College and Career Counseling in Rural Schools: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract
The recent legislation calls for attention to be given to rural education. Although the minority of the Georgia population lives in rural areas, school counselors play many roles in the lives of students in rural areas due to limited resources. This review summarizes the current literature on strategies utilized by school counselors in rural schools. Implications for practice and future research to assist rural Georgia school counselors are discussed.

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Across rural communities, diverse people, challenges, and opportunities can be found (see Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015). This is no less true in our southeastern state of Georgia. Year after year, more schools are opened to serve our students in rural areas. School counselors work with students at all levels of K-12 education and their work is often shaped by policy. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has created special opportunities for rural schools. For example, rural schools are now able to transfer funds between Title II and IV, as well as from Title II/IV to Title I through a Rural Consolidated Plan (Battelle for Kids, 2016). Under the Title V, the recent Part B Rural Education Initiative there are 105 local education agencies (LEAs) in the state that are eligible for federal- and state-funded resources (GA DOE, 2015).

Given that over almost one-third of public school students in Georgia live in rural areas (NCES, 2014-2015) and one-third of these students are minorities (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014), this initiative is an acknowledgement that rural schools lack the personnel and resources needed to meet student needs. Given this focus on rural education matters, the role of school counselor within rural schools is of interest more than ever. The climate of rural communities uniquely positions school counselors, especially as primary college and career educators. Many of the specific aims of the initiative, including increasing parental support, teacher professional development, and improving opportunities for disadvantaged students, overlap with the direct and indirect student services that school counselors provide per the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012) model.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Americans living in rural areas across the United States are becoming college educated more than ever before, especially women (USDA, 2017). However, the education gap between urban and rural America is growing with a smaller proportion of rural residents completing a college degree compared to their urban counterparts (USDA, 2017). Furthermore, a racial and ethnic disparity exists as only half of minorities from rural areas of the United States are likely to obtain a college degree as compared to their white counterparts from similar rural areas (USDA, 2017). Given that farming and agriculture are major industries of the rural U.S., including Georgia, school counselors must understand the cultural influences that shape how students and their families value postsecondary education (Brickman & Wimberly, 2014).

It has been well documented that school counselors play many roles within schools and the community (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009; Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner &, Skelton, 2006; Vann-Morrison, 2011). Within the rural context school counselors have also been described as social justice advocates (Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013-2014), giving voices to students that do not fit the status quo of their particular town (Wimberly & Brickman, 2014). According to ASCA (2014), college and career counseling entail the support of both Mindsets and Behaviors. These include not just having a positive outlook, but also deploying learning strategies, effectively managing time, and cultivating social skills. This paper summarizes the current research on strategies utilized by school counselors working in rural areas. To put the role of school counselors in context, we first describe rural Georgia in comparison to urban parts of the state.

Rural Georgia
Even though only about 17% of the state's population reside in rural areas (USDA, 2016), stark disparities exist across the settings of urban and rural Georgia. These socio-economic differences may affect the role and resources for school counselors practicing in rural Georgia. For example, the average per-capita income for rural Georgia residents in 2015 was $30,870 compared to $ 42,290 for urban residents (USDA, 2016). While poverty rates in urban parts of Georgia are reported to be as high as 15.9%, the poverty rate in rural Georgia is 22.9% (USDA, 2016). The unemployment rate in rural Georgia is 6.0%, while in urban Georgia it is 5.3% (USDA, 2016). In addition to these economic markers, educational attainment over the past few years is lower in rural Georgia with 20.7% of the rural population not possessing a high school degree compared to 13.3% of urban Georgia (USDA, 2016). Even though a higher proportion of the population has a college degree than ever before, only 15% of rural residents have obtained a college degree compared to 31% of urban residents in Georgia (USDA, 2016).

Need for Comprehensive Models
Continued development and adherence to national models such as ASCA's (2014) Mindsets and Behaviors is an important framework for school counselor best practice, and was highlighted as a need in past research focused on school counselors' experiences in the State of Nebraska (Barnes, Scofield, Hof, & Vrbka, 2005). Nebraska is a state noted to have an abundance of rural school systems (Barnes, et al., 2005, p.25). Given Nebraska school counselors' experience in rural areas, a Nebraska Department

of Education survey was sent out and completed by 428 Professional School Counselors to assess the progress of staff and program needs, and preparedness of Nebraska school guidance programs (Barnes et al., 2005). The survey included 32-items related to components of the Nebraska School Counseling Guide including response services, systems support, individual student planning, and curriculum; a list of specific items made up each component (e.g. guidance and counseling plans, adequate facilities, evaluations, responsiveness and service, access, career services, developmental emphasis, use of competencies) (Barnes et al., 2005, pp. 26-27). The survey asked counselors to indicate (yes, no, or unsure) if various items within these components were incorporated into their counseling programs (Barnes et al., p. 27).

After analyzing the data within each component, Barnes et al. (2005) found contradictory and inconsistent school counselor self-reports of knowledge and use of strategies designed to enhance program effectiveness (p. 29). For instance, when asked if they used a specific Nebraska school model for planning and improvement, 60% of school counselors surveyed responded "no" or "unsure" (Barnes et al., p. 29). The results of this study highlight the importance of creating, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive models and strategies that are then consistently used by a majority of school counselors in order to better provide program best practice (Barnes et al., 2005). In consideration of this need, reviewing programs and models that are effectively utilized helps fulfill the goal of promoting and supporting rural school counselors' use of effective strategies. Hence, the purpose of this review is to identify current research on effective career and college counseling strategies used in rural schools.

College and Career Counseling Strategies in Rural Schools
Academic Development
One strategy within career counseling that rural school counselors could employ would be targeting upper-level high schools in their decision-making regarding college. This strategy involves promoting students' academic development, a main domain of ASCA (2014) Mindsets and Behaviors for student success. Self-regulation skills, including goal setting and help seeking, are some soft skills that school counselors can use to support decision-making and development. These type of soft skills translate across contexts and could benefit students in both the workforce and postsecondary schools.

Self-regulation Skills. Lapan, Aoyagi, and Kayson (2007) studied how this type of development during high school affected students after graduation. In particular, the lead researcher developed the Integrative/Contextual Model of Career Development (ICM; Lapan, 2004) and implemented it in a previous study. ICM is a research-based approach which focuses student development in the area of six core areas. The program helps students to develop positive self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, and career-enhancing attributions… explore their options and develop personally meaningful goals… enhance the perceived fit between themselves and the world of work… integrate work readiness behaviors and prosocial skills into their everyday actions… identify career paths of interest to them… and become successful students and self-regulated, lifelong learners (Lapan et al., 2007, p. 267).

Students were surveyed to monitor how they applied these skills and attitudes into their lives. Across 8th, 10th, and 12th grades this strategy was successful. For example, female participants improved their academic performance by getting better grades, were more likely to participate in work-based learning experiences, and reported wanting to go to college more often than male students (Lapan, Tucker, Kim, & Kosciulek, 2003). By the end of 12th grade, students putting the ICM skills into practice were more likely to desire going to college or other postsecondary training (Lapan et al., 2003).

Of these seniors, 87 graduates were called three years later and asked questions about their status in school or work, quality of life, and success within their current role (Lapan et al., 2007). The more the students participating in the ICM career development in 12th grade reported taking away from the program, the better their reported quality of life and success in their current roles as workers or students. In particular, having counselor support during the original implementation was significantly associated with greater success in the graduates' current roles at school or work in the form of proactivity (e.g., goal setting, help seeking, as well as skills and relationship building. Thus, the goal is not just to expose students to the ICM components, but to start sooner and provide consistent guidance toward developing these crucial skills with long lasting benefits.

Career Development
A second domain in ASCA (2014) standards is career development. Strategies for working in rural areas and promoting career development can take many forms depending on the resources available in a particular area and school. As highlighted in a qualitative study by Morgan, Greenwalt, and Gosselin (2014), school counselors' perceptions about competency to use career counseling techniques can also affect the career development process. A group of 9 secondary school counselors from rural, suburban, and urban areas of two midwestern state were asked questions about their experience in career counseling education, training, and perceived level of confidence and preparedness (Morgan et al., 2014, pp. 485-487). Themes found from questions about use of career counseling were divided into the main areas of: awareness about and competency in career counseling (incompetence versus competence), theory versus reality, importance of colleague networks and use of technology, and current school counselor career development training needs (Morgan et al., 2014). Overall, school counselors reported not feeling adequately prepared to provide career counseling by their master's counseling programs and relied on colleague support and use of technology to aid them in career counseling interventions and strategies (Morgan et al., 2014). Support and information from colleagues on career counseling, as well as use of accessible technology (e.g., computer-based career interventions) were two important strategies that emerged from the study.

Classroom Guidance
In addition to school counselor career counseling preparedness and training, identifying effective strategies and programs for student successful career development is also important. Martinez, Baker, and Young (2017) identified one

strategy to promote student career and college readiness— a classroom guidance curriculum developed by the first author called Preparing for Post–High School Education: Motivated, Informed, and Ready (PPHSE:MIR) (p. 174). In order to evaluate the efficacy of this curriculum, Martinez et al. (2017) assessed and compared results from 9th grade students taking English classes at a rural high school (88 in the treatment group and 75 in the control group) (pp. 175-176).

For 5-weeks students were exposed to the classroom guidance curriculum (PPHSE:MIR) or independent learning. The PPHSE:MIR guidance curriculum program, implemented by school counselors, included eight modules with lessons on SMART goals, career exploration, pathways to college, and others related to career and college readiness (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 176). Before and after the intervention, student scores were analyzed on pre and post assessments measuring knowledge of post-secondary education entry requirements, ability to maintain future hopes and dreams, and career and college readiness self-efficacy (Martinez et al., 2017, pp. 177-179). Results showed support for the use of the PHSE:MIR with the treatment groups' higher post-test scores on measures of knowledge of post-secondary education entry requirements and career and college readiness self-efficacy (Martinez et al., 2017), further reflecting the need for effective career development curriculum and programs.

Social/Emotional Development
Another domain outlined in ASCA's Mindsets and Behaviors standards is social/emotional development (ASCA, 2014). Nicholas, Goforth, Sacra, and Ahlers (2017) reinforced the need for rural

student access to mental health services, and identified collaboration between educators (teachers and administrators) and "specialized support personnel" (SSP), including school counselors and mental health professionals, as a key factor in accessing services (p. 38). In order to facilitate collaboration, best practice approaches to meet rural student social-emotional needs were identified: enhancing educator training on mental health, multi-tiered systems of support, effectively utilizing SSP (Nicholas et al., 2017).

Collaboration
Enhancing rural educator training through various mental health organization programs (e.g., NAMI, NBCC, state health and human services) can help educators gain knowledge and address stigma surrounding mental health issues, so educators can identify these issues, communicate observations with school counselors, and collaborate with SSP to support the mental health needs of students (Nicholas et al., 2017). In addition to educator training, collaboration is supported by using a multi-tiered system of tiered service (Tiers I, II, and III); starting with Tier I universal school prevention and intervention services for all students, moving to Tier II for identified students with possible need for individualized or group interventions, and finally to Tier III for students with more persistent or serious social/emotional issues that might need referral to community mental health services (Nicholas et al., 2017, pp. 42-43). A third approach to support collaboration is effectively utilizing SSP by recognizing the role of school counselors and other mental health professionals within the school, as well as school counselors understanding the role of educators (Nicholas et al., 2017). One strategy for encouraging

utilization and collaboration are "Professional Learning Communities"— defined as organized meetings between educators and SSP with focus on specific questions to understand the needs of each student, and the criteria used to assess and implement goals (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2009 as cited in Nicholas et al., 2017, pp. 43-44).

Advocacy
The duty to learn and utilize multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skill, and advocate for client multicultural considerations are ethical tenants of the counseling profession (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2012; CACREP, 2015, F.2.). Advocating for students from various sexual orientations and identities is a part of this ethical duty. School counselors and students in rural areas at times struggle with options for advocacy because of limited resources, and lack of knowledge or support from rural communities regarding LGBTQ issues (Robertson & Full, 2015). Strategies identified by Robertson and Full (2015) for gaining additional knowledge and skill when advocating for LGBTQ students in rural areas include: community collaboration, community youth and family support groups, university affiliated organizations, school-based support groups, cultural advocacy groups (pp. 7-12).

Community collaboration education involves accessing and utilizing material from supportive LGBTQ organization internet sites, as these sites can be a good starting point to then organize more direct support in rural areas (Robertson & Full, 2015). When creating support within a rural community for LGBTQ students, one suggested resource are youth and family support groups that

can be provided by community agencies, religious organizations, or local chapters of national family organizations like "PFLAG" (Robertson & Full, 2015, pp. 8-9). Connecting to local university LGBTQ advocacy organizations can also be beneficial, as these organizations often have material for use in secondary school education, and promote awareness and advocacy through ongoing community events (Robertson & Full, 2015). Two final advocacy strategies provided by Robertson and Full (2015) involve, creating school-based alliance groups between gay and straight students, and encouraging participation and connection to larger community groups that address various kinds of discrimination and prejudice.

Implications for Practice, Counselor Education, and Research
Across the three domains of the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success, the current research identifies the following strategies for working within rural communities: consistent instruction in self-regulatory skills over time to support academic development, comprehensive classroom guidance to promote career development, and collaboration with the community and advocacy for social/emotional development. Other factors to consider when addressing career development include understanding how student identities and backgrounds such as SES, social class, family, and gender impact student career perceptions and aspirations (Eshelman & Rottinghaus, 2015; Meece et al., 2013; Meece, Askew, Agger, Hutchins, & Byun, 2014).

For instance, Eshelman and Rottinghaus (2015) studied how student perceptions of SES and Social Class effected student career expectations. A sample of 100 high

school students from two rural Midwestern schools completed a survey packet evaluating demographic information, education and career aspirations and expectations, perceived SES (assessed by asking about primary caregivers' occupation and education), and perceived social class (assessed using the Scale of Subjective Social Status—Youth Version (Goodman et al., 2001)) (Eschelman & Rottinghaus, 2015). Results indicated that perceived SES and social class significantly contributed to the direction of educational aspirations and expectations, and perceived SES also contributed to occupational aspirations and expectations (Eschelman & Rottinghaus, 2015, pp. 327-328).

In a larger study that also investigated influences on rural student educational and occupational aspirations, Meece et al. (2014) looked at the impact of familial, economic, and gender-related variables on future aspirations. Rural high school students (N=8754) in grades 9-12 from at 73 schools in 34 states were randomly selected to participate in two survey studies that examined student and teacher responses to questions about student, family, and community characteristics and influences (Meece et al., 2014). Data was analyzed using an ordinary least squares regression (run separately according to gender), and indicated: rural girls had higher educational aspirations that supported their future goal of non-traditional gender occupations; parental expectations influenced all measures; students with positive attachment to and perceptions of rural lifestyles and rural opportunities had lower educational and occupational aspirations; perceived academic competence and student rating of school value predicted level of educational aspirations (Meece et al., 2014, p. 251). Eshelman and Rottinghaus (2015) and Meece et al. (2014) recommend understanding and addressing factors that influence career and academic aspirations in order to best serve rural school students.

Leadership Roles
As it is the case in many towns across Georgia, a school counselor in a rural place is oftentimes the only school counselor in school district. This unique position provides an opportunity to take the lead across situations. Wimberly and Brickman (2014) suggest four areas in which school counselors should consider taking a leadership role: assisting with the principal, advocating for students, initiating collaboration, and promoting systems thinking.

In terms of working closely with principals, the lack of personnel means that school counselors are more likely to be assigned additional duties by principals. Doing this grunt work is seen as a foot in the door that allows school counselors to learn more about the school and students. This data enables the school counselor to do their job more efficiently and ultimately argue for their own position and the reassignment of duties that detract from helping student directly. Essentially, Wimberly and Brickman (2014) offer a positive perspective of the socialization process of school counselor: by biding time, rural school counselors gain insight and earn more decision making abilities within their schools.

With an elevated status within the school system, rural school counselors are also able to be leaders by advocating for students. Again, Wimberly and Brickman (2014) suggest that building rapport and relationships with stakeholders within the community allows school counselors to be a voice for the voiceless. Of course, this still takes the courage to oppose others and contract issues of inequality within a system that may promote the status quo. By getting to know the students within the rural setting, as well as the cultural factors within their lives, school counselors can identify the individuals or groups that need help increasing their strength through strategic action. Collaboration is a strategy that school counselors utilize across tasks. Wimberly and Brickman (2014) urge school counselors to use consultation as an opportunity to shine. Being the only school counselor means that that consultation with teachers, parents, and other adults in a student's life can be an opportunity to build relationships within the community.

Furthermore, rural communities are often small systems. If school counselors use systems-thinking they can help students navigate their futures, as well as effect positive change in the lives of others. Concrete practices that Wimberly and Brickman (2014) offer include sponsoring extracurricular activities, accepting a leadership role in the community, using input from the community to create school counseling goals, addressing the school board to showcase school counseling efforts, publicizing effort and goals in local businesses and areas of interest in town, as well as creating a brand for the school counseling program.

Counselor Education
In regards to school counselor education, there are many aspects of working within the rural context that have been identified. For example, Wilson, Schaeffer, and Bruce (2015) interviewed 21 school counselors about their experiences regarding supervision. After triangulating their findings, six themes emerged: "dynamics of rural living, supervision from school administrators, supporting development through technology, desire for increased connection through supervision, and the identification of roles and responsibilities" (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 27). Counselor educators need to go beyond presenting the roles and responsibilities of school counselors in ideal settings by presenting authentic scenarios within college and career counseling that take "place" into account. Scenarios and role-playing in counselor education should include rural settings with the multi-dimensional nature of college and career advising. For example, scenarios could include relationship building with local institutions of higher education, educating parents about options, using technology and available online inventories and resources, etc. In addition, the school counselor supervisors should become part of this ongoing dialogue about rural issues and how this actually makes their job unique. By including supervisors in such a reflective activity, it makes it more likely that they will emphasize and share these aspects of their day-to-day life.

Further Research
In conclusion, this literature review highlights that there is a paucity of research on career and college counseling in rural schools. Although it is well understood that rural counselors have multi-faceted roles within rural communities, we just do not know what works best in a rural context to support students in their career and college planning. More descriptive and experimental research documenting rural school counselor practices, as well as the manipulation of staffing (e.g., having

a school counselor dedicated to college advising) would help future students get the most effective services. Future research documenting the counselor education process within the rural setting could also illuminate which experiences are most beneficial in preparing school counselors for college and career advising.

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