in applying for RAMP within the district, she never felt any sense of competition that may be present in districts with high ASCA-expectations and limited resources.

...Our [professional learning community] (PLC), like our elementary counselor PLC...was huge. We're a pretty tight-knit group. We're pretty supportive of one another... We consult a lot. I think it's, in [my school district], I mean ASCA implementation has never been an expectation, so it doesn't really feel like a competition.

We've never been evaluated on our ability to implement ASCA. It's kind of just been treated as like 'a nice extra thing that Erica did'.

School

In the absence of strong district influence and in being the only counselor at her school, Erica's ability to leverage her school-level resources became more important in her ability to RAMP. Ironically, Erica noted how the lack of district-level support actually catalyzed her decision to move forward with RAMP.

I think that if I had come in and there was a clear set of expectations for what counseling in this district looked like, then maybe I wouldn't have pushed RAMP quite as hard. For me, I think I'm just a very structured person and I needed some sort of expectation and since I wasn't getting it from anywhere else, I thought RAMP would be a good one.

Erica, then turned to those in her school as a means of support. She discussed the ways in which her principal provided moral and monetary support, though partly for selfish reasons.

...My principal at the time, and I had her for my whole first five and a half years...was very supportive of the counseling program, but not very knowledgeable about what it should look like. Her feedback was always positive. It was always, 'I'm just happy you're doing anything.' Which I found uplifting, but not terribly helpful. I think she was really supportive of me doing it, and offered the funding to pay for the application and she helped me write a grant to be able to go and accept the award in person. She was supportive, but I think for her it was nice for her to be able to say, 'My counselor's doing this.' I think it was kind of like a feather in her cap as well to say that our school was RAMPed.

Erica saw her administration as the most important factor in her ability to perform appropriate school counseling duties and achieve RAMP distinction, noting, "...I think that the experience of a school counselor is almost solely based on the administration and the way that the administration sees you being used." But she also leaned upon other members of the school and surrounding community to help her get through the RAMP process.

I definitely think [one of the most important resources was] access to my student services [team]... they were pretty instrumental in the process. Our [student services] team is counselor, social workers, principal, assistant principal, school psychologist and special education program facilitator. We meet weekly, and so I think receiving feedback from them as well as the Advisory Council, so we had parent reps on that, and other teacher reps.

By utilizing members of the student services team Erica was able to share a portion of the load of creating a comprehensive school counseling program from the ground up. What is typically done as a team at the middle or high school level fell completely on her shoulders, and she able to find a way to outsource a bit of the burden.

Personal

There is something to be said for Erica's decision to pursue RAMP even in the absence of any clear guidance. This lack of clarity encompassed her role generally, and was present during the actual RAMP application. Erica took what was a nebulous role, and turned it into a nationally recognized program. She discussed how who she is, as a person, fit into this, she mentioned:

I guess for me I'm just, I'm very goal-oriented and so I think that having that goal of RAMP as the big end goal, and then being able to set those smaller sub-goals, sort of played into my personality. I like having something to work towards.

Further, RAMP was just one of the national recognitions that she achieved: “That's why when I finished RAMP, I started [National] Boards. Now I'm like, ‘oh God, what do I do next?’ I think that's why it sort of plays into my personality. I just really like, I like clear expectations.” The process itself did come with some uncertainty, but never felt overwhelming for her, at least with the advent of hindsight.

...being such a new counselor there was a level of nervousness, of wanting to pass your first try. I guess there was some level of that. Especially knowing that you have to have a school board member sign off on the application. I was sort of thinking ‘oh gosh, what if I don't pass and then what would be the outcome of having to tell my principal and those board members that it was for naught?’ I don't remember it being terribly stressful otherwise. Maybe that is now with the hindsight of comparing it to Boards.

Erica described herself as assertive, and direct, and said that these qualities helped her mesh well with the administrator that she had through the RAMP process:

I had a really good relationship with my last principal, where we could speak very frankly with one another... I think some of it was just our personalities. We're both pretty direct, assertive people. I think that we kind of just clicked in that way. We're also both, I don't know, like I would say, ‘This is an inappropriate use of my time,’ and she'd say, ‘Put on your big girl panties.’ Yeah, it worked out. I think we just clicked well.

She was also self-aware throughout her re-telling of her ASCA experience. She recognized and acknowledged the way that she was likely being perceived by others. Her wit and humor likely played a role in her ability to receive buy-in from other stakeholders, as did the intentionality of her planning. She mentioned the ways that she advocated for herself throughout (and after) the RAMP process.

I've gotten really good at picking my battles, I would say, over the last couple of years.

There are definitely times that I'll advocate for things harder than I would for other times.

I've been very frank in my advocacy about 504 [coordination] being an inappropriate duty for counselors.

She was persistent.

I know that people don't want to hear about it anymore, but I also feel like I have a responsibility every time we sign our Annual Agreement and we go through the ASCA Recommended Use of Time and then my actual use of time, to show that comparison and to say that 'this is what you've chosen, and this is what you're losing out on by choosing to utilize me in this way'. I haven't been successful in getting [504 coordination] taken off my plate yet, but at the same time I'm going to continue advocating in that way.

Her humor also came out in the way she somewhat off-handedly mentioned a final source of support throughout the RAMP process, "My husband was very supportive." She paused, and added, almost tongue-in-cheek, "He'd be sad if I didn't say that."

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

As was previously mentioned, Erica was the only counselor in the building throughout the RAMP process. This created a strange dynamic when her school was finally awarded RAMP. Much of Erica's story likened the RAMP process to the National Boards process—a natural analogy given their focus on national recognition within K-12 education. Unlike National Boards, which is an individual distinction, RAMP awards are granted to school counseling programs, not the school counselor. But in elementary schools, they are often one in the same.

...It's really hard at the elementary level. I'm always curious what it's like to be RAMPed at a school that has multiple counselors, because at the elementary level, at least in this

district where we're all singletons, you *are* the program...The RAMP award was not for-- like my name's not on it. [My school's] name is on it.

RAMP also had fewer rewards for participants, for Erica, there was no compensation for getting RAMP. Because it is less recognized, Erica didn't feel the same level of pressure to receive RAMP as she did National Boards.

I always heard of RAMP described as like National Boards but for a program instead of as a person. Boards certainly were a lot of components, and RAMP is certainly a lot of components. I think Boards just took a lot more time than RAMP did. It was just a lot more time intensive, and I think that perhaps, at least in [my state], knowing that there's money tied to Boards and there's not money tied to RAMP, makes you feel a lot more pressure to succeed at Boards. I think just the cost of application is so much higher for National Boards and having that raise kind of as the outcome, it felt like there was more riding on it.

In light of this distinction, between individual and program, and within the context of Erica being the school counseling program at her school she was required to, as an individual, find a way to complete an application process that favored a team-based approach.

But at the same time, I am [my school's] Counseling [Program]. It's sort of a strange distinction. I think that it required more of a team approach to do RAMP. It definitely required feedback from a lot more stakeholders. That's not to say that Boards didn't, but I think that RAMP definitely forced me to be more reflective in a team kind of way.

In general, Erica was given a lot of autonomy and trust by those around her. While helpful, there were times when it led to her not getting as much support as she would have liked to, particularly with her Advisory Council.

I think the challenge with the Advisory Council was just, and not disparaging the previous counselor at all, I think though that she was not implementing the ASCA model, and so I think when I met with the Advisory Council and I would present data to them and ask them for feedback, their feedback was always, 'Well whatever you want is great.'

Erica did run into some difficulty with the actual 12-step application process laid out by ASCA. The most apparent of which seemed to be time. When talking about what hindered the process Erica mentioned, "I think just time always being a challenge... the actual typing all of the things up and compiling it all took some time."

She also mentioned that though the individual program components that ASCA used were all relevant to Comprehensive School Counseling Programs instances where pre-existing groups or committees wouldn't count towards ASCA's scoring, even though their goals and/or actions would fall under the purview of a comprehensive school counseling program. Certain aspects of Erica's program were, therefore, implemented simply to be given credit by ASCA. This was particularly the case for the Advisory Council.

I mean, there's also multi-tiered systems of support that I'm consulting with all of those teams at tier two and tier three and then we have our PBIS team where we're looking at student data there to inform interventions. So it's kind of, it just felt like another team...

The utility of the Advisory Council, or lack thereof, has led to it no longer being an element of her current program.

[The Advisory Council would say] 'Anything you do is great'. Kind of similar feedback to the principal. Which again is like a nice pat on the back, but it's not helpful. I found that if they're not giving me real feedback, what's the point in continuing? I would give data or we would look at student data for something, and then discuss a possible

intervention for something, but I really wasn't getting much, I didn't feel like the program was growing as a result.

I felt like all I was doing was really just informing some stakeholders, which is good in itself, but perhaps not the best way to do so...I never really hit my groove with the Advisory Council either with implementing that well, and some of that was time, was getting everybody to be able to commit to it, but then some of it was also just finding a way for it to be useful for all of the stakeholders involved. I feel like I've tried different ways to do it since then, and currently we don't even have one this year.

That was one area that was kind of a challenge too...ASCA is so specific that in order to get full credit or full points on the rubric for the Advisory Council it has to be a standalone just for the school counseling program, but I think that we don't work in silos in that way, and so I think that's where the challenge, at least that I saw with it, was... my experience in the school has never been that I am a standalone body or that the school counseling department is a standalone entity. We're not siloed in that way, and so I didn't find it as helpful as I had found my participation on all of those other teams.

By the end it felt like I was checking a box for that one particular piece. I understand why they recommend it as a standalone team. I understand why they would want the focus just to be on that, I just don't know how realistic that is in a school setting.

There were times when the rigidity of the application process ended up making aspects of it feel more like box-checking than actual best practice. For example, Erica had to translate what she was already doing into ASCA-specific documents and formats in order to get credit for them.

Our [State-level Counseling Standards] for our social emotional learning, they're pretty heavily cross walked with the ASCA mindsets and competencies, but when I'm writing a

lesson plan, I'm listing out which guidance essential standard I'm using, and so I definitely had to backtrack and figure out which ASCA standard I'm hitting, so I think it's just ... Yeah. That was a little bit of extra kind of box-checking.

By and large, Erica believed that applying for RAMP allowed her to stay organized and on track with her programming. That said, the actual application process was time-consuming, at times, felt restrictive.

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

So what changed as the result of completing the RAMP process? According to Erica, the answer is short—one word:

Nothing.

Erica continued and discussed that the accomplishment of receiving RAMP and the recognition that has come from doing so has not necessarily been an entirely positive experience.

[After receiving RAMP], I got a high five. Yeah...I was congratulated by my administration, and then it really was just kind of going about the same routine. ...Our district just had a counseling audit a year ago where they paid a whole bunch of money for a local consulting firm to come in and audit all of our counseling programs K-12, and the results were not awesome district-wide, and I think it's because we were audited on are we implementing ASCA, and that's never been an expectation, so of course the district scores are going to be low... Until this audit report came out, it hadn't been really brought up again

Moreover, the recognition at the district-level didn't necessarily feel like a highlighting of her hard work, but instead used to showcase a district-level person with whom Erica didn't connect.

Then to the [School] Board presentation when they're giving all of this feedback, they kept holding up [my school] as this one bright spot. [Erica's school] has RAMP, and this and this and this. That's the only time it's ever been recognized at a major level.

I didn't feel good about the way that it was being held up in that way, because I think they were sort of holding it up as like a feather in the cap of our newest district-[level] person, of, "Well look at the work I did. We have one school who's RAMPed." I was like, 'you weren't even here'!...[and] the person that they hired who's over counseling, she kept saying the ASCA acronym wrong during the presentation. It was pretty bad. She was saying like, "AYSCA," and she was like, 'It's the America Counselor ... It's American, and they're counselors.'

Though the local response wasn't particularly exciting, a somewhat unexpected benefit of receiving RAMP was the ability to attend the ASCA National conference to be officially recognized by ASCA and other school counselors. This was made possible through Erica's principal providing funds for her to apply for RAMP and to attend the conference.

I think it was like \$200 to apply [for RAMP], and then what was really expensive that my administrator covered was traveling to the conference to actually receive the award... I think she just felt like that was all I was going to get out of it, because I think she knew. You don't get anything else, but that trip to [the ASCA conference] was pretty sweet... Being able to walk across the stage, get a plaque, be honored in that way, that felt nice. Especially with other people in the room who understand what it means... and I was totally goofy. I bought an evening gown and a tiara. It was pretty awkward. I was like, if I'm walking across this stage, I'm doing it right.

Erica was in a unique position in that she began the RAMP process (at least laying the groundwork to apply within two years) right at the beginning of her school counseling career. She, therefore, doesn't know how things would be different had she not started from the ground up with a comprehensive program. What she does know is that the ASCA national model, as opposed to RAMP itself, was where she saw the most value.

... I don't have a comparison of having been a counselor without that kind of framework, so it's sort of hard to tell [what else changed after getting RAMP]. I think for me it's definitely helped me organize things, and my perception at least is that I'm able to be more effective because I followed the model... I definitely drank the ASCA model Kool-Aid though. I'll stick with that.

And that for her, it wasn't necessarily about recognition from the district or the school. She began the process for herself, and in that way, there were positive results despite the disappointing response from those around her.

I guess it is nice to have that small level of validation that at least I'm doing something the right way, at least according to ASCA. That is nice to have that kind of mental validation. I think it was disappointing. I mean, I guess I was expecting, I don't know, something, but now having, I mean I know I'm still relatively new, only it being my sixth year, but now sort of understanding more of how it works in education. Now I'm unsurprised that that is what happened. I was so new and naïve that I thought that it was a big deal to get something like that, and now I'm like, 'oh, nobody cares'.

Moving Forward (& Shifting the Focus)

So far, this story has focused on Erica's RAMP experience, and the impact that receiving RAMP distinction had for her and her position. Here, the story shifts to what happened during

the interview itself, as Erica and I discussed the possibility of her Re-RAMPing in the future.

This portion of the story almost represents “breaking-of-the-fourth-wall”, to discuss Erica as she worked through this part of the conversation. Her voice will still be heavily represented, but the focus is on her in the moment of the interview, as opposed to her discussion of the RAMP process.

When discussing her feelings related to how others responded to her getting RAMP, Erica paused and again recognized the way that she may be perceived by those on the outside (in this case, me), “I know that sounds horribly jaded. I'm not unhappy that I did it, but I was disappointed at the time.”

In discussing the possibility of her Re-RAMPing, her outlook began bleak.

I can't say that I will re-RAMP, honestly. If the climate in our district stays the same, with no support, no professional development, no real incentive to RAMP, I'm probably going to be one of those schools that doesn't renew because, and maybe that's why other folks didn't renew too is that there's really no incentive and then most of the time you have to pay for it yourself... I don't know. That sounds incredibly pessimistic... Now, I want to continue following the [ASCA] model, but I think the question is more of what is my likelihood of jumping through the hoops to get a new magnet to put on my [RAMP] plaque. That's where I'm kind of unsure...

But, interestingly, as she thought about it, that changed.

I should look into when I actually have to submit the [RAMP] renewal. Because look, as much as I say, ‘Oh, there's no point,’ I feel like it's my personality that I'll probably renew. If we're really being honest here, I'll probably do it just to maintain it... I think I would see it as quitting if I didn't. That's probably silly, but yeah. I think that I would

wonder if the expectation of people higher up than me [in Central Office] would be that I would renew, and I wouldn't want to, I don't know, for lack of a better way of putting it, let them down... I feel like realistically I can talk a big game about not wanting to renew, but in all likelihood I probably will.

Erica also realized and discussed the ways in which having RAMP distinction can act as an important advocacy tool for her in the future, especially considering recent district-level mandates that have changed the school counseling role, moving it away from recommendations of ASCA. For Erica, these changes that are further complicated by school-level leadership changes. In line with the importance that administrators play in shaping the role of the school counselor she discussed the important interplay between district and building level leadership and the ways in which that shapes what counselors do day-to-day.

Whoever my new principal ends up being. I don't know who that person will be yet, but when they come on ... The direction in our district right now is towards putting elementary counselors on the specials rotation, and part of my advocacy for not being put on the specials rotation would be well look, we have a great program the way it is, and here's why, and here's all my data... Then I feel like the expectation might be, obviously I'm anticipating here, but the expectation could be that I would need to re-RAMP just to almost prove myself. Maybe in that way, I mean, as I talk through it, maybe in that way it seems logical to try to maintain it...we're in a weird position right now with this principal search, just because we're looking at the possibility of a new principal and a new assistant principal. I've only ever had the one administrator. That's a little bit, I don't know, I'm a little apprehensive about what's going to happen.

I would say the bulk of my time this year has been spent on 504. I did a use of time analysis for my past months, and it was close to 40% 504. That's coming down from the district level, not my building... and I think that some of that is just specific to 504 and how our district has interpreted 504 law and the pendulum has kind of swung in different directions just in the past five years. It's currently swung in the direction of everybody needs a 504. If you have a health plan, you need a 504. If you're allergic to peanuts, or if pollen makes you sneeze, you need a 504. That's kind of come down from the district level and the lawyers.

I know counselors in this district who spend all of their time, they're in kindergarten twice a week and other classes once a week, and so they have no time for groups or individual counseling or anything else. I could see my role changing pretty drastically if I had a different administrator. It's strange though because not all counselors are 504 coordinators. That is building level, who in the building is the 504 coordinator. It's mostly counselors, it's some nurses, some social workers, but that has been a lot of my time this year.

She went on to discuss the difficulty she has had, even with RAMP, of trying to get some inappropriate duties off of her plate, "When I attempt to advocate for [not being 504 coordinator], I'm told, 'But you're so good at it.'... Maybe we all just need to start sucking at it." In line with her tendency to self-advocate, and the possibility of using re-RAMPing in order to do so more effectively, she noted previous inappropriate duties that once fell to school counselors but have, since, been taken away, namely test coordination.

I think that parts of RAMP, I'm trying to think of any other examples aside from 504. Testing was a big one back years ago before that got taken off of counselors' plates. I

think that my first year I was the testing coordinator, and so as I was going through RAMP, and I do remember giving feedback to my principal about the challenges of 'this is what a fully-implemented program looks like, and when I'm testing coordinator and I'm essentially not the counselor for two months of the year, here's the challenge'. Same thing, 'here's what you're missing out on'.

And, at the end of it all, even in hindsight and with uncertainty about the future of her RAMP-distinction and what her role will look like with new administration, she paused, and said,

I do still really believe that it was helpful in structuring my program. I think that having that goal as an end point helped to keep me accountable, and so I do think that even if nothing else, it was really useful in that. I think that for a new counselor who's straight out of grad school, having that as their end goal could really help I think in the absence of other support.

Appendix J: Phoebe's Story

Phoebe's journey to becoming a RAMP elementary school counselor begins years prior to her actually stepping into the role officially. Her story, like many, is non-linear. Though her initial training was in Special Education, Phoebe worked as a home school advisor, a unique position that walks the line between a school counselor and a social worker. Home school advisors work with parents to provide support for children who are home schooled or homebound. It was in this role where Phoebe met a school counselor that planted the seed of her becoming a school counselor herself, though with another stop along the way, to be a *Testing Coordinator* at a local university.

Before I was a school counselor I was what was called a home school advisor... my Bachelor's Degree was Special Ed and Child Development... I worked in a different school district... basically it was a school counselor mixed with a social worker. So I did the home visits to students, I provided like all the resources that parents needed as well as doing groups in the school. So my connection was mostly a lot with the parents, providing whatever the parents needed. If the child was home bound for whatever reason, I would just take out the work to them but I did not provide the tutoring... from there I met a school counselor, she was like, 'Hey, why don't you go back and get your school counseling license? You're really doing school counseling'. So I went ahead and finished up and graduated with my school counselor license and lo and behold our jobs [as home school advisors] were eliminated. The funding stopped... after that I went to [a local university]. I was a testing coordinator [there]. So that was fun, just give tests all day long. And supervising tests.

Phoebe's RAMP story is interesting in that she is the only person that I talked to who had received RAMP at two different elementary schools. Further, at the time of her first RAMP distinction she was split between two schools. This brought upon unique challenges for Phoebe in how to allot and account for the time she spent creating her comprehensive school counseling programs.

Motivations for RAMP

Phoebe's initial motivation for getting RAMP distinction was utilitarian—her role was grant funded, and an expectation of that role was that she would apply for RAMP distinction. She noted, “I was just like well this is something I just need to do, it's just another job requirement... I need to stay employed.”

Many school counselors know the difficulty of creating buy-in for their programs, especially when entering a new school, and inheriting a previous counselor's position. For Phoebe, this challenge was a little different. She came into the school halfway through the schoolyear, and needed to build a program from the ground up. She was the first school counselor to ever be in the school where she initially gained RAMP. Her grant supervisor, who would later go on to become district Assistant Superintendent, really pushed Phoebe and the other grant-funded counselors to apply for RAMP. All within less than a year of being in their schools. This push came from an understanding of the positive effects that comprehensive school counseling programs would have for students, and also provided means for counselors' job security. Though there was a lot riding on it, Phoebe was up to the challenge pretty much immediately.

...We came [into our schools] mid-year, we didn't start at the beginning of the year. So as student counselors we came in [to schools in] January. We met all together in December, we got hired in in December and they kept us in...our [Central Office]. So we stayed

there for a month working with the Superintendent developing the [school counseling] program. And then in January we went out to the schools and you're kinda thrown in there to say 'hey, I know you have been in school for ... half a semester, now at the ending of the school year here I am to help'. So from there it was just kind of selling myself, going out to the classrooms. Going to the cafeteria just to sit and meet with the students, those things. Going to team meetings.

... We came in on a three year grant and it was saying we have a need for school counselors. Okay, so now we have this need, we have to show: 'what is this need for?' What better way for that than data? So the principals and assistant principals were like, 'oh yeah they're pretty cool, yeah this is pretty great, oh, oh, we have counselors now'. But still, like I said, not all the teachers understood, not a lot of principals understood. So our, he's now our Assistant Superintendent but at the time he was over Student Services. And he said, 'I want you guys to get RAMP.' So we were like, 'Oh, okay, he's gonna become assistant superintendent we really gotta do this and make it great.' And he said, 'You need to present to the school board.' And we were like, 'Present?' We need data to present to the school board and basically fight for our jobs.

It wasn't until she was engaged in the program itself, and collecting needs assessment data that Phoebe truly recognized the specific ways that the program may be able to help her students, which provided additional motivation to complete the process and obtain RAMP.

... When we surveyed the students...you have your career development questions, your social questions but then the last part was the questions about your counseling. 'Do you feel like my counselor cares about me? Do you feel like this?' And when I started reading the questions to them I was like, 'Wow, I really do want to know what they're thinking.

Do they feel valued?’ Or there was questions in there about bullying. ‘Do I feel safe at school?’ And I was like, ‘Wow, do they not feel safe?’

The combination of needing to secure her job as well the desire to see her students feel safer and more valued at school helped Phoebe persevere through the process, despite being split between two schools.

Important Resources

Given her situation, it was important that Phoebe was able to leverage resources to complete the RAMP process. Some of these resources were more tangible and practical while others were social and based upon relationships that Phoebe built and fostered.

State

One unique aspect of Phoebe’s RAMP journey was the extent to which the state in which she worked supported and encouraged counselors to run comprehensive school counseling programs, even going so far as to provide state-wide training for counselors.

...At the beginning of the RAMP process you go through all the training, which I think it was just a two day training. And it just kind of introduce you to what RAMP is. And like I said for us, we're coming in, it was very overwhelming to say. And everyone is smiling and like, ‘You can do it!’ And you're in a room with all of these counselors and I promise it was probably like 60 counselors and then the next thing you know, it's maybe five of you guys doing it.

Within that training, though, there wasn’t necessarily relevant support or recognition for elementary school counselors in the way that there was for the other levels.

[The state] is saying, ‘hey we're gonna have a training so come on down’. So you're in this room and ... it was probably maybe ten elementary counselors, the rest were middle

school high school. And so everything that they're talking about is middle school and high school and you're just kinda smiling like 'we're the other, we're the step kids'.

What the state-level support offers, though, is a normalizing of counselors running comprehensive programs in their schools. Though the training itself may not be entirely relevant and accessible to every level, the normalizing of programmatic school counseling trickles down to the district level, and into the expectations of individual schools and their administrators.

On a more practical level, state-level support also provided templates and documents that counselors could use when creating and advertising their programs. This provided consistency across for programs willing to utilize these resources, as well as cut down on the amount of time that counselors had to spend creating materials for their comprehensive programs. This was especially helpful for Phoebe.

I love how the [state] set it up. They set up a letter that you could send out, they set up a ... they gave you the format, everything was formatted for you. The first letter of your letters your phone calls for inviting people, your agenda and then they already had a PowerPoint set so that you could tell people exactly. You could tell people exactly what [RAMP distinction was and exactly what counseling is at the same time... [the program] was laid out but it was still a lot of work. It still was a lot of discipline and still a lot of meetings and writings and things like that.

District

Phoebe also received a high level of support from her district, specifically in having a full-month of time to plan a comprehensive school counseling program alongside other counselors. In addition to time, the district provided monetary support for her to get a program up and running, as well as templates from the aforementioned state-level resources which were

used to streamline the creation of counseling-related artifacts, and create uniformity across programs.

We were awarded, our first year I think we had \$500 to spend. So that was helpful, we were able to buy books; we were able to buy programming. And then even the next year we were able to look at bullying curriculums. So we were able to order different curriculums, which was super helpful. And then I know we spent a month at [Central Office]...during that month we... were able to develop our counseling brochure, a referral form. And that referral form is universal so it goes from all schools. So we were uniform...We developed... our entire counseling program. So when we started we were able to present 'this is who we are' and 'this is what we could do'.

Additionally, the district provided data collection software which allowed disaggregation of student responses based on student-characteristics, and was a valuable tool in Phoebe figuring out what the most relevant goals for her students and school.

...[We had] a list of questions when you're surveying... I think it's 50 questions... And then the thing is that you could break it down. After the survey, third grade through fifth grade they take it on the computer. Kindergarten through second grade you go into a classroom and you survey them and you enter your information in on the computer. But it [is broken] down that if you want to look at by grade levels, if you want to look at ethnicities, if you want to look by gender. So now you can start looking at your data and who's saying what and what this person is feeling...

School

At the school-level, Phoebe had the support of her principals, which played a role in her ability to receive RAMP distinction. Luckily, one of Phoebe's principals was a former school

counselor. The other principal, what he lacked in knowledge of the counselor role, made up for in support and trust of Phoebe and her program. Phoebe recognized that support for the counselor role and obtaining RAMP was not the case for all school counselors.

...each person had a different principal whose expectations was different. Like some counselors had to do lunch duty every day and that took away from your time. So it became a little wiggle room with that. So I was lucky enough one of my principals used to be a counselor so she understood. And the other one he was just like, 'hey do whatever you want, I need some help I don't care what you do'.

In addition to support, Phoebe's principals also had an expectation that she would at least apply for RAMP, which she indicated was an expectation throughout the district, partly because of the recognition it brought to the school as a whole.

[Applying for RAMP] was our job and that's what they said they wanted us to do. I'll be honest that it was one counselor who he didn't complete his. He didn't complete his the first year, he's still with us and everything but you had the push of your administrator and then the principals for sure. They didn't want to be the school that didn't get RAMP. We don't want to be the school that when they're announcing it at the school board, we're the one school who did not get ours.

Personal (and its effect on Parents, Community, and the District)

In order to discuss the ways in which Phoebe's personal characteristics played a part in her ability to obtain RAMP distinction it is important that I take a minute to discuss the actual interview with Phoebe, as it provides some insight into how these personal characteristics come to light. For me, having a conversation with Phoebe was very easy. She is personable, and friendly, and immediately puts you at ease. Despite having only talked with her briefly, one time

before our interview, I felt very comfortable with her. I imagine that this is the way that many people who meet her feel. She is likable.

It was also clear that Phoebe has made herself a fixture within the school and how it runs. Throughout our conversation she was called on a walkie-talkie multiple times, with other staff members looking to find where she was. The week that we spoke was also just after School Counselor Appreciation Week, and the administration had bought her lunch, a sign that they appreciated the work that she did and the role that she played at the school.

An important personal characteristic that Phoebe brought into the RAMP process was the ability to create buy-in from other stakeholders. One of the things that she was very good at was understanding others' perspectives, and values, and aligning herself in some way as to be helpful for those. She knew what teachers and administrators were looking for in a good counselor, and was able to adapt her program to include elements of these things. She provided comprehensive counseling services in a way that met students' needs, while also signaling to adults the ways in which she could be helpful for them.

I actually started learning a lot of the requirements for teachers to see how I could integrate myself into the classroom. We have what's called 'Scope'. So it's basically like every code of what they should be teaching and what they should be on and what they're teaching their students and learning. So what I started doing is going over their Scope and Sequence and looking at what should they be teaching and going, "I noticed that in yours you have something on your health curriculum, you need to talk about this. I can come in and teach your health curriculum and do it based on social, emotional." And they were like, "You can teach this and I can check it off? Yes!" So it was that way of selling I'm getting your curriculum covered.

She used conversations wisely, to figure out the ways that she and her program could fit into the larger mission of the school. She recalled a bus-related need that she saw and intervened with.

...[I built rapport] with the principals and assistant principals [by] talking with them. The assistant principal was doing mostly discipline and we would have a high rate of bus discipline. And I'd go, 'You know, I don't mind calling those parents. You know what I could start meeting with the students that have so many write-ups and let's discuss what's going on on the buses.' And that also led to another job in the district. They saw the value in that and hired me and another counselor for the summer to do social, emotional skills with the bus drivers.

Phoebe also listened. She provided a space for individuals, especially those outside the school (i.e., parents, community members) to learn about school counseling services and have their voices heard.

... I'm going, 'Oh, okay how can I sell this to other people?' ...you're asking them to yet join another committee on something they know nothing about. If you would say, "Hey, we have a school improvement [committee]." Or, "We have the reading group." Or, "We have [state standards committee]." Teachers understand that language, parents understand that language. Everyone understands the academics portion. The counseling no one is understanding, no one has knowledge of it.

So what I started going to is the parents that I worked with their kids. 'Hey, you know what? Your input would be so great. I know you were asking me a lot of questions. How about coming into this group? This group we're gonna start talking about what improvements can we need. We need in the school.' So parents start to feel a little bit

more empowered because they're like, 'Oh, okay. I might not know all about academics but I do know about my child. I do know what I want to see for my child.' And that's the same with going out to community leaders. 'Hey you said that you had a basketball program, you're going to the churches, you want more people to come in. You see things going on in the neighborhood, how about you come and talk to us about that? And so we want to hear from you, what do you think we need in this community?' So I did a lot of that kind of stuff, 'I need your opinion. Come bring your opinion to the school'. And most people I found felt like the school dictated everything to them. So, y'know this have them a choice of what could be said in their school, they never had a voice.

For a school to ask for parent-input is not necessarily unique. What is unique is the extent to which Phoebe was so quickly able to achieve buy-in, and have input from parents. Phoebe shared that many parents hadn't felt listened to in the past, and she was able to change this, and lay the groundwork for a reciprocal relationship between the school and the community at large.

...People bought into it and decided 'okay, I want to come to these meetings, I want to learn more about it. Because you were able to say you have a voice now and it's not just school'. I found a lot of parents upset with the schools like, 'Oh they only like this. Or all the teachers don't care about my students.' Well here's your voice, here's a time where you can talk really how you feel and let's really look into this. The same with the community. Well you were here in our community and you have a community center and no one really knows what the community center does. Come in and talk to us about it and let's hear how we could blend the two. How the school can help the community center and how the community center can help us.

A big piece of this seems to be Phoebe’s humility, and willingness to learn and listen, and best honest with parents and community members. She noted, “...I started finding out ‘okay this is valuable information’. That’s how I went out to everyone to say, ‘I value it, I want you to value it with me. I hear what you’re saying, help me improve’.”

In addition to creating buy-in from stakeholders at the school-level, Phoebe was also able to justify her program and position to the School Board as a result of having worked so intentionally to connect her school counseling services to the overarching needs of the school and district.

...We had to tell [the Schoolboard] how many times we were able to get in the classroom and like I said, I was able to use the scope and sequence to show the value that some people said, ‘Oh you’re taking away you’re academic time.’ No, based on your Scope and Sequence I am using my counseling strategies.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

One of the difficult parts of going through the RAMP process for Phoebe was that the data used to formulate programming and goals for the year that she was applying (2016) were from the previous school year (2015), and therefore not 100% relevant to the *current* year’s program (i.e., the comprehensive program that would grant RAMP distinction, if scored high enough, was being completed on behalf of old data from the previous school year). For Phoebe, the RAMP process happened within the context of her becoming the first school counselor in the history of the school, doing so in the middle of the schoolyear, immediately beginning the data collection process, then asking other staff members to join her in helping create a comprehensive school counseling program. She mentioned the difficulty in having all of these pieces fall into place so soon into her new role:

...We were the first counselors [in the district elementary schools]. So there were no school counselors. So the first year it was just making our way in to say, 'hey this is what school counselors do, this is how you need us, this is this'. And then the next year you're trying to do this RAMP application, so you have to get a community to even want to be involved and to even believe in school counseling. Now the first year you're saying, 'hey I'm here'. And now the next year, 'believe in me, come join'. [Other staff members are] like, 'yeah right', 'cause they don't even know what you do.

Further, though there was a district expectation that school counselors would apply for RAMP, what that looked like in practice was not always clear. Phoebe was asked to step into a new role partway through the year and immediately begin steps to building a nationally recognized program.

...You start off in the Spring of the year that you're applying and you have to survey each student in your school. Which is kind of tricky because you're surveying kids from the previous year. You're coming in and working on the RAMP application based upon the survey from the previous year so now your demographics changed, the kids move in and out, they moved up grade levels... What was a hindrance [was] that we didn't start at the beginning of the year, it was hard to come in mid-year. Some other things [that were a hindrance] were the expectation. I don't think that any of us or it was stated what the expectation is. 'What is it that you want to see from us'?

Even *during* completion of the first RAMP application Phoebe lacked some clarity and some buy-in herself. It was not something that easily became clear,

[The first time I applied for RAMP] it was still like I'm fumbling through it and I'm trying to get through the process and I'm understanding the needs of it.... I could be

honest, I wasn't buying into it because I still was unsure about it. So I had to start looking at, 'since I have to do this, what is gonna be the benefit?' ...at first, it was like 'I have to do this so I gotta start looking at really what is the benefit of this'. And the more I started actually looking ... then I started seeing a benefit.

In addition, being split between two schools brought with it some challenges regarding how report "use of time".

...it was a lot of work trying to do the RAMP application because you're at two schools and some of the things they're requiring it's like your daily ... every semester you had to turn in your time, like what your day would look like for a week, chart your week. Well, one day I'm here, another day I'm there. You know? So it was odd for us to do and it's like 'well should we count this time at this school? Should we count this time at that school?' So we had to finagle how to get a week's worth in when we're not somewhere a week, you're two days, three days.

Beginning and completing the RAMP application was a challenge. That said, it was a challenge that Phoebe was up to. When telling of how she was able to meet the needs of the school, and secure buy-in from stakeholders she recalled some of the specifics of the aforementioned bus-related program. Phoebe recognized that many students were getting in trouble on the bus. At the time, bus-related had become a no-man's-land, of sorts. Bus-drivers didn't know who to turn to, and not all bus-related incidents required discipline-based responses. Recognizing this need, Phoebe proposed a different way of dealing with the issue, and was successful in creating buy-in and strengthening her program. She discussed how the program was successful, and continues to be used annually.

It went well. Like, the first year we gave all the bus drivers a personality test. And so we talked about how their personality works with well with the students. And they were able to give us a lot of feedback as well. Like some of the issues were that they didn't know if a student had an IEP or they didn't know if a student had a lot of emotional issues. Or they could see a student come on the bus crying. They just never know who to tell. Because the teachers are getting them off the bus, the assistant principal is just getting their write up. So it's no one to say 'hey I'm noticing some things about this kid when I drop this kid off'. Now you have the counselors...So every year for a week we train all the drivers on just how to build relationships.

And it was a process that, despite the challenge, was one that she enjoyed even through the ambiguity.

...The process itself was ... I enjoyed the process. But even going to the meetings I still wasn't sure exactly what RAMP was. It was just like 'oh, okay you get the school RAMPed, but what does that really mean'? They are saying, 'Oh it's valuable. It's valuable. It's valuable.' But at that time you don't know what the value is. You just know, 'I should be doing this okay, my school district wants me to do this but really, what is the true value'? ...it's just like 'are we RAMPing because ASCA says RAMP? What does RAMP mean? What is the benefit of it?' And so until you start the process, then you start to learn more...

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

One of the most important outcomes of completing the RAMP process was that it made Phoebe a more intentional practitioner, and helped her recognize the small deficiencies in her program. To be clear, Phoebe was an intentional counselor, and did her best to follow best-

practice. And the RAMP application helped her see the gaps that she was unaware of. Notably, it wasn't until Phoebe completed the process for a second time that she really felt like she truly understood its benefits, even if there were some doubts along the way. It helped her be more confident in herself, and in the role she played in students' lives. Phoebe described the achievement of RAMP, she said it was,

Triumphant. I mean goodness, you are in the trenches...I felt like oh I'm a great counselor, oh I know what I'm doing. And when you start off you realize, 'What I'm doing is not really working' or 'What I thought I was doing I'm missing a lot of points to it'. And then you start going through it and you realize 'This is a lot of work, do I really want this'? And luckily my job is pushing for it because once I got into it I was like yeah, okay I understand it. But I have to admit doing it for [my first school] was totally different than doing it for [my second]. [At my first school] I felt like: it's information, I get it, I'm understanding it, but it was a lot of work. [At my second school], I appreciated it. And so I was like yeah, let's look at this. Yeah, let's talk more about this.

...I was excited that I accomplished it and then I got to see the benefit of what it was...The second go around it's like let me show you what the benefit is... I knew what it was I felt confident in talking about [it].

Going through the RAMP process not only changed Phoebe's perception of herself and her program, but also led to changes for students as well. The intentional, programmatic nature of the process allowed her to truly assess her students' needs, find specific groups that had additional needs relative to the whole school population, and create programs that addressed those needs. In turn, RAMP-goals aligned with the larger School Improvement Plan goals,

making the counseling program a key piece of overall school improvement, and responsible for school-based action in reaching these goals.

...one of my [RAMP] goals at [my school] was to increase reading for second grade males. Because and this is funny, now every school has to do a school wide plan, their school improvement plan. [But], when we sat down-- with [RAMP... you] have to have teachers on your committee. No one ever read the school improvement plan. How are you having a school improvement plan and no one knows what's on the school improvement plan?

It wasn't until Phoebe initiated committee action as part of the RAMP process that things really changed and the program impacted the whole school. This was done through true collaboration between teachers and Phoebe, the counselor.

So one of the goals for [the school] was to increase reading and so it was a second grade teacher and she was like, 'I never knew this was the goal. Well how are we doing this? How am I supposed to be doing this?' And this is part of our school improvement plan, we have nothing in place. So from there, we were able to say, 'Oh this can be a goal for me. How can we increase reading? So let's start looking at when we took the survey, how many kids read for fun outside of school?', that was one of the questions. And we noticed that in the breakdown African American boys didn't read outside of school for fun. So we decided to develop a book club. And each month we would have a superhero book, this book and then the kids could get into a drawing. Well that's gonna increase their reading and as well we could pick up that's socially relevant for them and do small group meetings and discuss more of the socio-emotional things, how they could connect with the characters and things like that. So that's when it became impactful.

Before then you don't know what the purposes [of RAMP] are. You just know, 'Okay I gotta ask these questions'... you're just doing things. You're doing things just because someone else said do them but you haven't seen the value or the use of them...

Phoebe's example of increasing reading for African American boys in second grade was especially timely given her state's focus on reading proficiency by third grade. Therefore, in addition to assisting in the school improvement goals through the RAMP process, she was also helping the school meet state-level standards. She discussed how the use of a superhero book club helped to both buy some time and provide direct actions for students to meet state-level proficiency expectations.

[State expectation] is that every third grade student has to take this reading test and you have to pass the reading test or you could get retained. Now you can take [the state test], you get several chances. You take it in the spring and then you could take summer school and if they move you on to fourth grade, you still have to take it and pass it before you can move on to fifth grade. But, now see, when we look at the data for second [grade] they're talking about improving second reading, well the next year you have to take the [state test], now we see this huge gap in kids that's not reading. So then the third grade teachers are like, 'Oh my gosh I need to get these kids to pass.' Well, let's look at the data to say second grade we need to push them more.

This school-wide change along with the other programs and services that Phoebe provided as part of the RAMP process also changed the way she and the profession, were seen by other stakeholders. She entered the school with an uphill battle of establishing a role, and creating and running a national-distinction worthy program all within the span of about ten months. When Phoebe discussed the ways that teachers and parents approached her after her

receiving RAMP distinction, it seems like she created a lot of change in such a short time. The school counseling program created a platform for true collaboration that went beyond Phoebe as the counselor. Phoebe saw this as one of the biggest benefits of RAMP distinction.

At the school level... I had teachers come up to me and say, 'Phoebe, I didn't realize that you do all of this stuff.' I had parents saying, 'Wow, I didn't realize that every time I talk to you, you had to take a note on it. I didn't realize you have to chart every time you see a student.' So I think a benefit was that they actually got to know what a counselor does.

For me, I got to actually see what parents and teachers really wanted. One of our big debates when we were doing RAMP is that you have all of these bullets and you have to dot 'what I think is the most important'. So one of our big debates was increasing reading or learning styles or the career development. The higher level teachers are like 'I want this', the lower levels are like 'no'. And then we had the parents yelling 'I feel like this'. That meeting we went over an hour just on that area of everybody darting and feeling like what was the most important and what was the most beneficial.

So for me, I think that's what was helpful. It was eye opening and I think that that's what the school 'cause then it became schoolwide. Like the teachers were talking to other teachers about it. And they starting thinking 'Oh, Phoebe's more than just this counselor that's just talking with kids.'

In addition to changing how she was perceived and used within the school, Phoebe's achievement of RAMP distinction paved way for her to continue to advocate for school counselors' position and funding. This was done primarily through presentations to the schoolboard during which she had to provide evidence of her effectiveness. The result was job security.

And so...what eventually happened is we presented to the school board, they loved the information we gave, they loved the data we collected. And it had to be data, it couldn't just be like 'we're doing great jobs here'... Yeah. So we had to show why we were this great group of people and from there, the superintendent a week later sent out a letter that said, 'Your jobs are secure. Once the grant runs out I am putting money in and making you regular salary.'

She secured her position and was granted the ability to focus only on one school, rather than being split between two. In the vein of "no good deed goes unpunished", Phoebe was then moved to a non-RAMP school, the upside being that she was able to focus all of her time and attention on this one school.

And so after that [the schoolboard] still continued the grant, but from the grant they hired additional counselors, they hired four more. So then we no longer had two schools, now we came in one school. So we became single schools then which was better for us.

And that was part of our push too is showing them that it's another need because we want to be ahead of the situation, we want to be proactive. And instead of being proactive, we were always reactive. Because by the time you get to that school the next day well this happened, this happened, this happened, this happened. And you was trying to get a program worked in but you're always chasing the fire. And so we were able to show, 'Hey if we're able to sustain some stability in one school, we could be proactive and the things that you're seeing could change'.

Despite the difficulty, at the end of it all, Phoebe said that the benefits of RAMP distinction make her know that she will re-apply once her distinction expires. When asked what

she would tell other counselors who were thinking about going through the process, she had this to say,

I would say go for the RAMP... If you're like me, you think that 'hey I'm serving kids, I'm doing the right thing' you realize that you might just be tipping the iceberg and it's so much more in depth doing it. You find out more about your students, you find out more about your parents, your community.

It really changed, for me, and I think even with the other counselors who have gone through it with me, it has really changed our program. I did not appreciate that, I didn't. I was like 'oh no, we gotta collect something else'. I love data now. I love it, I feel like I collect it, I share it. When the teachers put up their data posters, I put up my data posters. So now I feel like I could show my work in the school. I could show exactly what a counselor does just not people here to talk to the kids that you feel like are bad or misbehaving or, 'oh I just need some help'. You see the value that I can come before these behaviors.

[I could say to teachers], 'Yes, you need time to give me for these guidance lessons because they're beneficial to you because then you can teach. And the areas that you're worried about with your kids'... Now you see a value for counseling in itself, you see a value in groups. And like I know some counselors are like, 'I never get in the classroom.' The teachers are now asking me 'when can I come in? Do you have a group for this? Can you make a group for this?' And they don't mind. So I would say if nothing else it seems overwhelming, push through it, it's a benefit. I didn't see it at first, it's a benefit.

Appendix K: Maria's Story

Maria's RAMP journey began almost a decade from her actual application, and about 13 years prior to our conversation. Maria began using the ASCA National Model from the onset of her time as a counselor, and though it was emphasized by her professors, it wasn't something that she received in-depth training on.

I guess it would have started my first year as a school counselor. So that would have been 10 years before I applied. And I was tracking all the ASCA standards that I was doing in classrooms and that kind of thing, so I was using the model, or trying to as a new counselor as much as I could. Because we did, I bet maybe six hours of ASCA model training or class time in grad school, where we really went through it. But in like internship, nobody was doing anything like that, that I saw...my professor emphasized that this is what you should be doing, which case, and showed us the model and all that kind of stuff, and we designed the lesson plan and that kind of stuff. So maybe it was a little bit more than six hours, but I don't remember spending more than two nights on that particular.

Motivations for RAMP

Despite Maria's lack of extensive formal training in the model, knowing that it was best practice motivated her to learn the specifics, and use it in practice. Maria worked at a few different schools, which made it hard to establish and continue growing a comprehensive counseling program.

So, I was [using the National Model] because I was interested in it. I knew it was best practice. I had the publication, whatever they had, with all the standards, and it was the model. So I'd look at that and go through my lesson planning and see which standards I

was hitting and all that kind of stuff. So I was in that school for three years and then we moved. Then I was at another school briefly, and then we moved again.

It wasn't until she was at one school for an extended period of time that Maria was able to see the full scope of her work in context, and recognize that she was already implementing many parts of the ASCA national model, making RAMP seem more like a possibility.

So then I was at [the school where I RAMPed] for quite a while. And it was probably a couple of years after I started there, and I always was checking the standards and seeing where I was as far as that. And I was doing needs assessments, so I had some things already in place that I knew I was needing to be doing. I was just trying to get as many things in place as I could, and so I did a little bit at a time.

The real push to begin the process came from her speaking it aloud, for the first time to a colleague.

...So after... a couple years, a ... I guess we call her a Curriculum Director... we were talking one time, and I can't remember how we got on the subject... We were goal-setting or something like that in in-service, and I told her that my goal was to be the first counselor [in the area] to apply for and get to be a RAMP school. So that was the accountability piece, because I told somebody that was in charge what I was working toward.

Maria also recognized that the counselor to student ratio in her school, and many others was high. Interestingly, at the time of her receiving RAMP, she was splitting her time between two schools, so in addition to having a high caseload, she also had fewer hours in her school than many other counselors do. Maria saw RAMP as a means of advocacy for reducing that ratio and providing services to a higher number of students.

...If we had more counselors in schools, what could we do with the kids? How could the students benefit from? This is what one person did with a whole bunch of kids, what if we had more people doing more things with less kids?

Important Resources

When Maria began her RAMP journey, she was more or less alone on it. Because of this, it was imperative that she drew from some extant resources to help her along the way, and to provide support for the arduous, time-consuming process that the RAMP application proved to be.

National

As Maria mentioned, one of the motivations for her to apply for RAMP was that she would be the first counselor in her area to do so. One of the downsides of being a pioneer is that there was little systemic recognition and/or support at the district level by way of RAMP-related materials. Because Maria was an active member of ASCA, one of the biggest resources for her came from a number of sessions that she attended at a National ASCA Conference.

And when the conference was in Minneapolis, the ASCA conference, I had gone to a few breakout sessions on RAMP, and they broke it down year by year what they did, because they did a slow implementation in their district. So that gave me guidelines to follow as far as implementing that way, year one they did these certain things, and then year two they did some more. So based on what I already had in place I just listened to those people that had already been through it, and just went from there and really baby-stepped it, because I didn't have anybody to call or email. So I just did it on my own, based on what ASCA put out and the breakout sessions that I attended there.

Graduate School Community

Additionally, Maria utilized previous relationships, specifically with the counselor educators who originally trained her. They became a source of support for practical application of the ASCA National Model once she was in her own school.

... One of my former professors...would be another resource... I can call her, email her, text her anytime, and she helped me set up my needs assessments because I wanted to be able to quantify responses. So I do a lot of scales one to five, and then you can mathematically see the number change. Or the problem severity decreased by so much. So just having her help me set that up, makes it really easy to quantify that, whatever it is that you're asking.

School

At her school, Maria found support from the aforementioned Curriculum Director. Additionally, she was given a lot of autonomy from her principal, and not an excessive number of non-counseling duties. The result was that she could really *be* a school counselor.

...My principal was really flexible. I didn't have non-counseling duties. So I had time to actually do the things that I wanted to do. I didn't have any lunch duty because she knew that I was doing lunch groups at that time. Every once in a while I'd have to cover, maybe one day a week. I think it was my last year there that I actually did have a lunch duty because our numbers were just so high, that yeah, fair share, that's cool. But otherwise I wasn't asked to do anything inappropriate for school counselors. I mean, I was really a school counselor, which was really nice.

Additionally, something that would likely be seen as a hindrance, namely Maria being split between two schools, also played a role in her ability to really *be* a school counselor.

...I would guess I was split between two buildings, so whenever I was at a building or that specific building, they wanted me counseling. And I wasn't reliable as far as a lunch duty every day or a certain time every day, because I would be at other schools. So my schedule probably was a factor. The amount of time that I got to spend at that school I think was a factor too, where they wanted me being a counselor all the time I was there. I think that helped.

As an active member of ASCA, Maria was up to date with the state of the school counseling profession. In addition, she took an active role in helping train the next generation of school counselors through having interns. One of the benefits of having interns was the ability to gain clarity on her own role through teaching it to others as well as leverage their help with the RAMP process, which can be daunting for one person to do alone.

Having [interns] was helpful, because you always understand it better when you're teaching it, so that helped. And then I had another set of eyes, and another person to brainstorm things with or bounce ideas back and forth, eyes to proofread, that kind of thing.

Teachers also played a part in Maria's ability to run relevant programming that ultimately allowed her to gain RAMP distinction.

I had really supportive teachers. They really, really liked the fact that I could show them how effective a group was. They really like the numbers, where you could say, 'when I have kids in an impulse control group', or 'when I have kids in this type of group, here are the results'. You didn't have to tell them who the kids were, you didn't have to tell them what we were doing, but you got to demystify that, your role, and they really liked it...

Personal

Maria had no other RAMP counselors to turn to, nor a strong district push for her to implement a RAMP program. Much of the motivation was personal, so it begged the question of what made Maria different. Many school counselors, especially in elementary schools, find themselves without a team. Many school counselors lack district-level mandates and resources for helping with RAMP, but what made Maria able to go for the distinction in the absence of these things? For one, she is a, “classic first child overachiever” (her own words). But underneath that is also a humility that played a role, though Maria never used the word directly.

I thought [getting RAMP] would be the best way I could advocate for school counseling in my district without ... I don't know how to put that, the best way I could advocate without really saying, ‘Look at me, look at me.’ Just ‘this is what I'm doing’, and it's very transparent when you go through that application, and that type of thing

Maria also made a point to establish herself and her role early on at her school. When she got to the school where she obtained RAMP, it was a brand new building resulting from the merging of two different elementary schools, and she was a new counselor to the school. As a result, some of the teachers came in with preconceived ideas of what a school counselor should do, and what their role should be. Rather than falling into the patterns created by other counselors, Maria listened to teachers’ perspectives, but did what she believed was best for students based on her training and understanding of the ASCA National Model.

...I would smile and nod and reflectively listen. Because in one building the counselor said to the principal, ‘Well [teachers] need to have morning meetings every day.’ If you want to do a morning meeting that is great, by all means do that in your classroom, but I'm not going to tell you how to run your classroom. That's a great choice and if that

works for you that's great, but as for me, being new here, I'm not going to tell you what to do in your classroom. I think that's wonderful. And they gave me books to read on positive discipline and all this other stuff that the other counselor was doing, and I was like, 'Oh, that looks great, you can use it.' Where it wasn't a uniform administrator mandated program or curriculum... I'm just going to do what I need to do, and whatever you think is best for your kids I'm totally going to support what you do in your classroom rather than me telling them. Especially as the newbie, I don't know your kids...

In the face of little direction and external pressure, Maria drew upon what few resources were available, and be intentional about the work that she was doing both before, and throughout the RAMP process.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

Completing the RAMP process, especially on her own and in light of few district-level resources, required Maria to be planful throughout the process. In addition to implementing a RAMP program piece-by-piece over a number of years Maria also took the opportunity to have a “practice year” before actually applying for RAMP. The reason: mostly pragmatic.

I didn't want to apply twice. So I wanted to take a whole year and just make sure that I was going over everything and had everything in place. I was thinking to myself, 'I've already done this before so I can do that again.' And then just focus more on the application piece, where I knew that I had everything that I needed, but now I can write it up and get all the data organized and just add that last piece for the application part...and that way I could also figure out what data I needed to collect for each part and already have that system set up, so then the next year I could just reuse that and it was cleaner and more efficient...So I can just focus more on the counseling part and the data

collection. I've worked out the kinks the year before so then I know what ... And have the needs assessments already ready, or anything that I'm getting from the teachers, feedback forms or anything... So I already had everything, so I could just send it out again quickly or print it off quickly again, because I had that extra.

Despite her intentionality, the process was still difficult and arduous. The process itself initially led her to believe that she would not RAMP again, if given the chance. This partly due to the amount of time it took ensuring that everything she was doing would meet ASCA's submission requirements. There were also difference between her two schools that allowed her to RAMP at one, and not the other.

After going through [the RAMP process] once I thought to myself, 'I'm done.'... [ASCA] asked [me] to put out a timeline I guess, where it's a guideline where September you should work on that, and then October work on this, guidelines as to application-wise, which sections you could do and you could finish and all those types of things. And just doing that and going through and having every single thing that you needed for your application, and then it's like, 'Oh man, I had to have lesson plans for all those written out?' Because I just jot down a sentence, 'We're gonna do this,' instead of the whole lesson plan, because I already know what I'm going to do.

So I have to type eight lesson plans out for this group, and all the data. Just trying to keep all those where they needed to go and keep it all straight, and get the narrative written, and proofread, and then go over it again. It was just a huge process. And that was after I had all the data from the year before. Doing all that, putting it all together, and then re-going over it that next fall just to make sure everything was there. It was a big job...And just going over the rubric deciding, 'do I have this?', and 'is this a four or a

five?’ And I mean, it's just so gray as to where it's good or is it exemplary? And ‘where am I going to fall on that?’ And ‘what's missing?’ Argghh, it's stressful.

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

It's said in many ways: the journey provides meaning for the destination. For Maria, many of the changes that she saw within her school were not necessarily the result of obtaining RAMP distinction so much as they were the changes that she saw throughout the school as she was going through the process. One example of this was the way that she was perceived and utilized by teachers and administrators.

After I was doing collecting data and reporting it to [teachers], they utilized me as a counselor a lot more, and rather than, ‘Fix this kid,’ it was, ‘What can we do or what are you already doing that would benefit this kid?’ You know? It kind of shifted a little bit, which was really nice... I think I got a lot more street cred with the teachers, if you know what I mean. Where I'm not just going and playing games with them and we're just going to color, and they were a lot more willing to let [students] leave class for me, because they knew that what I was doing was effective because I could back that up.

An important source of these data was from teachers themselves, which made the change that much more meaningful for them.

So the teachers' perceptions [on the needs assessment] are, ‘Yeah, this problem is this severe.’ And then after the group, I surveyed them again, and their perceptions of severity had dropped... so [data is] from the teachers initially and then from the teachers afterwards. Because they don't remember what they filled out eight weeks ago or whatever, so then I could say to the teachers, ‘You guys are telling me that this works. I'm not saying it, you're saying it.’ It was a really good way to get feedback and to share

feedback as well. And administrators talk numbers and they like that, so it's the language that they understand too.

And provided a springboard for a relationship in which the act of her doing more counseling-related duties changed perceptions such that she were able to continue doing those things.

[Using data] a good way to say, 'I can do this more if I don't have lunch duties,' or whatever. It's a really good advocacy piece I think. And it's good because you can tell parents that too, 'well last year the kids that I had in a group were talking about, they showed improvement after one group. Teachers saw this.'...

The RAMP process also boosted Maria's confidence in areas that may have been relative weaknesses as well. In addition to clarifying the role for teachers and administrators, it clarified it for her as well,

I was a lot more comfortable with getting data, such as compiling data, and reporting it. It really demystified the role of a school counselor by leaps and bounds. I could send somebody my RAMP application and say, 'This is what school counselors do. This is what we are able to do.' And then they'd reply, 'Oh really, yeah I didn't know that.'

Going through the process also allowed her to become a more effective practitioner, and affect change for more students,

I think [the RAMP process] made me not necessarily a better counselor per se, but better able to serve my kids and affect more change in more kids. Rather than the 10% that get 80% of your time, I was able to flip it over and get more kids, the greater number of kids... And it was good, because a lot of the kids had the same needs. And so if you can show that you're effective with a group of the same needs kids, you can get six, and you

use your time so much better. Rather than seeing six different kids for six different times, you see those six kids at the same time, and you're using only a half hour... I was able to see a lot more kids. My individual numbers, it was crazy. The more groups I did, the individual counseling referrals went down so fast. The more groups I did, the individual referrals just went way down, which was good.

In terms of what happened when the school was actually awarded RAMP (the “destination”), the response was, admittedly, underwhelming: “We put a banner up in the entryway, that's it. I don't think the [RAMP] plaque is up in my former school yet...It was very anticlimactic.” It was not all negative at the school-level, though. There were some perks of gaining RAMP distinction, including that it brought some money in from the PTA.

Since last year in the fall, I got funding from the PTA, I think they gave thousands of dollars to us, because I...had data from the needs assessments [that] kids were having really big struggles with paying attention. So we asked the PTA and so I shared results, my needs assessment, particularly the severity of the problem in each grade. I shared an article about movement in class, so they gave us \$3000 to fill an order for teachers. I was able to ask teachers ‘what do you want in your classroom?’

But despite the local response leaving something to be desired, the recognition Maria received at the national level made the whole process worth it. This included both the celebration at the ASCA conference and opportunity for her to become a RAMP reviewer herself.

I would probably [Re-RAMP]... just because they did send me to receive the award, so that was amazing. It was totally worth it. I mean, just being able to go and receive that award, made it all worthwhile. I mean, and I know there was advocacy and I know all these different things happened as a result throughout the process. But after the RAMP

distinction, there was not much, but receiving that award was awesome and I got to meet so many cool people just at that dinner. Yeah, so I mean, that was cool, but that was not through my school, that was through ASCA.... So really cool things happened in the school-counseling world.

Because Maria was a pioneer in her area for having applied for RAMP she became a de facto leader within the local school counseling community, of which she was already an active member. Her obtainment of RAMP allowed her opportunities to talk about the process in ways that may pave the road for others to do so as well.

... I don't know if anybody from [my area] has applied for RAMP this year, I haven't heard. I know that some were going to, and then they said things like, 'I don't know. I don't know how.' So people had asked so then I could help them, and that kind of thing. So maybe more people will go that direction. I know in some districts it's really hard, because the 80/20. Some counselors just don't have that 80/20 requirement, so they're just automatically, 'I can't do it.' Which is sad, but the more that you do it the more you can get that 80... I was active in our local [school counseling] chapter and our state chapter and that kind of thing. So I presented at conferences before with different things...

Despite what she described as, "stressful", and in light of the feelings of, "I'm done" after first going through the process, Maria indicates that she would recommend it for others, and urged other school counselors to go through the process themselves, even if slowly.

I think if you're a school counselor you should do it. I don't think there's anything negative that could come from doing this. Yeah, you get a little stressed out, but if you slowly implement it, and I mean, you don't have to apply for RAMP either. But if you just systematically go through what you would need to do to be a RAMP school and put

those things in place, you will be able to reach so many more kids... I just got so much more buy-in and support from the teachers [after getting RAMP]. My street cred went up.

That's how I think about it all the time too. Because when I started, [my school] was brand new building...so [teachers] come into this new building with each other, and then me, this new counselor that they don't know anything about. So for the first year or two, I heard, 'Well this is how the other [counselor] does it.' 'This is how this person does it.' And I'm thinking, 'Yes, I know.' So after building my program then they understand what I do. And then being able to say, 'This is what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm doing it.' And then you get the recognition to back that up saying, 'Yes, she is doing what she's supposed to be doing,' which is different from what other counselors are doing.

Moreover, she learned an important lesson about recognizing that not all accolades will come with recognition, and certainly not from everyone. But at the end of it all, going through the RAMP process can be beneficial for all stakeholders.

I don't know. I know that there are some [people] that, I don't know, I could win 800 awards, and 'yeah, so?' There are just people that are more counselor friendly that really utilize you and want to work with you for their students and stuff. And then there's some that just aren't. But the majority ... and I think all of the perceptions of the counseling program improved through this process. I say from everybody. Because with my advisory board there were parents. Then, I was invited to speak at a PTA meeting about my role as the school counselor, and so I got to talk about different things there. I don't know, parents, administrators, I think just that piece where you can say that you have a

nationally recognized program, it's just nice to be able to say, 'Should you be doing this?'

'Yes, I should be doing this, I'm nationally approved right now.'

Appendix L: Debbie's Story

For Debbie, the possibility of gaining RAMP distinction was never out of the question. She was formally trained on the ASCA National Model, and was already using elements of it in her school counseling program. The seeds of what would eventually grow into Debbie's RAMP program were planted long before she ever applied,

I think it's a story that started in my graduate school. I feel like because I went to a school that taught the ASCA National Model, that's CACREP accredited, I felt like I graduated very competent to be an ASCA National school counselor...I feel like I know the program, and so I was ready to implement the parts of it, at that time work under the standards. Our application here became Mindsets and Behaviors but before that we were crosswalking, teaching the standards, having advisory meetings, so I feel like the foundation was really honestly in my training. Through grad school I knew what it meant, so coming in I was already starting components of the RAMP process, of the ASCA National Model.

Despite having had formal training on the ASCA National Model, the actual implementation of a RAMP program was made difficult by the setting where Debbie worked—a pre-k-5 Title I inner-city school with about 900 students. Though she had a part-time counselor who worked with her three days a week, the other two days Debbie was the sole counselor those 900 students. Many students came from large, blended families. Others were English language learners (ELL), or the children of the large undocumented worker population that resided in the county. Debbie's school was not the type you'd see on an American sitcom. But the reality is that her school is like many others across the nation that often go unnoticed-- invisible, which is part of what makes her story an important one.

Motivations for RAMP

There was no *one* thing that motivated Debbie to pursue RAMP for her school. Rather, it was a combination of colleagues, former educators, personal characteristics, and an understanding of her school's needs that led to her applying for the distinction. One friend and colleague, Kim (a pseudonym), played a big role in the decision, specifically in pointing out that only a few changes would need to be made to Debbie's program in order for it to warrant at least an application for RAMP. Further, at the time that Debbie applied she knew that she was going to be leaving her school at the end of the schoolyear. Because she was in a high needs school RAMP distinction would provide a template for the counselor that replaced her, essentially leaving a legacy of best practice that would continue after she left.

...when Kim was like, 'Debbie, you're doing it anyway,' and I was like, 'Well, you are, might as well get that craft even though I don't get any money for it or anything, you know.' And it was honestly because I knew I was leaving [the school]... I wanted to be like, 'Don't let this program die.' This plaque is hanging here, I wanted the next person to give the program, the school needs the program especially being a Title I school. They need all the components of it, so I wanted it to be something, almost like my legacy I was leaving there but to encourage the next person to keep it going.

In addition to Kim's influence, Debbie also had some influence at the county level. The part-time counselor that worked with Debbie split her time between Debbie's school and another school. That other school was also in the process of applying for RAMP, so there was a level of camaraderie and influence between Debbie and Fran (a pseudonym), the full-time counselor at that school. Further, a county supervisor was in support of Debbie applying for RAMP. Though

this a motivating factor in and of itself, Debbie was savvy enough to leverage this relationship into a professional development (and celebration) opportunity for herself,

...[What] inspired us to do it, besides having... Kim peer pressuring me for us all to do it at the same time, was that our county supervisor said, because we had a pretty good relationship with him too, he was like, 'If you ladies see this through, the three of you, and you guys get it, I will pay for you all to come to the ASCA Conference..., so that you can attend that [RAMP recognition] dinner.' So, that was a big incentive because I was like, 'I love going to ASCA Conferences. I hate having to hustle for money and be like, Can you pay?...If you're going to pay for me, I get to go to ASCA.' So, sure I might not have gotten CEUs for doing RAMP, but I got CEUs from going to ASCA. Yeah, and I got to go to the fancy dinner and dress up. And so, it might not be enough but it could be something that push, it did push me a little bit over the edge. I was like, 'All right, I want to go to a fancy dinner,' because I knew that was going to be my last time being with them before moving... So, that was something, a guiding part that guided my decision.

Important Resources

Two interesting pieces of Debbie's overall story are apparent in the interaction between Debbie and her county supervisor prior to her beginning the RAMP process. The first is her view of the RAMP process as a professional development opportunity, a thread that was consistent and will be explored further. The second is her tendency to make requests, and have them granted. Debbie's assertiveness and ability to do what is in the best interest of her school counseling program and students is another piece that will make additional appearances throughout her story.

Debbie's counselor education colleagues and county both played a role in her motivations to apply for RAMP, but they also both (alongside her school, and personal characteristics) had a hand in providing resources that she pulled from throughout the application process.

Graduate School Community

Debbie and Kim met through a state-level ASCA social. They got along well, and through this friendship Debbie gained access to other resources that helped her get through the RAMP process.

...[Kim] came to ...where my master's program was, to do her doctorate program, and she also created this cohort to support schools in the area doing RAMP. And honestly she's definitely part of my story too because without that support from the university and because she was like, 'Debbie, you have to do this.' Like, 'Do this with me. Come on, Debbie, you're doing it already at your school.' So, I came to the cohort and they supported us by having her grad students, so she was a doc student there who's running graduate courses, so she had her grad students critique parts of our RAMP process as we were creating it...

The community created by Debbie's graduate school led to a group of school counselors all working on RAMP simultaneously, separate from whatever counties they were in—the impetus for this community was from the graduate school side of things.

So, for example, fall of 2015 [the grad school] started having cohort meetings. So, once a month we'd go off campus and we were allowed to use that time how we wanted. Initially it was just they would tell us about the process and we would work on one part of the RAMP at that cohort but then it just became, you just come here and do what you need to do, and then we would submit parts of it to the grad class that Kim was doing with

[another counselor educator], who's down there. And so, they would give a feedback, they used the rubric from RAMP to critique how well we did it and give us feedback, and that way we could change it if we wanted to or adapt it to better help us apply for RAMP...So, I feel like my story is a lot of support and encouragement by grad school, then working in a big county with a great supporter, and then having a connection with a local university.

District/County

In addition to receiving practical and moral support from her alma mater, Debbie also utilized the aforementioned county supervisor, Tim (a pseudonym). Tim understood and valued the ASCA National Model and provided a concrete timeline and expectation for what elements of a RAMP program were the focus at any particular time. He also provided practical examples that Debbie and her colleagues could use as models, and was actively involved along the way.

...I was lucky to work in a really big county that we had, Tim is our ... I know he likes when I say his name, he was our leader, our county leader, and he strongly believes in the ASCA National Model, and he really wanted us to live in that, so he helped us by saying, 'You have to do this, this year.' So, like, 'This year it's all about creating your advisory committee. This year it's all doing the crosswalk, this year it's all about doing this component,' ...He just gave us ASCA's resources, so for example, the year he was like, 'You all got to crosswalk your program.' He gave us the cross walking program and told us when to turn it into the Google folder. And then, we got to see everyone else's too. Same thing with the advisory thing. He was like, 'Here is what ASCA says an advisory committee should be and now I'm ready to be invited to your advisory committee.'

School

Where Debbie was lucky in having a graduate school community and county-level support she was less lucky when it came to support at the school-level, namely because of the fluctuation in leadership prior to and during her RAMP application year. With changing leadership came differing levels of knowledge about school counselors and their roles meaning that Debbie had to explicitly teach about her role and the RAMP process.

...We're talking about a Title I school, so I had a new principal the year we were doing it. She didn't know anything about school counseling, in the elementary level... I don't think she even knew what it meant to get RAMP, but then again, she left that year, so that next year ... I was on my third principal the year we started it, so that created a hindrance. We started our advisory committee, I was with a different principal, different leadership, and so when we did our advisory committee it almost probably would have looked to RAMP like we were brand new because our agenda is like, 'What is school counseling?'

Because at the first meeting that year all three of our principals were new, so they had no idea what we did. And she was coming from a high school, so she really had no idea what we did. So, it did thwart our program because we already had learned to transition through a principal and lack of support.

A seeming upside to administrative change was a level of autonomy and trust that Debbie and her part-time-partner knew what they were doing. They were given freedom in running their program.

However, [leadership change] gave us the freedom to choose our goals and our pathway, and we were lucky that our principal just allowed us to deliver our program. They didn't put constraints on our ability to provide our program. We never had a problem getting 80/20, I mean, we were definitely 95/5...There was maybe 5% of my day I wasn't

working with kids, wasn't somehow interacting with a child, so we were able to continue doing all that.

Though the ability to obtain this freedom did require self-advocacy for her role.

... Our second principal actually did try, they tried to put us on lunch duty all the time, and so that would have wrecked us if we were trying to do something like that too but we advocated and were removed off of that right away that we're overpaid for lunch duty...

Being in a Title I school brought with it a number of unique challenges as well. Title I schools, by definition are schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families. As a result of this, the schools themselves often have little money. For Debbie, this translated to the counseling department not only having a very high ratio of students, but having no discretionary budget for materials. And, notably, this didn't change even after getting RAMP distinction. With no budget, Debbie needed to collaborate with other people and programs already running in the school, especially those providing services that would fall under those of a comprehensive school counseling program. One big help in this was the *Communities in Schools* program.

... We had Communities in Schools, at our school... we started the same year, so we were together and she [the head person for Communities in Schools] was almost like an extension of the program. Communities in Schools, does a lot of school counseling work in a school. If I look and think that RAMP was a lot—[Communities in schools] have to keep a lot of data on students, and have case files on all the students, and look every nine weeks of their grades, at their attendance, at their discipline record for the kids they're servicing. And they do the Backpack Program for me. She does the mentor program. She does things like, Give Kids a Smile, so she organizes dentists to come in to give the kids

dentist check-ups. She does the Thanksgiving turkeys, and Christmas gifts, and someone just got homeless, so she's going to direct them to these resources to get beds, and a place to live...we had a clothes closet. She would do donations for the school, school supply drives. Things like that.

It is not uncommon for school counselors to collaborate with other student services personnel. However, given the Title I nature of Debbie's school, the school social worker, who is often a close colleague of the school counselor, was not able to provide as much help with the RAMP process due to a heavy caseload. This is part of the reason that Debbie was intentional in allying so closely with Communities in Schools. In addition to providing her very relevant data for the RAMP application and important programming for her students that would be difficult for Debbie to do on her own as the only full time counselor at the school, Communities in Schools was also able to act as a means of a discretionary budget.

...We have a social worker but she had three schools, so [our Communities in Schools representative] was part social worker, part school counselor responsibilities. A lot of school counselors at other schools have to operate the Backpack Program for food on the weekends and all that other kind of stuff, where she did that stuff. So, she was a huge part of us being able to offer an ASCA National Model program. Because she could take care of all those other duties. And crazy important-- me spending three weeks organizing Give Kids a Smile, how would I write that down? So, she does those kind of things, and so she was a huge part of our advisory committee and the three of us worked together a lot on the things we offered. So, that was a huge benefit of me being able to do RAMP because I had this person who did a lot of other responsibilities and supported the programming.

And she was my budget. So, she actually has a huge budget, so if we needed materials or things like that she bought them for us.

Debbie also utilized other school-wide programs, such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) to pull data that could be used for ASCA results reports.

...We were a PBIS school, so we had SWIS [School-Wide Information System]. ...SWIS provides this wealth of data, and then because we're a PBIS school we're already working in data and have other ways to get it. So, having those kind of systems at a school, that was huge help as well and being a part of a big county that looked at data was helpful.

The final main source of support at the school-level blends the lines between school, county, and Debbie's personal characteristics. As mentioned, Debbie was the only full time counselor at her school, but had the assistance of a part time counselor, Tina (a pseudonym) three days a week. The other two days, Tina worked in a different elementary school with the aforementioned Fran. When Debbie decided to undergo RAMP, so did Fran, and they both utilized each other and Tina to help ease the burden of going through the process. Debbie also recognized that for her, personally, what might be a source of support for other school counselors isn't actually helpful for her.

So, Fran [was] at her other school, Tina was the person we shared, so [Fran and I] asked [Tina] to do the same parts [of the application] at each school so that way she wouldn't be doing double duty and it would help us, like she could just really know those few parts, and then we'll do everything else. So, part of the hindering would be the fact that generally in elementary school you're the party of one, so having that is a hindrance. I, however, was really never awesome at group work because I like power and control. So, I have to say for me that was almost a benefit because if I would have had to have done

this with a bigger group it would have made me super anxious and I would have had to, on the sly, redo all of their stuff before I submitted it anyway because that's just my personality.

Personal

So far, Debbie's savviness and ability to advocate for herself and her program have been discussed. The previous paragraph on working closely with Tina and Fran also provides insight into Debbie. On the surface it sheds light on her tendency to gravitate towards doing things alone, but it also shows her level of insight and self-understanding. This section of Debbie's story focuses on the ways in which she saw herself. The reader will see how her personal qualities interacted with the RAMP process in later sections of her story. Debbie's discussion of herself starts with her continuing the thought about the difference between herself and what she sees as a more 'typical' elementary school counselor in terms of how it relates to being a counseling team of one during the RAMP process.

So, I want to say, for an elementary...being alone is a huge hindrance because you don't have anybody to check in with but I wasn't alone because...three of us who were working on it together had been working together for seven years, sharing each other. So, we loved each other, worked well together, and [we] had the resources like Kim and that cohort to sit there and do that...It really wasn't my hindrance. But the time [it took to complete the application], as a party of one, wanting to put that [time] in is a huuuuge hindrance for probably other people.

...Other people might not agree because you go to a high school program that has six to eight counselors and they each did a part, so it's not that big of a deal but for the elementary experience they have to just accept that it's going to be a lot of outside the

school work for you still to be an ASCA National Model counselor, according to their time [recommendations].

It has been said that Debbie's was already running a comprehensive school counseling program prior to applying for RAMP. One of the motivations for her applying came from Kim's pointing out that she was 'already doing it anyway'. This speaks to the type of practitioner that Debbie was even prior to the RAMP process, and tells a little bit more about her personality. Debbie likes to do the best job that she can—in this case, RAMP represented the highest accolade possible for school counselor because it was based off of the highest professional standard, the ASCA National Model.

Okay. I feel like the personal qualities of myself is that honestly I'm this person who likes to get an A. You know what I mean? I'm one of those, if there's not just selfishly because I want the A but because I want to do the best job. I want to make sure that I've learned all I could or that, as a practitioner, I'm providing everything I can for the students. I don't want them to be missing out on anything and I don't want myself to be somewhere else not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. So, for me as a practitioner, I feel like it was about making sure I am offering a program that the standard, ASCA National Model, which what other guiding standard would be bigger than that, says that I'm doing the best I can.

In fact, RAMP was just one of the national recognitions that Debbie was applying for at the time.

...I was doing National Boards at the same time [as RAMP] because I want someone to say to me, 'Yes, you are on the right path. This is what should be happening.' So, it was both about me selfishly liking to get A's and also wanting to do the best job I can for the

students. I don't want them to not have anything because I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

Additionally, Debbie was not a stranger to working hard. As a single mother who went through graduate school, she was used to having to work diligently towards goals.

I think it's just my personal work habit. Honestly, I'm a single mom, and so when I went to [my master's program]... I just had a routine. So, every night my daughter goes to bed at 8:00 and I always was just doing my master's program, any work I had to do, and so when I started at [my school] that was still my pattern. I didn't know how to do anything different, for three years that's what I was doing. So, when I put my daughter down at 8:00, I'd go downstairs and I'd write lesson plans, I'd be working. And then, so that just continued.

Debbie didn't become complacent. She had a desire to continually improve, and RAMP provided her a means to do so, albeit through the commitment of a *lot* of time.

When I had my [school counseling] program, and I had all my lesson plans, and I had my groups, and things for cruising along, and sure I went into professional developments, implementing new things, but it was like when National Boards came along I started that first, I was like, 'all right, that's the what's next.' And when they said about RAMP I was like, 'Okay, that's the what's next.' If I would try to even put a number on it, because I did National Boards and RAMP when [my daughter] was at summer camp, outside of school. Because I didn't do any of the work inside of school, let's be honest, not in a school like that, 70% of your time is response time at a busy Title I school, so you have to be willing to give 100 to 200 hours outside of school easily to RAMP if it's not conducive to get it done during the work day.

And realistically, given the high-needs of her school, it was impossible to have possibly RAMPed without taking some (or most) of the work home.

So, doing National Boards and RAMP I always argued like, ‘Well, where is the National Board's line on this, how am I allocating my time during the day, like 20% is lesson planning and stuff like that?’ You can't lesson plan, and do RAMP in 20%. If you're going to do it, it's going to take a lot of time. So, RAMP, it's like you're either lying about your hours if you're getting it done during the day or, like me, you just do it all outside of school.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

The fact that Debbie had a comprehensive school counseling program prior to applying for RAMP wasn't just lucky—according to Debbie, it was imperative. Putting a truly comprehensive data-driven program in place requires an understanding of students' needs that can't be done too quickly.

...You have to be working somewhere for three to five years before you can even think about trying to get them RAMP. Honestly, if you've been somewhere one or two years, maybe even three years, I feel like you're lying on the application process. I don't know, I guess if you've done it before it might be easier like I'm now thinking, ‘Could I jump into another program and do it?’ I still think it would take me at least three years to feel like I could put something like that down. So, it's having the time at a school first to even think or accomplish something.

Debbie was realistic throughout the RAMP process. Given the needs of her school, she knew that it was unlikely that massive changes would occur in regards to her role. She, therefore, viewed it was a professional development opportunity from the start. And, despite the fact that

her program was already comprehensive, the application's requirement of reflections on every aspect of the school counseling program proved to be an important and helpful one. One that she recommended other counselors to undertake.

I feel like RAMP, when someone's entering into it, needs to view it also as a professional development opportunity...Doing this process is really a professional development opportunity, so I felt really strong about my program entering into that year, however actually having to fill out all of the forms with the thought somebody else was going to be evaluating me this time, and then I don't even know if I can get into the amount of brain energy you put into the reflections. Every submission of the 12 or 13 submissions comes with you submit, was it 750 words, yeah, you can submit up to 750 words of reflection about that piece. So, for example, when you give them your small groups action plans and all that stuff like small groups you then reflect on that piece for up to 750 words.

So, you're really doing a lot of meta about your process, about like, 'Why do I offer these groups?' And then, like, 'How am I differentiating in these groups? How successful are these groups? And why I should continue or not continue to offer them?'...There's a lot in those rubrics that really is professional development. And so, for me, that year was really reflecting on every piece of the program, and if its benefits are not beneficial, and how would I change it? So, 150% going through the RAMP process, I would say, 'Whether you get awarded it or not really helps you to be a reflective practitioner and can help strengthen your program.'

Debbie also had a love/hate relationship with the actual application itself. The reflections, while the most important for her, also proved to be the most tedious. Further, Debbie's tendency toward high achievement led to her sinking a lot of time into them.

...I feel like, while I hated them, the amount of time they took you to think, I feel like the reflections were a huge part of accomplishing this and maybe sometimes the most impactful for you to reflect. So, while I almost feel like, I wish they just didn't have them, because if they didn't have them, like, 'Why do I need to write 750 words on this group action plan?' Like, 'Just look at it.' And that just takes so much more time. I don't know if I would have them dropped because of the reflection and I would take them very seriously. I feel like it says you can have ... I don't remember if it was up to 350 or up to 750 words, but ...in National Boards you can have exactly 13 pages, no more, that's it. With [RAMP] it was like, 'Well, you can write 50 words or you can write 750,' I would write them all because you're arguing for your practice and what you're submitting. So, I think those are really important, not meant to be taken lightly. At the same time I can say, 'I don't know how RAMP used them.'

...I view [the reflections] as important both professionally, for my mental stability, I was like, 'Well, this is why it looks like that, and this is why ...' So, while I loved and hated it, I feel like the reflections and I'm just looking over some other things.

Other aspects of the application were just annoying. For example, the rigidity of ASCA templates meant that a lot of time was spent formatting artifacts in ways that didn't lead to a stronger, more comprehensive school counseling program. Therefore, it is unlikely that Debbie would go through the same process year by year for every piece of her program.

The calendars was super annoying, the weekly calendars because that's one thing they didn't like the way ours looked and suggested a reformatting of them. And I was like, 'That's not really important,' but I spent about four hours reformatting them and resubmitting them...

...Just like any part of any school counselor's profession, it's like, the paperwork, the paperwork, the paperwork. Like, 'My small group action plan doesn't need to look like yours, I don't need to write all these other words on another piece of document.' My small group action plan, I pull it out of the folders and I have all the kids' things. You know what I mean? It's different, it doesn't have to look exactly like that. Do we have to reflect and do some looking at data for kids? Yeah, and so we still do that but we might not do it on five groups that year.

Throughout the RAMP process Debbie was confident in the services that she was providing, and the positive effects that they had for students. This confidence allowed her to advocate for herself through the use of data in order to get less-appropriate counseling duties off of her plate, namely lunch duty.

I feel like it's because we had the data already, like, 'Hey, here are four groups that we have done that we will no longer be able to do during lunch time. Here's the number of students we provided groups to last year that we will no longer be able to do that, so you need to decide then as administration what is your priority?' I feel like we were just really confident and because we had stuff to show them. It's not just like, 'Hey, I won't be able to do groups but I don't have anything to show them that I've actually done groups, and that they have been effective, and numbers of how many I've provided. So, having that to

show them plus that was easy to advocate for us because of our personalities, I feel like, too.

She was also assertive and informed of what her role should be, and was not afraid to upset others by sticking to that role. She was also informed of the consequences (or lack thereof) of her refusing to undertake inappropriate duties.

I was just like, 'I'm not going to show up to lunch duty.'...I was already like, 'I'm just not coming, so you can't fire me. I know how this operates. I know how school systems and teachers operate, I know you can't.' ... I know my county supervisor supports me. So, even if you do try to raise a stink or something it's not going to get you anywhere, so I felt supported because we both we were like, 'We're standing strong and even if they somehow say that we're still going to lunch, we're not going.'

Debbie recognized the power that school counselors have, and was upset that many other school counselors give in too easily to having inappropriate duties, and these helped her continue to advocate for continued work that actually helped students.

... I think it's ridiculous to hear other counselors like, 'I didn't get out of [lunch duty].'

'Well, why didn't you get out of it? You did something wrong. You missed an opportunity to argue for your profession.' We're powerful too, you know? It's that nice thing of not being able to be fired easily that makes you feel powerful. You just have to remind yourself of that and not be worried if maybe something not nice is written in your folder because what does it really matter? Where does that folder even go?

Feedback from ASCA

Like many school counselors who apply for RAMP, Debbie did not receive RAMP distinction right away. But, true to her nature, she saw this as another opportunity to improve,

and make her program stronger. Unfortunately, the feedback she got from ASCA didn't provide a lot of clarity.

Yeah, when we got our stuff back... it said, 'Hey, you're really close, so you're allowed to resubmit some things.' You get to see people's feedback... I remember Fran and I were both talking to the feedback being like, 'What? That doesn't even, that doesn't even ... That's not even like, that doesn't help me in this part.' ... we wouldn't have a good score and I'd be like, 'So, tell me why,' and there'd be a sentence... So, we were trying to choose which ones we would fix or give them more information on in a sense... [RAMP applications are] peer reviewed, which, like any system, has its flaws... So, that's tricky because you never know what lens they're working for...

In some cases, Debbie was scored lower for trivial things. For example, her Advisory Council meeting agendas were originally submitted with the minutes attached underneath each agenda item, as one document. ASCA had asked school counselors to provide separate agendas and minutes, so Debbie ended up losing points for having combined them. Luckily, this was easily rectified. Though, overall, the "overachiever" in Debbie was annoyed that her program didn't receive RAMP on the first go around.

I do feel like it was pretty clear in how they're scored, the numbers. I do feel like we knew, 'Hey, if you didn't turn in this you're not going to get ... The most you could possibly get is a three,' or that kind of stuff. That's why when I did turn in a separate agenda and a separate minutes [for advisory council], that I was like, 'Oh, that's why we got a two in that category.' I guess I was thinking they would know that ... That the agenda were the minutes, so I just submitted the agendas and really gained us three points. So, I feel like we were pretty clear. I feel like part of me, being that overachiever

was like, 'What?' When I didn't automatically get it, I was like, 'Are you kidding me? I think of how we're breaking our backs at our school and I really am sure we're offering this comprehensive program and you're telling me that I'm not.'

In general, the RAMP application didn't provide an opportunity to truly show all of the great things happening at the school, and given how stringent the scoring was, there was a difficulty in providing an honest picture of the program without embellishing, which is something that Debbie wasn't willing to do.

I almost wish that somebody would have visited. I know we have this 1,500 word. At the end you could say, well, you had 1,500 words to say whatever you wanted or you could do a three minute video, which I debated doing since I can talk really fast. But I just felt like on paper it's really hard. With National Boards you're submitting videos and things like that to argue your point. It's hard on paper to really get to know a school, and to be honest with you, I know some schools fudge some of their stuff. I know that, it's hard to really be an honest RAMP school...

But even still, it was intense that year. We were honest about our program and I was like, 'We're going to stand strong with our program and be honest about it,' even if there's some times where our weekly calendars, or whatever, I know some things we didn't meet the expectation and I argued why. Do you know what I mean? Why I really do think we're still 'blah, blah, blah', but I'm not going to pretend our program is something that it's not, so I can't even imagine how middle school and high schools are even able to get RAMP, to be honest with you. It was a reflective year, it helped strengthen our program, it helped really get into how and why we're supposed to do things.

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

Debbie's RAMP journey came within the context of already having a comprehensive program, but it was also helpful in her becoming a more reflective and intentional practitioner. The consequences of Debbie obtaining RAMP, therefore, were intimately tied to the process itself, and present throughout the entirety of the application due in large part to Debbie viewing the application as a professional development opportunity. This section looks more closely at the consequences of obtaining RAMP, many of which also occurred within the context of the process itself.

For Debbie, the most important consequence of RAMP came from the application's design—specifically in the way that it forced her to be more intentional as a counselor. However, the time necessary to actually complete the application process made it difficult to sustain the same level of intentionality and reflection.

Yeah, so it was helpful to really critique our program and to really look it in the face.

'Are we really providing the best services we can as a counselor, and are we also meeting the standard?' Which, honestly... there's only two hundred and some [RAMP] schools, part of the reason is because [though] RAMP [is] something we all should be doing...I'm really surprised that schools even could. I feel like it's easiest at the elementary level because you're not working on college applications, you're not working on course scheduling. All that stuff can be also reviewed as direct service, things like that but we have this ability to deliver our program in ways that are really fitting our profession and what's expected of us...The next year, after submitting all that stuff, did I do all those things? No. I didn't sit there and fill out all of the things that I'm supposed to fill out. Did we still have advising? Yeah, we still had all the stuff. We had already had those things in

place, we know the benefits of it. We still reflected on our groups, but did I do an action plan? I don't think so. You know what I mean? Having to do all those pieces every year, I wasn't willing to give up every night again to complete all of them.

Debbie was still on the fence about whether or not she'd Re-RAMP. The fact that the distinction lasts five years made her more open to the idea of Re-RAMPing, but if it were any more frequent, the chances are low that she would do so.

Honestly, I probably would have [Re-RAMPed] just because I could see that we would be able to but I wouldn't sit there all the years in between and complete every one of those documents because of the sheer amount of time they take. I could see doing it once every five years but, like I said, it was hundreds of hours outside of school. It was me sitting there almost every night working on RAMP or National Boards, and then I'm thinking that summer my daughter went to two summer camps, and one of them was a sleepover camp, that whole time I did RAMP and National Boards, and the other was just a half day, day camp, that whole time I was doing RAMP and National Boards, so I'm not willing to live my life like that every year...five years later I probably still would have done it just because I wouldn't want to lose that distinction...

Though she was proud of herself for completing it, the distinction was not, in and of itself, worth the amount of time that it required. What was more important was the tendency to be self-reflective, as was the case for some of Debbie's cohort-mates who attended meetings, but did not officially apply for RAMP.

...I'm very proud of myself. I'm glad I completed it, I know the program but, of course, they can do changes to it, and then I won't know anymore but I'm not willing to give that much of my time anymore outside of school to do that...So, there's people in the cohort

that we were in who just did parts of RAMP and didn't submit and maybe will later but it really was a professional development opportunity to be a reflective practitioner, to help the program be the best it can be.

In terms of the response that Debbie and Tina got from the school upon receiving RAMP, it was underwhelming. This was partly due to the principal at the time having had plans to leave the school (in which case, RAMP distinction wouldn't really make a difference for her, as she'd be gone). Moreover, principals, in general, lacked a clear understanding of the school counselor role and, by extension, RAMP. Debbie and Tina were already reflective in their work, so getting RAMP distinction didn't really make much of a difference for them.

...When we actually said, 'Hey, you got RAMP,' [my principal] already knew she was moving to a middle school that year...They have a new principal now who's a first time principal, so I don't know if it changes [how RAMP is viewed]. It's that constant battle at schools for...school counselors who want to follow the [ASCA] National Model, and for principals who don't really know what that is. Do I feel like they had a better idea because we were doing RAMP or that changed anything? I don't think RAMP changed anything at our school. I think that we, as practitioners, are continuously advocating. I don't feel like RAMP would have helped that...I don't feel like they would have been like, 'Oh, because you guys are RAMP I'm going to take you more seriously.' I think that we were just that type of practitioner who would use data and things.

At the county level, Debbie was recognized by Tim, and she, Tina and Fran were given an opportunity to speak to other school counselors about their journeys and possibly drum up interest in others pursuing the distinction. This did not end up being the case, especially since there was no personal compensation given as the result of getting RAMP.

I know our county supervisor was proud of us getting RAMP. Did that change anything? Fran and I, and Tina, the three of us who got in, in the elementary level, were asked to come and speak, at the beginning of the year, to try to advocate for others to, ‘All right, now who else wants to go through this process?’ We'd done the process and I forget how many elementary schools they have, they have thirty-something elementary schools in our county, about close to 60 counselors. Nobody raised their hand that they want to do it. Honestly, part of it is because we were honest about how many hours [it took]. And so, they were like, ‘Pfft. You're not paying me anymore...’ Where [Tina and I] are National Board counselors too, in our county we get paid more money for being National Board. So, if [counselors] going to choose one, they were going to choose National Boards and there were only three of their counselors who had National Boards.

Unfortunately, Debbie didn't really get to celebrate receiving RAMP distinction for her school, because she was already gone by the time that the RAMP distinction plaque arrived at her school, though she did have some fun in attempting to steal a tile with her school's name on it—a tile that had a new home in her current office.

I didn't even get to put [the plaque] on the wall because...you don't get it until that summer at the awards ceremony, and then so my colleague took it back. But I stole the ... Well, and we thought we were being funny because we thought we weren't allowed to steal them, and then they're like, ‘You're all allowed to take it.’ And I was like, ‘But I ripped it off in an act of defiance.’ They had these tiles on the floor [at the ASCA conference], it's like a big sticker, so I was like, ‘I can't have the RAMP plaque because I'm not there anymore,’ so I took the tile, and Fran has her tile... Yeah. It's like anything

else, like, 'What does a plaque even mean?' You know, it's ... I don't know. It's not money.

Ultimately, being a school counselor who followed the ASCA National Model and a willingness to assertively create change were more important than being a school counselor who obtained RAMP distinction.

...The last year I was there I advocated for our duty to be attendance officers essentially. So, we sat at the front of the building every day for half an hour and signed tardy slips for kids coming in late because the data still showed, which was part of our RAMP application, all the things we were doing to help attendance, so they were moving the needle a teeny bit but we needed more, we needed more, we needed more. So, it wasn't really getting RAMP, it was just being an ASCA National Model counselor using data and trying to create change, create that change.

I don't know if specifically having that [RAMP distinction] plaque made a difference, but us saying, 'Here, I offer groups at school because I need to see that students are improving their reading level, improving their attendance. They are decreasing their number of visits to the principal's office.' And having that data is important and saying that, 'These are lessons I teach because my National Model, these are the mindsets and behaviors, and these are how they fall under it, and this is why I'm teaching this lesson to these kids.' And to have that as your argue point are helpful. So I say, I almost want to backtrack because I don't want people derailed from it. I *want* to say, 'Yes, RAMP made such a difference at my school and now that we have it there's all this prestige, and all this freedom. And, look, I have a bigger office and I get a bigger

budget.' No, we've never had a budget in the seven years I've worked there, never... We still don't have a budget. And RAMP wouldn't change it.

Even for the changes for students while going through the process, it was difficult to distinguish how much of this came from RAMP, and how much came from being an intentional practitioner who strived for best practice.

...It's hard to say did RAMP [lead to changes for students]? No. But following the National Model, being a National Model school counselor does. It does have an impact but RAMP's just that other, did that really change anything we did? No, because we were really, authentically, I always felt like we were following the ASCA National Model and we were doing things, we were collecting data, we were assessing our groups, our classroom guidance lessons, we were doing those things. So, I feel like it's more like thinking is being a National Model school counselor going to affect your school and your program? Yes, it will. Having an advisory committee, does that? Yes, that tool, it seems meeting two or three times a year but it is. Stakeholders know what you're doing, they have more faith in you.

But RAMP didn't [do that], we were already doing that. Doing the components of being a National Model, yes, they are going to help you advocate for your program. They're going to help you eliminate tasks and things that aren't falling under the National Model, that aren't beneficial to students. It's hard, I hate to taint it for you because other counselors may be like, 'Yeah, having RAMP certification helped me to not have this duty, it helped me to be able to provide these groups. It helped me to argue for a bigger space to work in,' or things like that. Where it's different for me because of the changeover of principals, I don't know if it's helping now. I don't know if they would care

but I do feel like the components that underline that, the National Model, help to change the student's experience and your professionalism at that school.

But at the end of it all, Debbie looked back fondly—if nothing else, remembering the ASCA dinner and conference. For her, the process was about professional development, not the accolades. Though, the dinner was a nice incentive, especially in the recognition that there's little to take home for getting RAMP.

[The dinner] is an incentive because you want to go to the conference, you want to learn more but it costs thousands of dollars to go there. Sure, the conference, that wasn't that expensive, but hotels, and air fare, and everything was taken care of. We even got per diem, so we got extra money for dinners and breakfasts, that was great. So, sure you don't get paid but if your county, it is like you get a little bonus... It's not going in your pocket.

Appendix M: Wendy & Hannah's Story

Wendy and Hannah's RAMP story is one of reflection and perseverance. By their own admission, it's, "really cool", and is unique in a few ways. For one, Wendy and Hannah completed the RAMP process together, from start to finish. Their story, therefore, is a joint one—it would be disingenuous to talk about "Wendy's RAMP experience" without Hannah, and vice versa. Because of the nature of their story, much of the re-telling of it will focus more on the actual story-telling process itself, including the dynamics within the interview itself, and the way in which they played off of each other. Attention will be given to who they were as interviewees in addition to who they are as counselors.

Wendy and Hannah are a two-person elementary school counseling team in a K-2 school—which are configurations rarely seen in public education. That said, they each still balance a caseload of over 600 students. Fewer grade-levels and two counselors did not translate to smaller caseloads for Wendy and Hannah.

Between them, there is almost 20 years of school counseling experience. Wendy shared that she was a non-traditional student, who returned to school about a decade after she graduated from undergrad to become a school counselor. In the time in between, she worked jobs that were not at all related, and became a mother, and that she always knew that she wanted to be a counselor. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Hannah worked in community mental health, and family therapy. Hannah mentioned that neither of them were teachers prior to becoming school counselors, which gave her and Wendy a different perspective on children and their needs, which provided a bit of a challenge initially, but was never a true hindrance. Hannah noted,

Hannah: I think the interesting thing is that neither of us were ever teachers. And a lot of times, you get teachers who've been around forever, who become counselors. We entered this profession from a very different perspective. We're just truly counselors, you know. So that was kind of a learning process for us as well, because when you're a teacher you understand a little bit more about the building and how things run and go... I think after this many years the teachers know that we've got a grasp on things now. In the beginning, I was very open and honest with my teachers and I just said, "Listen, I've never been a teachers. Help me understand this. What's this look like?" And so, I think that also gave me a little bit of respect from them because I said, "Hey help me out. I need your help. You're the person who is the guru in all of this."

Wendy added, "I just takes time to learn what's an IEP, what's an ETR, how do you go about a 504, all of those things, it just takes time".

Motivations for RAMP

The initial push for applying for RAMP was practical—evaluations of school counselors were underway districtwide, and elementary school counselors weren't a mandated position. Having RAMP provided a justification for keeping elementary school counselors as Wendy and Hannah could show that their program had a positive effect for students. What made this a little difficult is that, at the time, Hannah and Wendy didn't have a fully comprehensive program.

Wendy: ...we started [RAMP] because evaluations for counselors were starting. And in our meetings, we'd get together with the county counselors. Everybody was like, "How are we going to pull data? What's that going to look like for our evaluations?"...And because we're not mandated, elementary counselors aren't mandated. So honestly, we did RAMP wrong because we didn't have a comprehensive program and then go for RAMP.

We went for RAMP and so we created a comprehensive program, because we wanted to speak up for ourselves, we wanted to make sure that they knew what we were doing and why we were doing it.

Further, the perception within their district that elementary school counseling was somehow easier, or less stressful than other levels, and how RAMP could also provide some legitimacy to the hard work that they did day-to-day.

Hannah: And again, especially because we're elementary, a lot of times people don't think we do a lot down here. They say, and this is such insult to me, when they say, "Ah well at least you're not at the Middle School or the High School, that's where it's really tough."

And we want to say, "Live a day in our lives."

Wendy continued, taking on the role of a critic, "'All you guys do is color, that's all you do.' Oh my goodness, we'd run like crazy people."

Wendy and Hannah's back and forth throughout our conversation was proof of the extent to which they worked together throughout the RAMP process. Continually on the same page and wavelength.

Important Resources

Hannah and Wendy were in an interesting position in that not many schools in their state had achieved RAMP distinction. As a result, they were unable to pull resources or guidance from surrounding schools in the area. Instead, they worked together, along with others in their district and county to implement a comprehensive program that eventually allowed them to obtain RAMP distinction.

District/County

One interesting source of assistance came from district restructuring that brought Hannah and Wendy together in the first place. This provided stability in their schedules and the opportunity to work together more consistently.

Wendy: But one thing that happened that was really good for us is our district used to be four separate elementary schools, and I think that we have that in RAMP too. And then 5 years ago they put us all together in one building. So previously Hannah and I were splitting up our days between two buildings, and we rarely saw each other.

And it has been an absolute blessing being in the same building because there's not a day that we don't collaborate with each other and the reason that RAMP worked was because we were there to motivate each other and to work together. Because it is so daunting, I don't think I would have done it by myself, but when she was willing to give up I was going to motivate here and when I was willing to give she was motivating me. So that was the reason we got through it.

Other sources of support at the district level made for the ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling. Two examples of these were district-mentors, and a position of "school counselor liaison". These resources were helpful in general, as opposed to being helpful specifically during the RAMP process. Therefore, their mentors were not able to provide examples of RAMP application materials or insight to the process, but brought knowledge and experience about the district and its surrounding communities.

Wendy: we were each assigned a mentor and they were partners in their buildings as well. So it worked out very good for us. And like she said we have gained so much knowledge from them, they have been around for 20 something years, so they've seen the

district change, they've seen our community change, so it was just a great, great help to have them.

The position of “school counselor liaison” provided counselors an opportunity to work with counselors in their own district, as well as in surrounding counties. This provided the opportunity for differing perspectives and ideas.

Hannah: I mean, I wouldn't say during the RAMP process but I think that we are lucky in that we make the effort as a district to get together and communicate with the counselors at all the other levels. The other things that I think we have that is unique in our area anyways is that our educational service system has a school councilor liaison. So we get together as county counselors. And there's a very big group of us. And we meet at elementary level, middle school level, high school level, and then all together so that really gives us the opportunity to collaborate with people who have districts similar to ours as well as districts who may be very different but that have some great ideas that we might be able to incorporate into our own schools. So that has definitely been helpful. I just know throughout the state..., there are other areas that don't have that connection with their counties.

School

At the school level Hannah and Wendy got along well with others in the school building, as Wendy put it, “We've always had staff support. We work really, really well with our staff”. They were given a lot of autonomy from their administration, as well as professional development time to actually fill out the RAMP application, which can be long and time-consuming. This was something that they did in collaboration.

Wendy: ...we would spend every minute of professional development ...doing RAMP and we would both talk and [Hannah] would type and we just totally played off of each other, and there wasn't a piece of it that was done independently. We did it all together and I wouldn't have done it, if it'd been me.

Hannah and Wendy relied mostly on one another. They were each other's greatest source of support throughout the process. Their administration, though supportive, was not knowledgeable of the school counselor role nor the RAMP process. Having gone through the steps to put a comprehensive program in place and the ability to gain RAMP, Hannah and Wendy are now known as capable counselors, but even national distinction hasn't necessarily increased knowledge about what they do, partly because the work of the counseling team doesn't seem to affect the day-to-day life of administrators. Hannah discussed this:

Hannah: ... I think that [administrators] have seen what has come from the work that we have done, so they're confident enough in us so that they don't question, they just know that we can get the job done. You know what I mean? They don't have to know what our role is day in and day out, what we're doing all the time...They just don't need to know. So I don't know, I think there's always room for education on everyone's end when it comes to school counseling but a lot of times, people don't take the time or the effort to really learn.

The support that Hannah and Wendy played for each other was not only practical, but moral. This was especially important considering that Wendy and Hannah did not receive RAMP distinction the first time that they applied. Both believed that they would be much less likely to have applied for RAMP were they alone. It was a combination of their support for one another, and their ultimate goal of proving their worth that compelled them to keep going.

Hannah: During the process I would say to her, 'I can't do this anymore, we're done'.

And she'd pick me up and the next day she would say it and I would pick her up.... So I just don't know how it would be possible to do it on your own.

Wendy: After we didn't get [RAMP distinction] I was done. She said 'we're going to reapply' and I said 'no we're not'....I think it was the same thing that happened even during the initial process, it was one day she would say 'no I'm done, I'm mad we're not doing this again'. And I'd say, 'well come one let's try it'. And then the other when I said 'you know you're right, let's just not do this', then she would maybe have a change of heart. Because we realized that our ultimate goal was to really prove ourselves to people. Again as elementary school counselors, even within this district, people don't always look at us as valuable as the counselors at the upper grade levels and we wanted to prove to everyone, not just in our district but in our community that we are doing a lot of good work with the students. But that I think was the underlying goal always.

Personal

Elements of who Wendy and Hannah were, personally, also played into their applying (and re-applying) for RAMP. Their personalities seemed to mesh well, which created a space for their collaboration.

Wendy: ... The reason that we did go for RAMP again, a lot of it's personality, it just is.

I'm kind of like this, but [Hannah's] definitely competitive. And so we lost, and that wasn't going to stay that way. And so it was personality too.

Hannah: I am competitive, I'll admit.

Wendy: Oh no we didn't lose.

Additionally, even in the face of “losing”, Hannah and Wendy were able to keep everything in perspective. They didn’t seem to have wrapped their self-worth in getting RAMP distinction, which allowed them to be able to pick up the pieces and reapply. Hannah talked about how, after receiving feedback from the RAMP reviewer, she put it into perspective, and thought about alternative reasons for why they may not have “won” the first time.

Hannah: ...When someone is a person who is judging you, a lot of it is opinion. So if there is something that they don't like about, that I chose a grief [group]. Maybe they thought that we should have chosen a different type of group. I had to sit there and tell myself ‘it's all on who's reading it’. Because it's an opinion, it's not fact. And it's very easy to read something but not truly understand it because you're not seeing it. And we've talked about that even within our own district, it's very easy for higher-up people to make assumptions or to say something but until they're in it, living it every day with the students, you don't get a true picture of what's really happening.

This idea of others’ inability to truly understand the reality of being a counselor in Hannah and Wendy’s school also made an appearance within their discussion of the actual RAMP application.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application:

Early on, Wendy mentioned that she believed that she and Hannah almost did RAMP “backwards”, in that they put a comprehensive program in place because they were applying for RAMP instead of the other way around. But with that was the unexpected difficulty of really *showing* the effectiveness of programs and services that are difficult to measure quantitatively. This played into filling out elements of the RAMP application.

Wendy: I was a lot more work I think than what we thought. I think had we realized, I don't know, that might have been a deterrent at the beginning too. But we just started at the beginning, we started with the vision. We just started with the very first thing and we just went through it...

Hannah: That was probably one of the most challenging things for me is that I realized what I do on a day-to-day basis-- because I'm talking to the students, the teachers, the parents-- I'm seeing the growth that the child is making, but I don't necessarily have data to reflect that.

Wendy: RAMP doesn't really reflect our greatest accomplishments.

Hannah: No.

Wendy: I doesn't. No. That's because there's no way to put it in words I guess. I don't know.

Hannah: Yeah. You know to have, I think it was the beginning of the year, maybe the end of last year, [Wendy] had a student that she had had from a charter school reach out to her and email her and just tell her what a huge support she'd been and how much she meant to him. And this is you know, 8 years later, that is a win in our book. You can't put something like that in your RAMP application. So I guess that was probably the hardest part is we do so many things but you can't always prove it or show it in your data.

Wendy and Hannah also ran into difficulties logistically with the application. There were times when artifacts were submitted to ASCA, but ended up being scored incorrectly, or were misplaced within the application, leading to a lower score overall.

Wendy: And honestly too, when we didn't make it that was really hard too. It sucked but if you look through the criticisms that they gave us, they were like, "This graph was in

the wrong place. And all that stuff." That was something that was completely out of our control because when we submitted it all, it all looked like it was where it should be but then something happened through, yeah ... So that was something that really sucked because we did what we thought we needed to do and it got jumbled up.

That said, the ability to look at data and see the effects for student, as frustrating as it was at times, was actually very helpful.

Wendy: But I don't know. [RAMP] was just a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of work. It was a lot of time putting words down on paper. But it was really fun and it was really motivating to see the attendance go down and to see the bus referrals go down.

Hannah: And had we not really been looking at that data so specifically and so in depth. We would have maybe realized all that we are doing in the school.

Wendy: Definitely rewarding. Yeah.

Hannah: So the data piece sucks, but in the end it is worth it. I think though, that is truly why a lot of people don't move forward with it, because it is daunting, to read everything that you have to do and to show. It's just a lot of work. That's all we keep saying is it's a lot of work, but it is.

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

As was mentioned previously, Hannah and Wendy did not receive RAMP the first time that they applied for it. This necessitated a visit back to the drawing board to look for weaknesses, and create plans for improvement. This was, no doubt, helped by their competitive spirit. What happened after they achieved RAMP distinction is also interesting. At the school level, there wasn't much that changed, due in part to the aforementioned fact Wendy and

Hannah's day-to-day role wasn't known to others in the school. In a similar vein, RAMP isn't well known.

Hannah: We were so excited to tell our district [that we got RAMP], and they had no clue what it meant. We give them information but...it's so limited. Even when you look up on ASCA's website, you still just don't find a lot of information. [ASCA] gives you the templates, they tell you what it is, what you gotta do. But you still don't get a true understanding of what it means for a school counseling program.

Wendy: ...Nobody knows what the heck RAMP is. Nobody. They're not impressed by that at all. They don't know.

Regarding the RAMP distinction plaque that school counselors receive from ASCA, Wendy pointed up above the cabinets in her office where the plaque resides and said, "[Administrators] don't want it in the building. I mean it's in my office because nobody else cares." Hannah added, again keeping things in perspective, "I mean when you think about it some, there's nothing that's really--we're not in this profession for all the accolades. There's not much out there."

Though the application process was strenuous, and Hannah and Wendy went through it twice, it was still worthwhile. Part of this was due to the changes that happened throughout the RAMP process. These were changes that happened gradually, for themselves, and for the students they served. The very act of creating a comprehensive school counseling program changed their perception of themselves. It also changed how students and staff members saw and utilized them. Applying for RAMP changed how they approached planning a comprehensive school counseling program.

Hannah: ...[Going through the RAMP application] really caused us to be very reflective. When we did not get it the first time, I was pissed. I'll be honest. I was like 'this is stupid, we deserve it. I can't believe they didn't give it to us'. But then [Wendy] said, 'let's read over this, let's look over their comments'. And as we started to look at their comments, we said 'oh, okay. I get it now'. After that initial anger was able to settle a little bit, it really did cause us to be very reflective, it caused us to make the changes we really needed to change. And I think it was good. It was probably better that we failed in the first place actually.

Wendy: Well one big change ... was we had to make our program comprehensive so that means we had to hit academic, personal/social--done, and career. And we were like, 'What the heck do you do for elementary kids for career?' So that forced us to look at programs that would hit that, and we have had huge success with that. And we probably wouldn't have done it before because it was just one more thing when you've got 40 million. But it's really been beneficial for us, the program that we do for career.

Hannah: And I think that happens a lot, that career piece gets fallen by the wayside at the elementary level because counselors say, 'Well what can I do with a 5 year old to talk about college or careers?' But in actuality there are a lot of things you can do. And the good thing was once we started putting some of these new programs in place, then there were extensions of the program that we could do to continue to support those goals.

Wendy: And it hits some many kids... kids that might not have been on our radar before so it gives us an opportunity to connect with kids that we might not have before.

Hannah: I think anytime you start doing new programs within the school that have a positive effect, you see it in the students. Like [Wendy] mentioned, we're seeing students

that we normally maybe wouldn't see and they're excited. The kids are so excited and the staff. ... They get really involved in the process and for us... So you really just see the kids get excited and the staff get excited. So I think that was a change for us when we started plugging all of these different things in.

Wendy: And... the staff buy-in that's huge. That makes or breaks you. And we have an incredible staff and our administration has given us free reign. You want to do it? Go, go fly. You know? They give us free reign to do those things. So that's been really good. That has allowed us to accomplish a lot.

The process boosted Wendy and Hannah's confidence—it ensured them that their work was beneficial, and making a difference, even if the plaque commemorating this fact was relegated to their office. Despite not being in it for the accolades, gaining RAMP *did* have some benefits that, ironically, led to some larger accolades. One example of this was Hannah winning school counselor of the year in their state, which brought with it additional accolades.

Wendy: So we started doing RAMP, and because we were trying to put some things together, we were starting to get more confident. We started presenting at the [state] counseling convention and ... So we were starting to feel more confident in ourselves, so ...I recommended Hannah, I nominated her for school elementary counselor of the year through the [State] School Counseling Association. And she got it. And we went to [the capital] for the celebration and at that time we found out that not only was she the elementary school counselor, but she was the state school counselor of the year...And it was only because, for me it was only because we were doing RAMP and we got really set on promoting our program and it gave us the confidence that once we started looking at the data, we were like, 'We really do a lot of things.' And when we look at RAMP we're

like, we're really doing things the way we're supposed to do them, so let's try this. So I nominated her and then...she got to go to the White House. She got to sit for...[an] address from Michelle Obama and I got to be her date. And we got to meet a whole bunch of famous people and hang out in the White House. So it's been the things like that that have come from it that have been just absolutely, we could have never even imagined.

They have also become more active as representatives of the profession within their community, and provided an opportunity to teach others about school counselors and the work that they do. Wendy discussed how Hannah has appeared on TV in the years following their decision to RAMP, "...everybody in our community ... Hannah spent a lot of time getting interviewed on TVs and TV shows and our community knows who she is and what she does. It's been a great vehicle for educating everybody."

There were also some added, more tangible perks, to having obtained RAMP distinction, including free ASCA membership and the ability to become a RAMP reviewer for others' applications, which will also benefit them when they decide to Re-RAMP (something that Wendy said they have a 100% chance of doing).

Wendy: ...After we got RAMP, [ASCA] sent an email... and they asked [me] to be a RAMP reviewer. So this past year I was on one of the committees that reviewed 3 of the RAMP submissions, and that really helped me because after doing RAMP I was like, 'This is it, we're not going to re-RAMP, we're one and done'. But being a reviewer helped me see better what reviewers are looking for and it also helped me see that it's just people like us. So the fact that they tore apart our first one, it's just somebody's opinion, like Hannah said.

Wendy and Hannah's RAMP journey had so many pieces. Their original motivation for applying was to prove themselves to others in the district. In doing so they received state and national recognition, yet it seemed that those in charge—the ones that they originally set out to prove a point to, were the ones who cared the least. This put them in a position that made RAMP no longer feel like the destination, and instead, a learning opportunity that they carried with them as they continued to advocate for themselves and their position. Hannah and Wendy both discussed the ways in which their fight continues still, even in light of having RAMP distinction.

Hannah: ...I think there's going to be a lot of changes that happen in the future and I think when there's changes that happen in the building, you obviously have to change some of what you're doing. So I foresee us looking at some of the processes in this building and maybe some of the programming and making some changes just to fit our needs at that point. You know, I think we're going to have some administrative changes, I think we're going to have some teacher changes. So I think we're always going to have to be constantly changing and so I think again like [Wendy] said earlier, RAMP helps keep us in check, it helps us make sure we've got our checks and balances and we're doing what we need to do.

Wendy: And we don't just get lost in putting out fires all day every day. You know, like stop and think about what we should be doing... But again with like she said, evaluations coming, at least for [our state], I think we could potentially see more people going for it because who's going to get a bad evaluation if you've got RAMP. You really proved yourself there.

They turned their attention to the ways that they've seen other student service professionals lose their positions. Including school counselors. Shades of who they likely are in news interviews, and when they are out advocating for their role came through.

Hannah: Well I think that, as least in our area, we're seeing a trend where a lot of public schools are wanting to bring in mental health counselors. Sometimes in place of school counselors because they're able to bill, so they don't cost the district money because they're billing [students and their families] for their services. So I think that was always a concern for us that we needed to prove our worth. That yes mental health counselors maybe great but our roles are very very different, and schools still need school counselors...

Wendy: That was huge honestly and I know that we're supposed to do RAMP [because] our hearts are so big for children but really it was because our district outsourced nurses. We don't have nurses in our buildings anymore, we have ...

Hannah: Medical assistants and then we have a district nurse who travels buildings.

Wendy: And if they started looking our way towards doing some of those things. And honestly that's not best for the kids, it just wouldn't do. And so we made sure they knew what exactly we were doing. And how are you going to get rid of a school counselor here who went to the White House?

Hannah: And I was going to say honestly I think there's a time and a place for mental health counseling and it's not in a school environment. It's not fair to these students to bring them out of the learning environment, into an environment where they can potentially become very upset and then have a hard time going

back. And as school counselors, it's our role to give them resources in the community where they can get those services outside of school. So again, if you're not a school counselor, you don't understand that, and I think that was difficult because we can tell them until we're blue in the mouth, this is the difference. You need school counselors. But when it comes down to the bottom line, that's what they're looking at. What's going to be cheaper? What's going to be better? And I think you see even now, with everything that's going on with all the school shootings. Now I think there's a big push to get schools to recognize the importance of school counselors versus all of these other things. Whether it's the social worker or the mental health counselor, you still need a school counselor in that school...We have personal connections with these students. And when you have someone outside of your school coming in, they don't have that personal connection with the student, they don't have that connection with the teacher, and they don't understand what the schedule is like or what the school environment is like or what you can and can't do. So we've had some other people come in and it's honestly created more work for us because we've had to teach them what they need to do. But again a lot of people, unless you're a counselor, and I so appreciate that you are, you don't get it. Until you're in it, living it, that's when you understand it.

Wendy: Those are two completely different jobs. Outsourced mental health and school counselors are just, what we do is completely different. They're completely different. And RAMP I think gave us a voice to tell our school board what we thought should happen. It gave us street cred.

Recommendations/Final Thoughts

Wendy and Hannah ended their RAMP story by delving deeper into what really made the process “worth it”. After all, they had spent a lot of time on it, and hadn’t received distinction the first time. Yet, they continued, and did receive it, but they still felt the need to continue fighting for themselves and their positions. When asked if there was anything they would change about the RAMP process, in recognition of how daunting it was, they had a simple answer: *nothing*. The difficulty is part of what made it valuable. At the end of the day, the most important thing for them was that they knew they were doing a good job.

Hannah: I think at this point I don't think I would change anything. Because if you do less then it's not RAMP. You know what I mean?

Wendy: If it's too easy. It's got to be something ... If just anybody can get it then it loses its value.

Hannah: Exactly. And I know there, and at least in [our state] there are other things you can do. We have...an accountability report that at the state level they award to different programs. And it's a lot less than RAMP. But you know if you can put the time and the effort into something like that for a small reward, to be able to prove yourself by doing all the extra work, I think it's totally worth it.

Hannah: I would say even though we didn't necessarily get the response that we were hoping, once we received RAMP people didn't fall over us and just say congratulations and do all these things. We didn't get anything big when we got it.

Wendy: But we did when we went to the White House!

Hannah: Well yeah. But it's still worth it in the long run because it changes you I think as a counselor and it makes you become better. And I don't know how you want to put that into words but ...

Wendy: Well I think, like I said, it gave us more confidence, like we were validated a little bit. And so then we're like, 'Okay I do know what I'm doing and now I have this to prove I know what I'm doing.' And so you feel more comfortable to try new things. And I'm telling you what, there's been very little that we tried we haven't been successful at, it's really been wonderful from celebrating her award to presenting [at the state conference], to presenting at other colleges. Going on TV and speaking to the news about the things we do. Getting all the community counselors together for drug symposiums. That confidence I think, has just opened so many other doors. It's just, and I think that all came from RAMP, I really do.

Hannah: I mean most counselors don't like to put themselves out there in the public. But for us, we do it all the time. I think because we're so passionate about what we do. But yeah, I think I would agree with that because now we have the confidence. Like you know what, listen to us, we do know what we're doing. And we have the proof right here. So yeah, I think that's it.

Wendy: Yeah. And it doesn't matter that nobody else cared because it was for us. It was invigorating.

Hannah: And we still go back to that all the time. We can always say, well we're a RAMP school. Oh you don't know what that is? Let us tell you.

Appendix N: Jasmine's Story

The school where Jasmine earned RAMP distinction might not be the type that jumps into someone's head when they're asked to describe a school with, "a nationally recognized school counseling program". The setting-- a Title 1 school, with 90% of students on free and reduced lunch. Jasmine was initially brought in on a grant due to the school's low test scores and overall high needs. She recalled, "Attendance was an issue. A big issue. Attendance and tardy. And it's an extremely high needs school. It's still an extremely high needs school. That's why I was placed there." This is not an unfamiliar setting for her, though. In fact, this type of school is part of the reason that she became a school counselor in the first place. It's where she wants to be. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Jasmine worked in a demographically similar school, but in a different role.

Before [I was a school counselor], I was actually a kindergarten teacher at a charter school. And I became a school counselor just because I worked at a high needs elementary school and I felt ... We didn't have a counselor, so I felt like I was doing the job of a counselor. Like, checking in on students, making sure their social and emotional learning piece was all together. So, I was like, 'You know what? Let's just go back to school for school counseling.' And so I did. And my main goal was to be in a high needs school. Like, a title 1 high-needs school.

Noting the difficulty and energy necessary to sustain such high effort over the long term, Jasmine added, "Now, I don't know if I'm going to stay because it can be overwhelming and I don't want to burn out, but I love it so far."

Motivations for RAMP

The motivation and beginning of Jasmine's RAMP journey are one in the same. Jasmine came into her school through a grant that mandated her to go through the RAMP process. Though it was her fifth year as a school counselor, she was introduced to a new school, and required to go through the RAMP process simultaneously. Not an easy task by any means. Another unique element of Jasmine's RAMP journey is that she was one of three school counselors, a larger team than is often seen at the elementary school level.

I was required by my grant to go through the RAMP process. Not necessarily to gain RAMP distinction, but at least go through the process, because my actual position was heavily data based, so we needed some data-driven programs that were going on at the school. And so, since we were already doing it, our coordinator was like, 'Everybody needs to apply for RAMP.' So, that's how we started the RAMP process.

Though Jasmine was required by her grant to go through the RAMP process, she also left another county in order to apply for this grant-based position. On a personal level, Jasmine valued RAMP, and the benefits that it could bring for students, so much so that she paid out of pocket for the application.

Our district didn't allot us money. Even though we were required to do it, they didn't allot us money to pay for it. So, we paid for it out of our own pockets...If you're a member - which I am a member - it's \$250. So, we used my membership and paid \$250.

Important Resources

The ability to walk into a new school and immediately begin the process towards getting RAMP distinction required Jasmine to work closely with others. Resources across the district, school, and personal level played an important role in the process. Jasmine's school saw a lot of fluctuation in staff, both teachers and administrators. This is common in Title 1 schools, and

speaks to Jasmine's earlier discussion of burnout. But it also played a real role in her RAMP journey, specifically in how it affected the extent to which she was able to obtain and sustain administrative support for the program that she and her colleagues were running. Luckily, because Jasmine came in on a Title 1 grant that was overseen by the district, there was some infrastructure and resources in place for her at the district level, though notably, not monetarily as evidenced by her having to pay out of pocket for the required RAMP application.

District

One of the main sources of support at the district-level was Jasmine's grant coordinator. The grant coordinator also knew a school counselor who had obtained RAMP distinction and was able to draw upon her experience to provide practical assistance to Jasmine and her colleagues.

Our grant coordinator was a district-level person. She was hired by the grant as well, so she was under the grant to help ... We have four grant schools ... Help us navigate what we're supposed to be doing and our impact in the schools... Well, she helped us out with an abundance of things, but before we even sent our application or our narratives to RAMP, she proofread them to make sure we were answering the questions, make sure we were going through the things that we were supposed to. She knew somebody who evaluated for the RAMP process, so she would ask them questions to help us along. For Jasmine, physical resources played less of a role than social capital. The most important resource for herself throughout the process was other people.

We just used people as our resources. Like, my grant coordinator, the elementary person over us. Since we're elementary, we have a person over us at a district level. She evaluates for ASCA. We just used people that we knew to help us.

School Level

At the school level, things were a little tricky due to the aforementioned fluctuation in school leadership. Jasmine discussed how the shift in administration affected her and her colleagues' journey towards obtaining RAMP distinction.

When we first started the process, we had a different principal, and he was all for us doing the RAMP process. Anything we would need, besides money, he would be supportive of it. And he was, but ... He left, and we got an interim principal, so it was really hard getting things signed because you have to have your principal's signature. And it's weird because you submit for one year, but you submit it the next year. So, he wasn't there. The principal we started with wasn't there to sign off on, which ... I don't know if it matches in our portal but...we have a principal signing off on our management agreement or annual agreement, and one signing off on our total paperwork. It's two different people, but [RAMP] said that didn't matter.

So, it was tough trying to explain to one principal what we were doing when the other principal already knew... My first principal, he knew an abundance about the school counselor role. He didn't really know what RAMP was; he just knew it was a high distinction. Once we explained it to him, he was all on board about it. He was very excited about it. He would even come to our Advisory Council meetings just to make sure we were on track and things like that. However, our second principal, he was a great principal, but he was also an interim principal, and he had other fires to put out. So, he wasn't as ... I won't say he wasn't supportive. He just let us do our own thing, and was like, 'Let me know what you need.'

But where there may have been difficult with administrative buy-in and understanding after the shifting in leadership, Jasmine was able to turn to other student support personnel for assistance through the process.

I will say, my student support team ... Like, counselors, social workers, psychologists, they were all on board to help us do whatever we needed to do. Our social worker even ran some attendance groups for us. So, they were a really big support in this whole process.

Personal

Who Jasmine is as a person also played a role in her ability to successfully complete the RAMP process. The RAMP process in and of itself can be arduous. The choice to complete the process as a new counselor in a high needs school speaks to the characteristics that set her apart from other school counselors. Namely her perseverance—a quality that set her apart even from those who came in on the same grant as she did. She pushed through the difficulty of the process when others didn't:

Once I start something, I have to finish it. To be honest, there were four schools ... One of the schools did not finish, and two of the other ones, they were like, 'Well, if we get it, we get it. If we don't, we don't.' But I was like, 'No, we're going to do it and we're going to get it,' because we're putting so much work into this. I'm just very driven. If I put my mind to it, we're going to do it. It's going to get done.

Jasmine also came into the school with practical skills that she drew upon throughout the RAMP process. The ability to compile and analyze the data necessary to complete the RAMP application came from a previous position as a school counselor in a different county.

...The county I came from before...made us put everything into Easy Analogs [a data program], so I already knew how to put some of the data into that, which would produce pie charts, show us time, anything like that. So, when I came to [my county], I was like, 'Hey, we don't have to do this by hand. I know how to do ...'" So, I was showing everybody, and it was just a lifesaver. So, I learned how to use it from the county before, where I was previously working.

In addition to her perseverance and data-ability, and in line with her discussion of using people as resources, Jasmine also leveraged her interpersonal relationships throughout the RAMP process. She was able to connect with people in ways that created buy-in and assistance throughout the process, something that becomes clearer in her discussion of actually navigating the RAMP process and the unexpected elements that arose throughout.

Beginning & Navigating the RAMP application

Though Jasmine knew that she had to apply for RAMP when she took the position at her school it did not mean that she entirely knew what to expect nor the things that would cause difficulty along the way. While being a member of a three-person counseling team may have had some benefits (e.g., in caseload, and division of programming), Jasmine was still seen as the lead on the RAMP application due to the nature of her position. This made for an interesting dynamic with her co-counselors who were also part of the school counseling program, but not necessarily as invested in obtaining RAMP or going through the application process as Jasmine was, which put her in an interesting position when trying to complete all parts of the process.

Going through the process, I will say it was difficult because I was the lead on this, just because it was my grant that ... The other two counselors, they were very supportive, but because my grant made us do it, then I was the lead on it...with my other co-counselors, I

felt really bad having them do this because they weren't RAMP before, and I don't think they were thinking about getting RAMP. And here I come in, the new person, and I'm like, "Oh, we're going to get RAMP." Because, you know, I have to.

Here, Jasmine leveraged the interpersonal relationships that she had built in order to ensure a smooth process for everyone through both conversations and action. Jasmine took more of the responsibility of the RAMP application on her shoulders than may have been the case if it had been split evenly among all members of the counseling team, which further exemplified the personal characteristic of perseverance that put her apart from other school counselors.

Overcoming [that came from]... just talking to [my co-counselors] about it, making sure everything is okay. And I just took on a really big piece of it because I didn't like having to make them do something they didn't want to do. So, that was really hard for me, getting through that. [I overcame it through] just conversation. And I kind of blamed it on my grant, which ... I mean, it was true, but I was like, 'I mean, I know you don't want to do this, but I have to do this in order to keep my job'...

In addition to the uneven division of the application components, Jasmine ran into some difficulty because of the sheer number of artifacts required, and the necessity of ensuring that submitted pieces met ASCA's requirements. Her school was running a comprehensive program, but providing documentation of that fact proved to be more difficult than expected.

...We did what we were supposed to do. We have a comprehensive school counseling program. It was just putting that all into words exactly how [ASCA] wanted it, and making sure we had data that matched how [ASCA] ... We had data, but how they wanted it. That was the most difficult part. And then submitting everything.

And on the initial run through, Jasmine and her colleagues were not rewarded RAMP right away, but true to her words, she persevered.

We did not receive RAMP distinction ... We didn't automatically get it. We were a couple of points shy, so they let us re-try. Not getting it on the first try was annoying, but they told us what we needed to work on, so we worked on that. And then, of course, we got it.

ASCA, themselves, also made errors in scoring Jasmine's team's initial application, which may have contributed to them not getting RAMP distinction on their run through. That said, she was quick to advocate for herself and her program, even if just to make a point.

When we got our results back [from ASCA]... It's a point system. I went through all the points to see, like, 'Okay.' And then I went through all the comments and I found some mistakes on their part, and so I emailed right back. I remembered ... I was like, 'No, we do have this. It's right here.' And I would screenshot things. And they were like, 'Okay. You still have a chance to submit. So, just make sure you're submitting everything.' And I was like, 'I know. But I just wanted you to see that we have these things, though.'

Consequences of Obtaining RAMP Distinction

One of the main consequences of gaining RAMP distinction for Jasmine and her team was the ability to see which elements of their program were beneficial to students, and which were not. Data provided an objective look at their program, and its effect on students. Some of their programs achieved and exceeded their goals while others did not. These data also provided some explanation for why goals were not met. Ultimately, the RAMP process helped the team become more reflective on their practice and provided a comprehensive look at the outcomes of their programming.

We were really working ... Like, our attendance group, we were proud of that. We actually met and exceeded our goal. Very proud of that. We had some [standardized testing] groups that ... We did not meet our goal. However, we figured out why we didn't meet our goal, and it wasn't because of us. It was some other factors that ... And so, we were like, 'Okay, we're going to keep doing this.' Because it was a good route. It was just other factors. So, just knowing of the things that we were putting into place weren't just foo-foo counselor things that we wanted to do, but they were actually making a difference.

Running programs taught Jasmine and her team more about her students, and some of the factors that contributed to or hindered their success. One example of where this was apparent was the attendance group that Jasmine and her colleagues ran.

I'm just going to use attendance because we did an awesome job in attendance. The enthusiasm in the students wanting to come to school was a big factor. Like, we want you to want to come to school and not ... You know? And we figured out some of the factors. Of course, parents ... They're elementary aged kids. They can't drive themselves to school. However, we got them on alarms ... We figured out some kids weren't coming to school because they were being bullied, so we could handle that issue, and then they could come to school. Some children weren't eating, and they were afraid to come to school. Just things like that. So, underlining things, we would've never known if we didn't do the group.

The team's comprehensive school counseling program also changed how students viewed and felt excited about school. Students valued the time spent in group even after the group was over, they wanted to continue. In Jasmine's words, "As far as the kids go, they were still wanting

to be in the group...You know how kids are”. Even the groups that were less successful still provided valuable insight for the counseling team.

...one of the groups we were doing was an academic group. And not necessarily concerned with [standardized testing], but connected with it. We found out ... Like, ‘No. Don't do that.’ It's just something we like to do. The students didn't particularly benefit from it. We just like to do it. So, just coming to those realizations. Like, ‘Okay. This group first. This group ...’ You like it, but it's not beneficial. We can see those changes. So, we would have to sit down, regroup, figure out, ‘Okay. What does the data say? Are we making a difference? We don't need to do it or we do need to do it?’ So, I think that was very helpful for us, one, in eliminating some of the groups that we were doing, and two, the groups that we decided to keep, they were more effective because we could focus more on what we were doing in that group instead of being spread so thin in other groups.

Though there were some definite changes throughout the RAMP process for both counselors and students, when the school actually received RAMP, it wasn't met with a huge celebration. This was partly due to the fact that without a school counseling background, it's difficult to understand the amount of time that goes into planning and implementing a model program. On the other hand, Jasmine's school continued to have a stigma, mostly due to its demographic makeup of low SES, predominantly students of color. This stigma didn't magically go away upon receiving RAMP distinction—there were still high real needs that RAMP distinction didn't “fix”. This may also have played into the lack of true celebration of the team's achievement. Though, this was disappointing.

... We shared with our stakeholders that we were RAMP and what it meant to be RAMP, but I'm not ... They were just like, 'Okay. Good job. Thank you for being good counselors.' But I don't think they understand, not being school counselors, how big it is to be a RAMP school. Especially our school being a RAMP school because we have ... Our kids are great kids, but we have kind of a stigma with our school. We are very low performing. We have low socioeconomic status at our school, so we have a little stigma. So, bring us something ... like, we're trying to make it a big deal. It's RAMP school. I don't know. I guess they didn't really take it as something ...

Thoughts on Re-Ramping/Thoughts for other School Counselors

At the end of our discussion, Jasmine and I discussed the likelihood of her Re-RAMPing, as well as the thoughts that she had for other school counselors. When talking about whether or not she'll Re-RAMP at the end of her school's RAMP-recognition period, Jasmine was practical in how she approaches it. She recognized that her situation, having been in a team of three at an elementary school, is unique. Since achieving RAMP, this team was reduced to two, and Jasmine's position is still grant-funded. Despite the hard work that she and her team did, there's still the possibility that her position will lose funding. If she is there, though, she indicated that it would be something she'd like to continue because of the positive effect it has on students.

[Whether or not I'll re-RAMP] depends on if I'm at that school. And I say that because ... [one of] the other counselor[s is] gone, so now we only have two, however, our school is only allotted one counselor. My position currently is paid through title 1 funding. If we do not get that title 1 funding, then there's no position for me. So, if I'm not there, then of course I'm not going to re-RAMP. That would be the only reason. If I'm not there, I won't

re-RAMP, but if I am there, I want to re-RAMP just to make sure that ... we're doing everything that's effective. Not that we like it, but it's effective for our kids.

Further, despite the difficulty of the process, and the lukewarm response from school personnel, it was still valuable. It sharpened the edges of an already-comprehensive program.

I think it was worth it. One, because it made us ... Not that we didn't self-evaluate at the end of the school year, but we kind of were like, 'Hey, we did a good job this year. Let's do this again.' With this process, it was different because we had to have the data, the numbers, the perception data. We had to make sure everything was in align with ASCA. And if it didn't, then we knew, 'Okay. We need to really look at this and go back and work on it.' So, that was the kind of annoying part because it was like, 'Hey, we were doing a good job before we had to do this.' But it was good because we figured some programs that were effective and programs that we just liked...

As Jasmine neared the end of the story of the RAMP process, she turned to recommendations for other school counselors. She noted that, if nothing else, the ASCA National Model is a valuable tool that counselors should use, even if they don't choose to go for full RAMP distinction.

...I think it's important just to look at your program and compare it to the rubric, and just make sure that you're doing what ... Even if you don't want to RAMP, you're doing what's on that rubric. Because if you're doing what's on that rubric, then your program is going to be ASCA aligned, and of course we want ASCA aligned programs. Just my opinion, anyway...[RAMP is] hard, I'm not going to lie. It's hard. But, yeah, it's something possible for school counselors to do. And I will say, if you are a recent grad from graduate school...Once you're fresh and you're right out of school, I suggest going into

it, seeing what you can do. [Be] sincere about the counseling profession. Not just being a counselor because it makes you feel good, but you really want to make an impact on your students. And if you really want to make an impact on your students, then you will do things that are proven to help them. Not things that you like to do. Not saying that you can't do things that you like to do, but still adding in those things that are proven to help. You just have to be sincere about the entire profession. Not just the feeling piece, but the data piece as well.

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Education

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| 2018 | Ph.D.– Counselor Education & Supervision (<i>CACREP Accredited</i>)
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Selected Publications and Presentations

Refereed Journal Publications

Duquette, K., Akos, P., & Harrison, R., (2016). Eliminating social homelessness: Providing a house to GROW. *Middle Grades Review*, 2(6), 1-10.

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National Refereed Publications

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Romagnolo, S., & **Duquette, K.** (2017, October). Modeling and Teaching Social Justice in School Counselor Supervision. Association of Counselor Education and Supervision, Chicago, IL.

Romagnolo, S., Edirmanasinghe, N., & **Duquette, K.** (2016, July). School Counselor to Scholar: Are You Ready to Leap? American School Counselor Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Akos, P., & **Duquette, K.** (2015, October). School Counselor Preparation: Is Training Culturally Relevant? Association of Counselor Education and Supervision, Philadelphia, PA.