

# Exploring Perceptions of Urban High School Students Related to Their High Priority Counseling Needs

**Olcay Yavuz**

*Southern Connecticut State University*

*There is a growing emphasis to improve underserved students' academic, social-emotional, and career development as schools strive to deliver comprehensive student services. The purpose of this study is to explore urban high school students' perspectives on improving academic and counseling services. The results and implications for educational leaders and policymakers are designed to extend school leaders' and counselors' knowledge about delivering effective school counseling programs. Particularly, the findings allow urban school principals and school counselors to identify the high and low program needs of urban students to become college and career-ready. School leaders and counselors can apply the findings of this study to create a systemic and comprehensive student service in their schools by looking at time allocation in prevention versus responsive counseling services.*

**Keywords:** Principal and Counselor Partnership, High Priority Counseling Needs, Urban Schools,

## Introduction and Purpose

Improving the academic, social-emotional, and career development of all students is a fundamental aspect of implementing comprehensive academic and counseling services (Geesa, Elam, Mayes, McConnell, and McDonald, 2019). In this study, urban high school students' perceptions of their comprehensive school counseling needs were explored because the amount and type of support students receive from their school counseling services is important to support student success. Both school leaders and counselors are encouraged to be familiar with students' complex academic and counseling needs to appropriately support the whole child's development (Darling-Hammond, and Cook-Harvey, 2018). School leaders and counselors have been utilizing various data, such as student achievement test scores, math and reading levels, and attendance data to determine the academic levels of students. While this information is useful, they do not tell the whole story regarding underserved urban students' wholistic needs (Fowler, and Brown, 2018). Therefore, to better understand urban high school students' perceptions of academic, social, emotional, college, and career readiness-related needs, this research was undertaken to explore what urban students need from a school counseling program from school counselors and principals

Based on The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2019) school counselors are encouraged to deliver comprehensive programs that aim to promote the academic, social/emotional, and career development of all students. However, there are several barriers to the effective implementation of school counseling services including (a) a lack of funding, (b) a very high student-to-school-counselor ratio, (c) inadequate collaboration, and consultation among key stakeholders (Chandler, Burnham, Riechel, Dahir, Stone, Oliver, Bledsoe, 2018; Patel and Clinedinst, 2021). One additional barrier to the successful implementation of school counseling services can be attributed to the lack of professional development activities (White, 2019).

Since there are well-reported challenges to implementing comprehensive school counseling programs, utilizing a systemic need assessment can be considered an effective strategy to plan and implement targeted school counseling services (Warren and Mauk, 2019). Particularly, need assessment results can be instrumental to identify high-priority student services to develop intentional and meaningful counseling practices that lead toward a systemic change. Therefore, in this quantitative explorative study, urban high school students were asked to complete a comprehensive need assessment related to their academic, social, emotional, college, and career readiness needs. Particularly, the following research questions guided this study to explore what urban high school students need from a comprehensive school counseling program.

1. What are the highest and lowest college and career readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students?
2. What are the highest and lowest social and emotional development needs as perceived by urban high school students?
3. What are the highest and lowest academic development needs as perceived by urban high school students?

4. How urban high school students' perceptions of their high-priority counseling needs are associated with special education, English language learner, parent education, and race?

## Literature Review

### Comprehensive School Counseling Services

Comprehensive school counseling programs use a holistic and collaborative approach to help students' academic, social, emotional, and career development (ASCA, 2019). Aligned with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework (CCSCF) (2020) indicates that implementing a comprehensive school counseling program has many beneficial outcomes. For instance, when students participate in comprehensive school counseling services, they experience improved academic performance and success, better social relationships, improved decision-making and problem-solving, and a better understanding of careers and postsecondary options (CCSCF, 2020; Yavuz, 2014,).

Moreover, Brown, Trusty (2005) reported that the majority of state departments of education have adopted comprehensive school counseling programs as the model for school counseling programs in their states to improve all disadvantaged students' academic, personal, social, emotional, and career development. Particularly, the six state-level studies (Connecticut, Missouri, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Utah, and Wisconsin) focused on measuring the impacts of comprehensive school counseling programs provide valuable evidence of the relationship between positive student educational outcomes and implementing school counseling programs (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012).

### Academic Development and Comprehensive School Counseling

Both school leaders and school counselors are accountable to improve student academic development, and school success (Dimmitt, 2009). Improving the academic development of students is a significant component of a comprehensive school counseling program (Parzych, Generali, and Yavuz, 2021). Particularly, academic development goals provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, habits of mind, and knowledge that contribute to effective learning in school (CCSCF, 2020). As a part of the comprehensive school counseling services students are supported to employ strategies to achieve success in school and understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

Particularly, ASCA (2019) identified the school counselor's role to support student's academic success. These responsibilities include but are not limited to: (1) Delivering a school counseling program based on data identifying student needs, (2) Working with administration, teachers, and other school staff to create a school environment encouraging academic success and striving to one's potential (Stone & Clark, 2001), (3) Establishing data analysis methods to identify and target systemic barriers deterring equitable access, (4) Working to establish student opportunities for academic remediation as needed and (5) Delivering information to students

and teachers within the school counseling curriculum on best practices in mindsets and behaviors (i.e., learning strategies, self-management skills, social skills) critical in academic success.

### **Social and Emotional Development and Comprehensive School Counseling**

In addition to the academic development issues, more recently state policymakers, educational leaders and counselors have placed increasing importance on the social and emotional development of students (Lawson, McKenzie, Becker, Selby, and Hoover, 2019). As indicated by The Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework (2020), social-emotional development goals provide the foundation for social-emotional growth as students' progress through school and into adulthood. Social-emotional development contributes to academic success by helping students understand and respect themselves and others, acquire effective interpersonal skills, understand safety and survival skills, and develop into contributing members of society (p.5).

School counselors serve as the first line of defense in identifying and addressing student social/emotional needs within the school setting (ASCA, 2019). Since school counselors have unique training in helping students with social and emotional issues, they play a critical role in supporting student's social/emotional development by collaborating with school leaders and classroom teachers to provide the school counseling curriculum to all students through direct instruction, team-teaching (ASCA, 2019). School counselors also provide lesson plans for learning activities or units in classrooms aimed at social/ emotional development. A comprehensive framework approach requires collaboration with students, families the community, faculty, and administration. Therefore, school counselors work collaboratively with school stakeholders to select and implement appropriate strategies and resources in a school counseling program to facilitate K–12 students' social/emotional development (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, Cobb, 2010).

### **College and Career Readiness and Comprehensive School Counseling**

The third domain of a comprehensive school counseling program focuses on the college readiness and career development of all students. According to the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework (2020), career development goals provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, habits of mind, and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work and as careers changes across the lifespan. School counselors collaborate and consult with school leaders and teachers to ensure that students participate in a comprehensive plan of career awareness, exploration, and preparation activities (Paolini, 2019).

ASCA (2019) also indicates that school counselors play a critical role in students' career development by (1) helping students understand the connection between school and the world of work, (2) Working with teachers to integrate career education learning into the curricula, (3) Providing and advocating for students' college and career awareness pre-K through postsecondary (4) Collaborating with administration, teachers, staff and decision-makers to create a postsecondary-readiness and college-going culture. They also systemically advise students on multiple postsecondary pathways (Deslonde, and Becerra, 2018).

School counselors recognize that each student, regardless of background, possesses unique interests, abilities, and goals, which will lead to future opportunities. Therefore, school counselors assist students in completing the steps necessary for participating in college access programs or postsecondary programs, such as registering for tests or applying for financial aid (ASCA, 2019). Moreover, with support from key stakeholders like administrators, teachers, and parents, school counselors and school psychologists can work collaboratively to increase students' college and career readiness (Hines, Vega, Mayes, Harris, and Mack, 2019).

Taking everything into account, school counselors are the catalyst for establishing collaborative partnerships that help students' academic, social, emotional, and career development (ASCA, 2019, Bruce and Bridgeland, 2012). However, it is noted that many school leaders do not receive proper training to support and evaluate school counselors (Geesa, Elam, Mayes, McConnell, and McDonald, 2019). To promote equitable treatment of all students, and promote access to rigorous academic courses and learning paths for college and career for all students, school counselors and school leaders are encouraged to collaborate (ASCA, 2019)

### **Equity for All Students and School Counseling Services**

In 2018, a polling organization Gallup interviewed 1,892 superintendents about their priorities across the American education system. According to these survey results, superintendents are most likely to see "improving the performance of disadvantaged students" as a challenge for their districts. At least eight in 10 strongly agree or agree that improving the academic performance of underserved students (89%) is considered the main challenge that K-12 schools face. The underrepresented groups face unique academic, social, and emotional challenges in schools. Disadvantaged students tend to struggle more in their college and career readiness process (Yavuz, 2014).

Significant progress has been made over the past four decades in improving academic achievement and college readiness of historically underrepresented groups in U.S. schools and colleges (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, and Kuh, 2008). Several research-supported resources and strategies are available to help underrepresented students prepare for college and succeed in school. Collaboration, consultation, and coordination among school leaders, counselors, and teachers are crucial to meeting these challenges and balancing these priorities (ASCA, 2012). While school leaders focus on finding additional resources and outside partnerships, K-12 school counselors are encouraged to act as advocates, consultants, coordinators, collaborators, managers of resources, and facilitators to increase all student outcomes (ASCA, 2012). Particularly, in this study, underserved students are categorized into four main groups (1) Students with Disabilities, (2) Bilingual Students, (3) First Generation-College Bound Students, and (4) Students of Color.

### **Advocacy for Students with Disabilities**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public schools to provide a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for all students. However, previous research indicates that instead of receiving proper educational services and support in the least restrictive environment, children with disabilities are often enrolled in more restrictive

treatment environments with limited support (Davis, 2018). Students with disabilities and particularly, children with emotional disabilities (ED) live lives of desperation, depression, and rejection. Hurwitz, Cohen, and Perry (2021) also reported that students with disabilities are disciplined at disproportionately high rates, despite federal laws designed to ensure disciplinary protection.

Based on the Report on the Condition of Education 2021, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.3 million, or 14 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education services, the most common category of disability (33 percent) was specific learning disabilities. Besides specific learning disabilities, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act defined disabilities include: autism, deaf-blind, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairments (including deafness), intellectual disability (formerly mental retardation), orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairments.

A study conducted among 948 school counselors indicates that during the COVID-19 pandemic, counselors did not manage to carry out direct work with students on social-emotional topics. Counselors reported that they often spent their valuable time with non-counseling administrative needs (Heled and Davidovitch, 2022). Inappropriate administrative responsibilities for the school counselor include but are not limited to: (1) hallway monitoring (2) coordinating state tests, and (3) covering classrooms for absent teachers. Instead of spending time with non-counseling tasks, school counselors are recommended to provide school counseling curriculum lessons, individual and/or group counseling to students with special needs within the scope of the school counseling program (ASCA, 2019).

### **Advocacy for English Language Learners (ELL)**

According to the Report on the Condition of Education 2021, there are an estimated 5 million children in U.S. public schools learning the English language. In other words, over 10 percent of K-12 students in the U.S. are second language learners. Under civil rights law, schools are obligated to ensure that English language learners (ELLs) have equal access to education. Particularly, students who are identified as ELLs can participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards that all students are expected to meet. Even though the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requires school districts to take affirmative steps to improve the school success of English language learners, previous studies indicated that English language learners have lower academic achievement in college entrance exams compared to general education students (Soland, 2019). Therefore, counselors and key stakeholders are encouraged to give extra attention to the needs of special education and ESL students (Yavuz, 2014).

In addition, as recommended by the six state-level studies, professional school counselors are encouraged to use comprehensive data, prioritize counseling activities, and focus on implementing a differentiated school counseling program delivery that meets the needs of all students, including special education and ESL students. Particularly, both ESL students and special education students with learning disabilities need systemic and ongoing supportive services. Therefore, comprehensive school counseling frameworks provide counselors with a road map so

they can develop targeted responsive services, and guidance curricula to meet the diverse needs of underserve students (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012).

### **Advocacy for Students of Color, Low Income and First-Generation College-Bound Students**

The disparities in achievement between students from the highest and lowest socioeconomic status groups are strikingly persistent throughout the past decades (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, and Woessmann, 2019). Students from low-income families are less likely to attend and graduate from college. In other words, income differences among families tend to have a significant impact on the college enrollment rates and success of students (Bailey, 2001). Growing numbers of low-income, urban students in the United States are exhibiting a lack of college and career readiness (ASCA, 2012). Avery (2010) studied the effects of counseling on low-income students. Students offered systemic counseling were 7.9 percentage points more likely than students not offered counseling to enroll in most competitive colleges. Avery (2010) also suggests that counseling would have had approximately twice as much effect if all students matched with counselors had followed the advice of the counselors.

Like, bilingual, low-income, and first-generation students, students of color make up a significant portion of underprepared students in college. In the early 1950's, racial segregation in both K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions was the norm across America. However, in 1954, thanks to the *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* court decision, African American students gained the opportunity and right to attend predominantly white K-12 schools and colleges (Kluger, 1975). Then, the Civil Rights movement also encouraged colleges to actively recruit African Americans and other underserved students. As a result of these social justice movements, the racial diversity of the student population in colleges has significantly increased (Yavuz, 2014).

Yet, even though there has been an increase in the number of Hispanic and Black students who are accepted into college, the gap in college attainment with White, non-Hispanic student remains large. For example, the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began their pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution was highest for Asian students (74 percent), followed by White students (64 percent), Hispanic students (54 percent), and Black students (40 percent) (NCES, 2019).

When all things are taken into the consideration, the limited college access and success of (1) Special Education Students, (2) English Language Learners, (3) Students of color, low-income and first-generation college-bound students are national concerns that are considered a social justice issue. It appears that there are significant, and in some cases, widening, gaps among certain groups of these students in terms of college access and student success. Since these disadvantaged minority students are underrepresented in the USA higher educational institutions, they are widely acknowledged by previous studies (Mishra, 2020). Overall, it is noted that these students do not have equal access and opportunities to enter and achieve in college.

### **Method**

The aim of the study was to observe how urban high school students' self-perceived knowledge and needs related to their academic, social, emotional, and career development. A quantitative

explorative study was conducted during Spring 2020 and focused on gathering and analyzing students' perception of their counseling needs regarding academic development, social and emotional development as well as college and career readiness.

The researcher focused on gaining an understanding of the urgent needs of urban high school students to inform school counseling services. The study design allows urban school principals and school counselors to identify the high and low program needs of urban students to improve their academic, social, emotional, and career development. Particularly, school leaders and counselors can apply the results to consider time allocation in prevention/education versus reactive/responsive academic and counseling services. During planning, local context should be taken into the consideration.

Research Question 1: What are the highest and lowest college and career readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students?

Research Question 2: What are the highest and lowest social and emotional readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students?

Research Question 3: What are the highest and lowest social and academic development needs as perceived by urban high school students?

Research Question 4: How urban high school students' perceptions of their high priority counseling needs are associated with special education, English language learner, parent education, and race?

## **Instrumentation**

This quantitative case study contains data derived from the comprehensive student need assessment survey. Fifty-five items in the survey were derived from the literature and the matrix comprehensive student need assessment survey was composed of questions in 3 domains: (1) academic development needs, (2) social and emotional development needs, and 3) college readiness and career development needs. Urban high school students were instructed to rate responses to questions related to each domain. Participants determined the level of need for each school counseling service by indicating "4"- Strongly Agree, "3"- Agree, "2"- Disagree, "1"- Strongly Disagree.

The comprehensive student needs assessment survey was reviewed by an expert panel consisting of certified school counselors and certified school administrators, and university professors. The first domain of the Needs Assessment Survey was comprised of 17 questions regarding the college and career readiness of urban high school students. The author conducted a reliability analysis to determine the internal consistency of the items. All seventeen items were included (N = 105) in the analysis. The results of the analysis indicated a Cronbach's alpha of .97, which was well above the conventionally acceptable Cronbach's alpha of .70 for social science research (Cohen, 1998).

The second domain of the need assessment survey was comprised of 24 questions regarding the social and emotional development of urban high school students. Social-emotional development contributes to academic and career success by helping students understand and respect themselves and others, acquire effective interpersonal skills, understand safety and survival skills, and develop into contributing members of society. These items had the



respondents reflect on the social and emotional development needs of their students. The results of the internal consistency analysis indicated a Cronbach's alpha of .96.

The third domain of the needs assessment survey was comprised of 14 questions regarding the academic development of urban high school students. Academic Development goals provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, habits of mind, and knowledge that contribute to effective learning in school; employing strategies to achieve success in school; and understanding the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community (CCSCF, 2021). These items had the respondents reflect on the academic development and school success needs of their students. The results of the internal consistency analysis indicated a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

### **Survey Participants**

To better understand urban high school students' perceptions of academic, social, emotional, college, and career readiness-related needs, this research was undertaken in one urban school in the state of Connecticut. A comprehensive need assessment survey was conducted using an electronic survey instrument and was administered to all high school students at one Connecticut urban high school. The student population at this urban high school is diverse. The racial makeup is White (46.2%), Hispanic (29.3%), African American (18.5%). Of the 314 high school students enrolled at the school, 213 responded to the survey, for a 78% response rate. Survey participants included in the analysis for this paper includes 14.4% English second language learner. It is also noted that 18.1 percent of participating students were enrolled in the special education program. Participants were also distributed across the high school students grade level 12 (18.6%) grade 11 (29.9%), grade 10 (22.1%) and, grade level 9 (29.4%). Age and college readiness differences between the grade levels can be considered as a limitation of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

In this quantitative explorative study, the researcher applied descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze responses to the quantitative research questions. Particularly, the mean and standard deviations of all items were computed to answer the first three research questions that focused on exploring the highest and lowest academic, social, emotional college and career readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students.

Different from the first three research questions, the fourth research question focused on exploring how urban high school students' perceptions of their high-priority counseling needs change based on special education, English language learner, parent education, race. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to answer the fourth research question. The Chi-Square Test of Independence determines whether there is an association between categorical variables (i.e., whether the variables are independent or related). It is a nonparametric test.

### **Findings**

This study was conducted in one Connecticut urban high school to explore high school students' perceptions of academic, social, emotional, and career development needs. It is expected that

the results provide school leaders and counselors with a framework and process to design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs. Particularly, the findings were organized based on four main research questions.

**Research Question 1: What are the highest and lowest college and career readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students?**

To explore what urban high school students perceive as the highest and lowest college and career readiness needs, the researchers asked participants to rate the level of agreement for each statement from 1 (lowest priority need) through 3 (highest priority). As shown in Table 1, the total mean scores of urban high school students' perception of their college and career readiness needs are ranked from highest priority to lowest priority. Results indicated that all mean scores higher than 2.15 out of 3 were considered between high and medium priorities.

Specifically, responses to the college and career readiness statements indicated the top four highest level of agreements are directly related with financial aid, job search and job application process including: (1<sup>st</sup>) Searching and applying for a job ( $M = 2.35, SD = 0.73$ ), (2<sup>nd</sup>) Identifying what education, training, and skills are required for different jobs ( $M = 2.34, SD = 0.74$ ), (3<sup>rd</sup>) Exploring grant, financial aid opportunities and loans ( $M = 2.30, SD = 0.74$ ), (4<sup>th</sup>) Understanding personal finance and creating simple personal budget ( $M = 2.30, SD = 0.75$ ). There is no statement that was rated as lower than 2.00 out of 3. The findings indicate that all college and career readiness related counseling needs are listed as high or medium priorities by urban high school students.

**Table 1**

*Urban High School Students' Perception of Their College and Career Readiness Needs (N=213)*

Counseling needs related to college and career readiness	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Searching and applying for a job (cover letter, resume writing, interviewing)	2.35	0.73
2. Identifying what education, training, and skills are required for different jobs	2.34	0.74
3. Exploring grants, financial aid opportunities and loans	2.30	0.74
4. Understanding personal finance and creating a simple personal budget	2.30	0.75
5. Researching post-secondary requirements in relation to future career goals	2.30	0.70
6. College enrolment and transition	2.29	0.75
7. Attending college/career fairs to explore postsecondary options and requirements	2.29	0.75
8. Identifying personalities, values, and interests to plan college/career paths	2.28	0.72
9. Identifying career clusters to pursue as part of the college and career plan	2.27	0.70
10. Gaining early career experiences: career fairs, job shadowing, and internships	2.27	0.75
11. Understanding and using the accessible college and career readiness resources	2.26	0.74
12. Completing college application and college admission process	2.25	0.77
13. Researching post-secondary and employment options based on the career choice	2.25	0.73
14. Having easy access to a counselor to get help with college/career readiness	2.25	0.76

15. Understanding post-secondary options: college, career, technical, military	2.23	0.75
16. Applying knowledge of technology and social media to organize career goals	2.17	0.73
17. Demonstrating effective 21st Century Skills (4Cs) for future career success	2.15	0.75

**Research Question 2: What are the highest and lowest social and emotional readiness needs as perceived by urban high school students?**

Urban high school students’ counseling needs related to their social and emotional readiness have 24 items. To explore what urban high school students perceive as the highest and lowest counseling needs in this crucial domain, the researcher asked participants to rate the level of agreement for each statement from 1 (lowest priority need) through 3 (highest priority). As shown in Table 2, the total mean scores of urban high school students’ perception of their social and emotional needs are ranked from highest priority to lowest priority. Similar to the college and career readiness needs, the need assessment results indicated that all mean scores higher than 1.71 out of 3 were considered between high and medium priorities.

Specifically, urban high school students’ responses to the social and emotional statements indicated the top four highest level of the agreement are directly relate to social-emotional learning (SEL) and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills including: (1) Understanding the balance between school, work, and leisure ( $M = 2.31, SD = 0.71$ ), (2) Understanding and accepting my personal strengths and weaknesses ( $M = 2.25, SD = 0.75$ ), (3) Improving self-confidence and self-esteem to achieve goals ( $M = 2.24, SD = 0.76$ ), (4) Improving communication and relationship skills ( $M = 2.23, SD = 0.76$ ). There is no statement that was rated as lower than 1.71 out of 3. The findings indicate that all social and emotional related counseling needs are listed as high or medium priorities.

Findings also indicated that urban high school students’ the lowest social and emotional development needs are related with relationship, self-awareness, personal safety, and security needs that include (1) Dealing with dating and relationship issues ( $M = 1.90, SD = 0.79$ ), (2) Dealing with self-harm and suicidal thoughts ( $M = 1.80, SD = 0.81$ ), (3) Dealing with my gender identity and sexual orientation ( $M = 1.77, SD = 0.86$ ), (24<sup>th</sup>) Dealing with alcohol and drug addiction problems ( $M = 1.71, SD = 0.83$ ).

**Table 2**

*Urban High School Students’ Perception of Their Social and Emotional Needs (N=213)*

Counseling needs related to social and emotional readiness	M	SD
1. Understanding the balance between school, work, and leisure	2.31	0.71
2. Understanding and accepting personal strengths and weaknesses	2.25	0.75
3. Improving self-confidence and self-esteem to achieve goals	2.24	0.76
4. Improving communication and relationship skills	2.23	0.76
5. Accepting individual differences in ethnicity, culture, race, religion.	2.23	0.83
6. Understanding practicing self-care and personal well-being	2.21	0.78
7. Getting along better with my friends, family members, teachers, and others	2.18	0.77
8. Improving my leadership and self-advocacy skills	2.18	0.76
9. Recognizing that everyone has rights and responsibilities	2.18	0.80
10. Recognizing, expressing, and managing my emotions	2.16	0.77

11. Dealing with my own personal issues and health problems	2.15	0.79
12. Feeling safe at school	2.12	0.80
13. Participating in enrichment and extracurricular activities (art, clubs, sports)	2.11	0.78
14. Developing effective coping skills when dealing with difficult decisions	2.11	0.78
15. Understanding and practice of personal safety skills	2.11	0.81
16. Demonstrating an understanding of the risks and responsible use of technology	2.06	0.79
17. Learning about community service and volunteer projects	2.06	0.78
18. Having easy access to counselor to get help with social & emotional concerns	2.02	0.81
19. Dealing with peer pressure, harassment, and bullying	1.92	0.81
20. Dealing with my home, family, divorce, and parent separation issues	1.91	0.82
21. Dealing with dating and relationship issues	1.90	0.79
22. Dealing with self-harm and suicidal thoughts	1.80	0.81
23. Dealing with my gender identity and sexual orientation	1.77	0.86
24. Dealing with alcohol and drug addiction problems	1.71	0.83

**Research Question 3: What are the highest and lowest social and academic development needs as perceived by urban high school students?**

The ASCA National Model (2019) encourages both school leaders and counselors to intentionally implement strategies that support and improve student academic achievement (ASCA, 2019, Parzych, Generali and Yavuz, 2021). Therefore, this study also explored the highest and lowest academic development needs as perceived by urban high school students. With an emphasis on improving the academic development of urban high school students, the findings are expected to inform urban school leaders and counselors how they can support students' academic development for a school success. 14 items have been identified related to the urban students' academic development counseling needs.

Urban high school students; responses to the academic development statements indicated the top four highest level of agreements are directly related to motivation, study and organizational skills including: (1<sup>st</sup>) Improving my self-motivation toward learning and schoolwork ( $M = 2.40, SD = 0.68$ ), (2<sup>nd</sup>) Improving my academic weaknesses ( $M = 2.36, SD = 0.67$ ), (3<sup>rd</sup>) Improving my effective study and organizational skills ( $M = 2.36, SD = 0.66$ ), (4<sup>th</sup>) Improving my test-taking skills ( $M = 2.34, SD = 0.70$ ). There is no statement that was rated as lower than 2.11 out of 3. Like the first two domains, the findings indicate that all social and emotional related counseling needs are listed as high or medium priorities. The general findings indicate that compared to social, emotional ( $M = 2.29, SD = 0.78$ ) and career development ( $M = 2.26, SD = 0.73$ ) domains, academic development domain has the highest overall mean score with ( $M = 2.29, SD = 0.71$ ).

**Table 3**

*Urban High School Students' Perception of Their Academic Development Needs (N=213)*

Counseling needs related to academic development	M	SD
1. Improving my self-motivation toward learning and schoolwork	2.40	0.68
2. Improving my academic weaknesses	2.36	0.67

3. Improving my effective study and organizational skills	2.36	0.66
4. Improving my test-taking skills	2.34	0.70
5. Understanding the graduation requirements	2.34	0.75
6. Understanding what test scores mean in relation to academic/career planning	2.33	0.73
7. Tracking my academic progress toward graduation and college readiness)	2.32	0.71
8. Managing my time effectively	2.32	0.69
9. Understanding the requirements of college entrance exams (PSAT/SAT, ACT)	2.28	0.72
10. Exploring my academic strengths and weaknesses	2.28	0.68
11. Having easy access to counselor to get help with my academic concerns)	2.22	0.74
12. Setting academic goals based on my evaluation of current school performances	2.20	0.68
13. Using computers, social media,/technology effectively to improve my learning	2.16	0.79
14. Reducing my test anxiety	2.11	0.81

**Research Question 4: How urban high school students' perceptions of their high priority counseling needs change based on the special education, ELL, parent education, race?**

The last research question explored how special education, bilingual, parent education, and race are associated with urban students' perceptions of their high-priority counseling needs. Therefore, cross-tabulations were constructed to compare perceptions by scores, separated based on these four factors. When the Chi-square test of independence was applied to determine the significance of any relationship between the selected independent factors and responses to the survey items, in general, there was not a significant association between high priority counseling needs and independent factors (1) special education, (2) bilingual, (3) parent education, and (4) race. In other words, since the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), the null hypothesis was not rejected. Rather, in many cases, we conclude that there is not enough evidence to suggest an association between high-priority counseling needs and selected independent factors. Particularly findings indicated that there is not an association between high priority counseling needs and whether or not a student is a first-generation college-bound student.

However, when the Chi-square test of independence was applied to determine significance of any relationship between race and responses to the survey items, results related to high priority social and emotional needs were significant including: Life Balance ( $\chi^2 (2, n = 207) = 8.83, p = .01$ ), Personal Strengths ( $\chi^2 (2, n = 207) = 5.91, p = .02$ ), Communication ( $\chi^2 (2, n = 207) = 6.86, p = .03$ ), Diversity Issues ( $\chi^2 (2, n = 207) = 15.73, p = .001$ ). Since the p-value is less than our chosen significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , we can reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is an association between high priority social emotional needs and whether or not students are White.

A similar significance pattern was observed when the Chi-square test of independence was applied to determine significance of any relationship between ELL students and responses to the survey items, results related to high priority college and career readiness needs were significant including: Job Requirements ( $\chi^2 (2, n = 209) = 5.89, p = .05$ ), Financial Aids ( $\chi^2 (2, n =$

209) = 7.38,  $p = .02$ ), Personal Finance ( $\chi^2$  (2,  $n = 209$ ) = 13.73,  $p = .01$ ), Post-secondary Plan ( $\chi^2$  (2,  $n = 209$ ) = 6.25,  $p = .04$ ). Since the  $p$ -value is less than our chosen significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , we can reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is an association between high priority college and career readiness needs and whether or not urban high school students are in a bilingual program.

Based on the Chi-square test of independence test results, we can also conclude that there is an association between urban students' high priority financial aids needs  $\chi^2$  (2,  $n = 209$ ) = 7.94,  $p = .01$ ), whether or not students are in a special education program. It is also noted that bilingual students are significantly more likely to agree with receiving counseling services regarding study skills  $\chi^2$  (2,  $n = 209$ ) = 6.51,  $p = .04$ ). In other words, there is an association between high-priority study skill needs and whether or not urban high school students are in a bilingual program.

**Table 5**  
*Urban High School Students' Very High Priority Counseling Needs by Student Factors*

Top Priorities	Special Ed.			Bilingual			First Generation			Student of Color		
	$M_{no}$	$M_{yes}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$P$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$P$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$
<b>College Career</b>												
				$s$			$s$			$s$		
Job Search	2.3	2.21	.09	2.4	2.0	.63	2.32	2.4	.83	2.32	2.3	.02*
Job Requirements	8			0	7			0			8	
Financial Aids	2.3	2.32	.52	2.3	2.1	.05*	2.33	2.3	.87	2.31	2.3	.33
Personal Finance	5			9	0			7			6	
College Plan	2.3	2.13	.02*	2.3	1.9	.02*	2.30	2.3	.08	2.23	2.3	.30
	4			6	7			7			7	
	2.3	2.18	.35	2.3	1.8	.01*	2.30	2.3	.26	2.28	2.3	.71
	3			7	7			2			0	
	2.3	2.26	.08	2.3	2.2	.04*	2.28	2.3	.69	2.23	2.3	.20
	1			2	0			3			4	
<b>Academic</b>	$M_{no}$	$M_{yes}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$
				$s$			$s$			$s$		
Self-Motivation	2.3	2.50	.16	2.4	2.2	.20	2.41	2.4	.70	2.34	2.4	.07
Improving GPA	8			4	3			2			6	
Study Skills	2.4	2.24	.51	2.3	2.3	.21	2.43	2.3	.45	2.33	2.4	.12
Test-Taking	1			3	6			0			1	
Graduation Plan	2.3	2.47	.20	2.1	2.4	.04*	2.35	2.3	.29	2.28	2.4	.63
	3			7	1			7			1	
	2.3	2.34	.69	2.3	2.2	.34	2.37	2.3	.94	2.30	2.4	.13
	7			9	0			7			0	
	2.3	2.42	.50	2.3	2.3	.29	2.32	2.4	.94	2.34	2.4	.39
	7			9	0			4			0	
<b>Social-Emotional</b>	$M_{no}$	$M_{yes}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$	$M_{no}$	$M_{ye}$	$p$
				$s$			$s$			$s$		

	2.3	2.29	.33	2.3	2.2	.45	2.31	2.3	.74	2.22	2.4	.01*
Life Balance	3			3	7			2			0	
	2.2	2.37	.18	2.2	2.2	.72	2.27	2.3	.91	2.18	2.3	.02*
Strengths	4			6	7			0			4	
	2.2	2.24	.40	2.2	2.2	.94	2.28	2.2	.96	2.27	2.2	.05
Self Confidence	7			7	3			3			7	
	2.2	2.32	.19	2.2	2.1	.67	2.24	2.2	.38	2.15	2.3	.03*
Communication	2			5	7			3			1	
	2.1	2.39	.33	2.2	2.3	.90	2.20	2.2	.29	2.13	2.3	.01*
Diversity Issues	9			1	7			7			1	

## Discussion

The results of this study provide information and research-supported strategies for school counselors, school leaders, policymakers and educators as they consider the key stakeholders to implement comprehensive school counseling services. The implications for practice are grouped into three major domains (1) Implications for improving college and career readiness, (2) Implications for improving social and emotional development and (3) Implications for improving academic success.

### Implications for Improving College and Career Readiness of Urban High School Students

The findings of the study indicated the top four highest level of agreements are directly related with financial aid, scholarship, job search, and job application process. Since financial readiness is an important part of college access and college success, professional school counselors and school building leaders are encouraged to collaborate to provide the following school counseling services (1) Supporting urban students' job search and job application, (2) Providing guidance lessons to help students explore grant, scholarship, financial aid and loan opportunities, (3) Conducting personalized counseling sessions can also help urban students' understanding personal finance and personal budget guidelines (Millett, Saunders, and Fishtein, 2018).

Similar to financial readiness, the findings suggest that it should be the responsibility of the education system to improve career and job readiness of urban high school students (Astuti, Purwanta, Risqiyah, Veronica, and Novita, 2020). Student perceptions of need assessments present a unique opportunity for educators, with training and support, to talk to students about their career and job readiness. Particularly, based on the findings, schools are encouraged to provide students with early career experiences such as career fairs, job shadowing, and internship activities. After students research post-secondary requirements in relation to future career goals, they can also be encouraged to identify what education, training, and skills are required for different jobs.

### Implications for Improving Social/Emotional Development of Urban High School Students

Educators have an important role in providing students with targeted academic and counseling services. Therefore, besides college readiness activities, schools are encouraged to address the social and emotional needs of urban high school students (Romasz, Kantor, and Elias, 2004). In this study, urban school students' responses to the social and emotional statements indicated the top four highest levels of agreement are directly related to social-emotional learning (SEL) and 21st Century skills. Therefore, it is recommended that intentional interventions be developed that incorporate time management, self-confidence, self-awareness, communication, and relationship skills to enhance urban students' social and emotional development.

Particularly, while implementing social and emotional counseling activities, it is crucial to consider social justice and equity issues. Barnes (2019) provided a systematic review of the use of social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions in urban schools. She summarized the types of interventions used and the outcomes examined. The review of the 66 studies revealed that few incorporated culturally responsive strategies, and none addressed racism and the role it can play in student mental well-being (Barnes, 2019). Therefore, in the light of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) policies, school-based SEL interventions should be designed by considering classroom setup, diversity issues, and making learning contextual.

### **Implications for Improving Academic Development of Urban High School Students**

Urban high school students' responses to the academic development statements indicated the top four highest levels of agreement are directly related to motivation, study, and organizational skills. Therefore, practices and policies must be developed to ensure all students are provided the information and resources necessary for their academic success (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, and Oakes, 2018). For instance, besides improving urban students' self-motivation toward learning and schoolwork, student services might consider improving students' effective study and organizational skills as well as their test-taking skills. Since there is an association between high priority student needs and whether or not students are coming from a minority background. It is also suggested that need assessment surveys may be useful in identifying services that students are likely and unlikely to use and that multiple sources of information should be used in assessing diverse students' needs.

Moreover, effective implementation of school counseling depends on the partnership between school counselors and principals as well as the optimal student and counselor ratio (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, and Chieu, 2019). The American School Counselor Association (2012) recommends a ratio of 250 to 1. However, in urban schools, for one school counselor to provide ongoing individualized support to 250 low-income first-generation students and prepare them for college and career readiness does not seem to be a realistic and feasible practice. Therefore, in order to provide intensive individualized college and career counseling sessions, it is recommended that each urban school have one school counselor for every 160 students (Yavuz, 2014).

Finally, effective prevention and responsive interventions are important to address the underprivileged students' urgent needs related to their academic, social, emotional, college, and career development (Brown and Trusty (2005). To improve every underserved students' success all students should have equal access to resources, educators, certified school counselors, and specialists (Geesa, Elam, Mayes, McConnell, and McDonald, 2019). When school and district



leaders work in collaboration with school counselors, often school climate is more positive for students, faculty, and stakeholders. These findings might help **principals** and school counselors adhere to and implement comprehensive school counseling practices which include foundation, management, accountability, and delivery components.

### **The Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

There were several limitations to the study. The study is restricted to a defined geographic area that limits transferability. Nonetheless, the study can be considered "value-added" within the confines of the survey area with social justice focus. Therefore, the study may have replicative applications in other regions. Further investigation by including more diverse schools from different states is recommended. The full survey includes 55 items that can be considered long for high school students. In future research, a comprehensive factor analysis might have helped reduce the number of items. In this study, urban high school students' very high priority counseling needs were analyzed by various student factors including (1) Special Education, (2) Bilingualism, (3) First Generation, (4) Student of Color. However, students' grade level differences have been excluded. In this study, approximately 50% of the respondents to the survey were juniors or seniors. 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students likely have the most insight about career readiness, SEL, and academic preparation for college, while 29% of students responding were 9th grade. In the future research, further investigation of counseling needs of various grade levels is also recommended.

## References

- American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2019). *ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author
- Astuti, B., Purwanta, E., Risqiyah, L. H., Veronica, N., & Novita, D. (2020, February). Individual Student Planning Model to Develop Career Readiness in High School. In *Proceedings Of The International Conference On Educational Research And Innovation (Iceri 2019)* (Vol. 12, pp. 61-63).
- Avery, C. (2010). *The effects of college counseling on high-achieving, low income students*. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No.16359. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16359>
- Barnes, T. N. (2019). Changing the landscape of social emotional learning in urban schools: What are we currently focusing on and where do we go from here?. *The Urban Review*, 51(4), 599-637.
- Brown, D., & Trusty, J. (2005). *Organizing and leading comprehensive school counseling programs*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Bruce, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2012). The 2012 survey of school counselors, True North: Charting the course to college and career readiness. New York, NY: College Board.
- Carey, J. C., & Dimmitt, C. (2012). School counseling and student outcomes: Summary of six statewide studies, *Professional School Counselor*, 16(2), 146-153. DOI: 10.5330/PSC.n.2012-16.146
- Chandler, J. W., Burnham, J. J., Riechel, M. E. K., Dahir, C. A., Stone, C. B., Oliver, D. F., & Bledsoe, K. G. (2018). Assessing the Counseling and Non-Counseling Roles of School Counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*, 16(7), n7.
- Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) (2020). *Connecticut comprehensive K- 12 school counseling framework guide*. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/School-Counseling/SchoolCounselingFramework.pdf>
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (2008). *The American community college* (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dahir, C. A., Burnham, J. J., Stone, C. B., Cobb, N. (2010). Principals as partners: Counselors as collaborators. NASSP Bulletin, 94, 286-305.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success. *Learning Policy Institute*.
- Davis, R. Y. (2018). *Perspectives Regarding Care of Students Enrolled in Special Education Day Schools for Emotionally Disabled Students* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Southern Mississippi).
- Deslonde, V. L., & Becerra, M. D. (2018). High School Counselors' Influence on Low Socioeconomic Students' College Enrollment. *Journal of School Counseling*, 16(24), n24.
- Dimmitt, C. (2009). Why evaluation matters: Determining effective school counseling practices. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(6), 2156759X0901200605.

- Fowler, D. J., & Brown, K. (2018). Data-Driven Decisions: Using Equity Theory to Highlight Implications for Underserved Students. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 14*(4).
- Gallup, Inc (2018) Leadership Perspectives on Public Education The Gallup 2018 Survey of K-12 School District Superintendents. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/education/241151/gallup-k-12-superintendent-report-2018.aspx>
- Geesa, R. L., Elam, N. P., Mayes, R. D., McConnell, K. R., & McDonald, K. M. (2019). School leaders' perceptions on comprehensive school counseling (CSC) evaluation processes: Adherence and implementation of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy & Practice, 34*, 26–43. <https://doi-org.scsu.idm.oclc.org/10.21307/jelpp-2019-002>
- Hanushek, E. A., Peterson, P. E., Talpey, L. M., & Woessmann, L. (2019). The achievement gap fails to close. *Education Next, 19*(3), 8-17.
- Heled, E., & Davidovitch, N. (2022). School Counseling During the COVID-19 Crisis—From Crisis to Growth. *Journal of Education and Learning, 11*(1).
- Hines, E. M., Vega, D. D., Mayes, R., Harris, P. C., & Mack, M. (2019). School counselors and school psychologists as collaborators of college and career readiness for students in urban school settings. *Journal for Multicultural Education*.
- Hurwitz, S., Cohen, E. D., & Perry, B. L. (2021). Special education is associated with reduced odds of school discipline among students with disabilities. *Educational Researcher, 50*(2), 86-96.
- Kinzie, J., Gonyea, R., Shoup, R., & Kuh, G. D. (2008). Promoting persistence and success of underrepresented students: Lessons for teaching and learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2008*(115), 21-38.
- Kluger, R. (1975). *Simple justice: The history of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's struggle for equality*. New York: Knopf
- Lane, K. L., Menzies, H. M., Ennis, R. P., & Oakes, W. P. (2018). Effective low-intensity strategies to enhance school success: What every educator needs to know. *Beyond Behavior, 27*(3), 128-133.
- Lawson, G. M., McKenzie, M. E., Becker, K. D., Selby, L., & Hoover, S. A., Diliberti, M., Cataldi, E. F., Mann, F. B., Barmer, A. (2019). The core components of evidence-based social-emotional learning programs. *Prevention Science, 20*(4), 457-467.
- Irwin, V., NCES; Zhang, J., Wang, X., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., York, C., AIR; Barmer, A., Bullock Mann, F., Dilig, R., and Parker, S., RTI (2021). Report on the Condition of Education 2021. NCES 2021-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Wang, K., Hein, S., ... & Barmer, A. (2019). The Condition of Education 2019. NCES 2019-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Millett, C. M., Saunders, S. R., & Fishtein, D. (2018). Examining how college promise programs promote student academic and financial readiness. *ETS Research Report Series, 2018*(1), 1-24.
- Mishra, S. (2020). Social networks, social capital, social support and academic success in higher education: A systematic review with a special focus on underrepresented students. *Educational Research Review, 29*, 100307.
- Paolini, A. C. (2019). School Counselors Promoting College and Career Readiness for High

- School Students. *Journal of School Counseling*, 17(2), n2.
- Parzych, J. L., Donohue, P., Gaesser, A., & Chieu, M.M. (2019). Measuring the impact of school counselor ratios on student outcomes. Retrieved from the American School Counselor Association website <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/>
- Patel, P., & Clinedinst, M. (2021). State-by-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Maps by School District. *National Association for College Admission Counseling*.
- Parzych, J. L., Generali, M., & Yavuz, O. (2021). School Counseling Programs Identifying Academic Development Needs. *Journal of Education*, 00220574211016433.
- Romasz, T. E., Kantor, J. H., & Elias, M. J. (2004). Implementation and evaluation of urban school-wide social-emotional learning programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 27(1), 89-103.
- Schultz, Deanna, & Stern, Sam. (2013). College and Career Ready? Perceptions of High School Students Related to WorkKeys Assessments. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 38(2), 157–169. <https://doi.org/10.5328/cter38.2.157>
- Soland, J. (2019). English language learners, self-efficacy, and the achievement gap. *Collaborative for student growth [Research Brief]*. Portland, OR: NWEA. <https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/03/researchbrief-collaborativefor-student-growth-english-language-learners-selfefficacy-and-the-achievement-gap-2019.pdf>.
- Stone, C. & Clark, M. (2001). School counselors and principals: Partners in support of academic achievement. *NASSP Bulletin*.
- Warren, J. M., & Mauk, G. W. (2019). Implementation Science: A Path Toward Strengthening School Counselor Practice. *Professional School Counseling*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19878120>
- White, N. (2019). School Counselors' Professional Development Needs for Preparing Diverse Learners for College.
- Yavuz, O. (2014). *Improving College Readiness, Pursuit, Access, and Persistence of Disadvantaged Students* (Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University-Graduate School of Education).