Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC): A Measure to Support School

Counselor Accountability Efforts

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Abstract

The need for greater accountability in school counseling practice is widely accepted within the profession. However, there are obstacles to making accountability efforts common practice among all school counselors. The Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC) is a tool that can be used to encourage and support these efforts. In this study, 146 SPARC participants were surveyed to determine the impact of their participation in the SPARC application process. Results indicate that participation led to an increased use of student outcomes data for program improvement, increased awareness about student support programs among stakeholders, and increased action research activities.

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The call for greater accountability in politics, business, medicine, and education

is part of our national discourse and cultural landscape. Though initiated in the 1960s

and 1970s (Wellman, 1968; Wellman & Moore, 1975; Wellman & Twiford, 1961), the

accountability construct within the school counseling profession has recently become a

central focus in training and practice, especially with the focus on student outcomes as

a measure of success (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Gysbers, Hughey, Starr, & Lapan,

1992; Johnson, 1991; Stone & Dahir, 2007).

School counseling's historical journey from a school guidance position to a

comprehensive support program led by a professional school counselor is well

articulated by practicing school counselors, counselor educators Gysbers & Henderson

(2000), Myrick (2003b), Erford (2007), and others. The profession's evolution toward

increased accountability for effective counseling programs that enhance student

success has been supported by the gradual adoption of comprehensive guidance

models by individual states, along with the influence of the American School Counselor

Association (ASCA), the development of National Standards (ASCA, 1997), and the

ASCA National Model (2005) for school counseling.

Despite the current discourse among professional school counselors regarding

the data-driven and results-oriented program design as a model for the profession, and

the existence of school counseling programs across the country that design, implement,

and evaluate their programs using student outcome data, a review of recent literature

suggests there has not been a broad shift in the profession to infuse these activities into

everyday practice. Furthermore, although some school counselors conduct accountability assessments, school counselors are frequently not included as central players on the school leadership team that determines school improvement efforts, student success measures, and strategies for addressing the achievement gap (Stone & Dahir, 2006).

Explanations of why implementation of accountability assessments are not more wide-spread among school counselors include roadblocks to change such as: lack of training in program evaluation and other kinds of research (Astramovich, Coker, & Hoskins, 2005), school counselor educational preparation that is typically separate from teacher and administrative preparation programs, self-identification as "people persons" versus "data/numbers persons," time constraints due to high student-counselor ratios, etc. The paucity of readily available, efficient, and relevant vehicles for initiation into data-informed practice has also been cited as a barrier (Studer, Oberman, & Womack, 2006; White, 2007).

School counselors are often not encouraged or expected to provide data to substantiate their efforts (Myrick, 2003a). Brott (2006) along with Astramovich, Coker, and Hoskins (2005) asserted that school counselor education programs are called upon to provide the knowledge and skills required for counselors to conduct accountability research and also to help school counselors incorporate this role in their developing professional identity. Lewis and Hatch (2008) discussed the need to cultivate strengths-based professional identities that are guided by evidenced-based interventions and practices. Although many counselor educators are responding to this call for data-driven identity development, newly placed school counselors routinely lament their difficulty in

implementing best practices that include accountability activities. They anecdotally report that, in many cases, models and standards are not evident at their internship sites and that not all experienced site supervisors, some of whom were trained many years ago, embrace the role of researcher in their professional identity (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006). Perhaps some of these concerns have contributed to the absence of school counselors on leadership teams addressing school improvement and educational reform (White, 2007), and the need for school counselors to take on roles as participatory leaders (Lewis & Borunda, 2006).

The school counseling literature points to the need for models and tools to assess the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs (Stone & Dahir, 2007). Such tools allow school counselors to focus on cultivating local knowledge and wisdom by developing school site specific programs and outcomes using the ASCA National Standards as a guiding framework. Some of the available tools guide school counselors in their efforts to take a participatory leadership role in school improvement, particularly in the area of closing the achievement gap and assuring access to the array of opportunities available in K-12 schools and beyond (Dahir & Stone, 2003).

The study described in this article focuses on the use of the Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC), an instrument designed to place school counselors and student support services in participatory leadership roles in their local school-wide accountability efforts. Though developed in California, SPARC is applicable across the country and has been replicated in several other states.

Accountability in California schools has primarily focused on the School Accountability Report Card (SARC); a state mandated report card designed to provide

parents and the community with information about public schools performance. The SARC did not include impact/results of school counseling and guidance programs. Consequently, the SPARC (Support Personnel Accountability Report Card) was developed by the California Department of Education and the Los Angeles County Office of Education in 2001 as an evaluation tool that would involve school counselors and other support personnel in assessing the impact of school guidance programs and activities focused on student performance (Kiggins, 2003). SPARC required involvement of diverse stakeholders, including school counselors, school principals, and district superintendents to ensure that key administrative leaders were informed about the contributions of school guidance activities on student performance and saw that school counselors played a key role in school-wide improvement.

SPARC also required a plan for sharing the results with all stakeholders. Knowing that parents, taxpayers, and policy-makers continually press for more accountability in schools, SPARC was designed to be accessible to stakeholders because the larger public community "prefers that these accountability reports be short and well designed" (A Plus Communications, 1999, p.3). The two-sided, one page limit for SPARC applications addresses this preference. The study reported by *A-Plus Communications* also revealed that parents and taxpayers indicated that safety was their topmost issue of concern, followed by teacher qualifications, class size, and graduation rates. In response to these stakeholder concerns, SPARC was designed to require a description about the relationship between the student support system to school climate and safety.

In keeping with the goal to share results with all stakeholders, SPARC is designed to provide school accountability information for a wide range of audiences including; students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, accreditation committees, community members, legislative representatives, and other school policy makers. As a result, SPARC has become a widely shared public document which has placed school counseling at the center of school improvement and educational reform in California (R. Tyra, personal communication, September 12, 2008). Encouragement to participate in the SPARC process is supported, in part, by the receipt of formal awards to successful applicants.

SPARC applications are submitted annually, are peer reviewed, and scored by trained evaluators. Those meeting the criteria on the scoring rubric are awarded in several categories. Award-winning SPARCs are sent to the governor and legislature in California. This acknowledgement, conducted in a public forum, has provided the impetus for the wide use of this tool, not only in California but in several other states including Alabama, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Texas, and Wisconsin. To date, more than 670 schools have participated in the SPARC process. The SPARC represents a new way of sharing the school counseling model and its impact on student success. SPARC is an open source, public document that is continually improved based on applicant and scorer feedback, thus, modeling the action research method that it encourages in applicants (http://www.sparconline.net). Significant changes to the SPARC format and content were implemented following an evaluation of SPARC and its impact during the first five years of its implementation (Campbell & Reilly, 2007). This

practice of transparency fits well with the paradigm shift needed for school counselors to take a leadership role in school-wide accountability efforts and site improvement.

The SPARC process shifts the professional discourse by encouraging applicants to answer the question "How are students different because of what you do as a coordinated student support services program?" rather than answering "What do school counselors do?" (R. Tyra, personal communication, September 12, 2008). Rather than viewing the SPARC process as a "one shot" evaluation, the majority of applicants continue this peer-reviewed process annually, transforming their first-year data into baseline data that can be compared in the second year and viewed in terms of possible trends in subsequent years.

In this study, we explored the impact that the SPARC process had on the 2008 applicants' perceptions of their programs and activities. As members of the California Counselor Educators Research Collaborative, we designed a survey with input from the Los Angeles County Office of Education, California Counselor Leadership Network to examine the applicants' experience in this process.

Method

Participants

The eligible participants for this study included k-12 public school personnel in California who submitted SPARC applications during the 2007-2008 academic year, and who could be contacted by an e-mail address for their participation in a web-based survey. A total of 233 potential participants met these criteria.

Initially 233 e-mail messages were sent to all SPARC participants inviting them to participate in this anonymous survey. Each email provided a link to the web-based

survey. Seven e-mails (3%) were returned as "undeliverable". A total of 226 e-mails were delivered. The survey was available on-line for 27 days. Two follow-up e-mail reminders were sent during this time period to the eligible participants. A total of 146 respondents (65%) participated in the study.

Ninety-five of the participants (65%) are members of the American School Counseling Association, and eighty-one participants (55%) are members of the California Association of School Counselors. Participants also reported membership in thirty-four other professional organizations.

Instrument

A web-based survey was created to inquire about the impact of the SPARC application process on the delivery of student support programs and activities. Ten of the questions were constructed using a 5 point Likert scale format (5 = great extent, 4 = good extent, 3 = adequate extent, 2 = somewhat, 1 = not at all).

These 10 questions explored the extent to which the SPARC process resulted in collection of student outcome data; used outcome data to evaluate student support programs; changed or improved student support program activities or procedures; informed or modified system-wide policies, procedures, or programs; increased awareness of student support programs among parents, teachers, administrators, or others; prompted a deeper look into the data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) (http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/pj/245) related to school climate and academic achievement; improved efforts to help under-presented or marginalized students; encouraged action research projects. The Likert-scale questions also explored

the extent to which SPARC was discussed in graduate training programs and the extent to which school counselors played a primary role in completing the SPARC.

There were two multiple choice questions and one open-ended question designed to determine which SPARC award was received, and to gather information on participant membership in professional organizations. There were five open-ended questions constructed to elicit specific examples of how graduate education programs prepared participants for the SPARC experience; examples of activities supported through California legislation (AB1802) designed to improve educational performance that were incorporated into the SPARC; examples of action research activities influenced by the SPARC process; reactions from the community to the SPARC; and any additional comments about how the SPARC process influenced student support programs and activities.

A comparison of those participants who were trained about SPARC in their graduate education programs with those who were not was conducted to determine the impact of previous training on several survey items. One open-ended question asked respondents to describe the nature of any counselor educator's impact or involvement in their SPARC process. This question is omitted from the data analysis, as the majority of respondents did not understanding the term "counselor educator". Most of the respondents described the involvement of the k-12 school counselor. The intent of the question was to determine the involvement of any faculty in their graduate training program.

Procedures

This was largely a descriptive study. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare means of participants' responses before and after the SPARC experience and to compare the responses of participants who had previous SPARC training with those who did not. The 10 Likert scale survey questions were checked for and demonstrated high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .80.

The method for analyzing the data from the open-ended questions involved both a holistic and categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Each activity that was described by the participants was underlined, assigned an identification code, placed on labels and transferred to 3x5 cards. A hand sorting process was utilized to group similar activities together, collapsing them into categories. An excel spreadsheet was created to record the categories and to list the specific activity associated with the category.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the 10 Likert scale survey questions. The mean score for the question, "Prior to applying for the SPARC award, to what extent was student outcome data used to evaluate the student support program at your school?" was 2.97 (SD = 1.16). The mean score for the question, "To what extent did the SPARC application process result in the collection of student outcomes data at your school?" was 1.85 (SD = .98). The mean score for the question, "To what extent have you used the SPARC process and results to change, modify, or improve student support program activities or procedures at your school?" was 2.20 (SD = 1.06). These mean scores suggest that before the SPARC, there was adequate use of student

outcomes data to evaluate programs. However, as a result of the SPARC process, there appears to be an increase in the collection of student outcomes data as well as in the alteration of student support programs. The mean score for the question, "To what extent was the SPARC used to inform or modify system-wide policies, procedures, or programs at your site?" was 2.78 (SD = 1.20). This mean score suggests that while the SPARC led to altering student support programs to a good extent, it only led to moderate systemic changes.

The mean score for the question, "To what extent has the SPARC process led to an increased awareness about your student support programs among parents, teachers, administrators, and others?" was 2.08 (SD = 1.07). This score suggests that the SPARC process aided in increasing the awareness among stakeholders about student support programs.

The mean score for the question, "To what extent has the SPARC encouraged you to conduct action research projects at your site?" was 2.78 (SD = 1.34). This score suggests that the SPARC led to moderate action research practice.

The mean score for the question, "To what extent was SPARC discussed in your graduate program?" was 3.99 (SD = 1.16). The results suggest that there was limited exposure to the SPARC in graduate programs. (Nearly 40% of respondents said they were not exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs). For nine of the Likert scale survey questions, an independent samples t-test was used to compare means between participants who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs and those who were not. (The question, "To what extent was SPARC discussed in your

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations on the Impact of the SPARC

Question	*n*	*M*	*SD*
To what extent did the SPARC application process result in the collection of student outcomes data at your school?	146	1.85	.98
Prior to applying for the SPARC award, to what extent was student outcome data used to evaluate the student support program at your school?	146	2.97	1.16
To what extent have you used the SPARC process and results to change, modify, or improve student support program activities or procedures at your school?	145	2.20	1.06
To what extent did the school counselor(s) at your school play a primary role in completing the SPARC?	146	1.24	.67
To what extent was SPARC discussed in your graduate training program?	136	3.99	1.57
To what extent was the SPARC used to inform or modify system-wide policies, procedures, or programs at your site?	143	2.78	1.20
To what extent has the SPARC process led to an increased awareness about your student support program among parents, teachers, administrators and others?	144	2.08	1.07
To what extent has the SPARC process prompted you to look more deeply at the data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), data related to school climate, or data connected to academic achievement?	146	2.14	1.13

Question	n	M	SD
To what extent has the SPARC improved your program's efforts to help underrepresented or marginalized students at your school?	146	2.49	1.15
To what extent has the SPARC encouraged you to conduct action research projects at your site?	146	2.78	1.35

graduate training program?" was recoded to determine the participants who were

exposed to the SPARC in their graduate program and those who were not

exposed.)Table 2 shows that on four of the nine Likert scale survey questions,

participants were more likely to seek out information from the California Healthy Kids

Survey as well as to collect their own outcomes data if they were exposed to the

SPARC during their graduate program. Additionally, these participants seemed more

apt to use such data to modify individual and/or systems-wide programs and procedure.

Inspection of the two group means on the question, "To what extent did the

SPARC application process result in the collection of student outcome data at your

site?" indicates that the average score for participants who were not exposed to the

SPARC in their graduate programs ($M = 2.03$) is significantly higher ($p = .003$) than

students who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs ($M = 1.51$). The

difference between means is -.52 on a 5 point scale. Thus, participants who were

exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs appear to be more likely to collect

student outcomes data than participants who were not exposed to the SPARC in their

graduate programs.

Inspection of the two group means on the question, "To what extent have you used the SPARC process and results to change, modify, or improve student support program activities or procedures at your school?" indicates that the average score for participants who were not exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs ($M = 2.33$) is significantly higher ($p = .027$) than students who were exposed to the SPARC in their

Table 2

Comparison of Participants Who Were Exposed to the SPARC in Their Graduate Programs and Those Who Were Not on Nine Survey Questions

Variable	M	SD	t	Df	p
To what extent did the SPARC application process result in the collection of student outcomes data at your school?			-3.008	134	.003
Exposed	1.51	.66			
Not Exposed	2.03	1.09			
Prior to applying for the SPARC award, to what extent was student outcome data used to evaluate the student support program at your school?			.157	134	.875
Exposed	3.00	1.14			
Not Exposed	2.97	1.21			
To what extent have you used the SPARC process and results to change, modify, or improve student support program activities or procedures at your school?			-2.230	128.92	.027
Exposed	1.96	.75			
Not Exposed	2.33	1.18			

Variable	M	SD	t	Df	p
To what extent did the school counselor(s) at your school play a primary role in completing the SPARC?			.292	134	.771
Exposed	1.23	.60			
Not Exposed	1.20	.61			
To what extent was the SPARC used to inform or modify system-wide policies, procedures, or programs at your site?			-2.311	132	.022
Exposed	2.47	1.14			
Not Exposed	2.97	1.22			
To what extent has the SPARC process led to an increased awareness about your student support program among parents, teachers, administrators and others?			-1.681	132	.095
Exposed	1.87	.87			
Not Exposed	2.19	1.14			
To what extent has the SPARC process prompted you to look more deeply at the data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), data related to school climate, or data connected to academic achievement?			-2.318	115.34	.022
Exposed	1.81	.92			
Not Exposed	2.24	1.19			
To what extent has the SPARC improved your program's efforts to help underrepresented or marginalized students at your school?			-1.568	134	.119
Exposed	2.28	1.08			
Not Exposed	2.61	1.21			

Variable	M	SD	t	Df	p
To what extent has the SPARC encouraged you to conduct action research projects at your site?			-1.636	134	.104
Exposed	2.53	1.35			
Not Exposed	2.93	1.36			

graduate programs (*M* = 1.96). The difference between means is -.37 on a 5 point scale.

Thus, participants who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs appear

to be more likely to use the SPARC to alter their support programs than participants

who were not exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs.

Inspection of the two group means on the question, "To what extent was the

SPARC used to inform or modify system-wide policies, procedures, or programs at your

site?" indicates that the average score for participants who were not exposed to the

SPARC in their graduate programs (*M* = 2.97) is significantly higher (*p* = .022) than

students who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs (*M* = 2.47). The

difference between means is -.50 on a 5 point scale. Thus, participants who were

exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs appear to be more likely to use the

SPARC process to inform systemic change.

Inspection of the two group means on the question, "To what extent has the

SPARC process prompted you to look more deeply at the data from the California

Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), data related to school climate, or data connected to

academic achievement?" indicates that the average score for participants who were not

exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs (*M* = 2.24) is significantly higher (*p* =

.022) than students who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs (*M* =

1.81). The difference between means is -.43 on a 5 point scale. Thus, participants who were exposed to the SPARC in their graduate programs appear to be more likely to review data than participants who were not exposed to the SPARC. No other significant differences were found.

Qualitative results showed that fifty-two of the participants (36%) provided examples of how their graduate education program prepared them to complete the activities required by SPARC. Four categories were identified: *Direct experience with the SPARC process; Effective ways to use data; Knowledge of comprehensive counseling; Developing affective skills.* Examples of activities associated with these categories included the following: Received SPARC training and scoring in class; Required to complete a SPARC; Required to conduct and analyze research data; Completed action research project; Trained to consult with all stakeholders; Introduced to school counseling standards; Learned to be persistent and determined; Developed comfort and confidence in the SPARC process.

Eighty-four of the participants (58%) identified AB1802 activities that were incorporated into their SPARC. Four categories were identified: *Individual & Group Meetings; Parental Outreach; Intervention Programs & Prevention Strategies; Use of Data.* Examples of activities associated with these categories included the following: Meeting with at-risk 7th through 12th grade students and parents after school, evenings, on weekends; Home visits; Informational workshops; Student success workshops and classroom visits; Develop and revise 6 year plans and post-secondary options; Data to show improvement in high school exam pass rates, at-risk students who have graduated, and reduction in number of at-risk students.

Fifty-five of the participants (27%) described action research activities that were planned or begun as a result of the SPARC process. Four categories were identified: *Collaborative Partnerships; Developing & Implementing New Programs; Evaluating & Analyzing Programs; Systemic Changes.* Examples of activities associated with these categories included the following: Implementing guidance lessons in classrooms; Using solution-focused methods and strategies to reduce number of students with Ds, Fs and Incompletes; Implementing whole-school social-skills building program; Data collection on improvement in academic requirements; Data analysis of program surveys; District-wide commitment to use Health Kids Survey results to guide decision-making; Use of web-based surveys to elicit effectiveness of campus-wide programs.

Seventy-seven of the participants (53%) responded to the question asking them to describe reactions from the broader community (i.e. parents, accreditation team, board members, legislators, etc) to the SPARC. Sixty-nine of the respondents reported positive responses, 5 respondents said they received no response from the community, and 3 respondents reported unfavorable responses. Examples of positive expressions used by participants to describe the broader community reactions included the following: "…our School Board was thrilled…quite appreciative"; "…our Congressperson was impressed enough to make the award presentation"; "…our Accreditation Team was highly impressed by our completed SPARC"; "…Parents have been very excited to learn that these resources are available to them and their child"; "the Superintendent was…really amazed at all that we do…didn't realize it until he saw it in writing"; "our WASC team was very impressed…it helped our school when developing our self study

and our action plan";"Overall there was an increased awareness about the support team and the role of counselors".

Examples of unfavorable responses used by the participants to describe reactions of the broader community included the following: "… indifference"; …"the consensus is that it is too wordy".

Seventy-three participants (50%) provided additional comments about how the SPARC process has influenced their student support programs and activities. Of those who provided additional comments, 60 of the responses were positive and 13 were unfavorable. Many of the respondents felt that the SPARC process "motivated the counselors", they became "more involved", "organized", "rejuvenated", and "more confident". Others described that the SPARC process "brought us together district wide", and "validates what we do". Some reported "we became more proactive and less reactive"; "it helped us to advocate for counseling positions"; "it helped us reorganize the counseling department and now we are seen as the model for the district"; "our program is now more aligned with the national school counseling standards".

One respondent indicated "it helped get my job back! …We applied for the RAMP (Recognized ASCA Model Program) and won…we could have never received RAMP if we hadn't started with the SPARC." Another respondent suggested "the process of the SPARC is the true value…the time and hard work is worth it".

The respondents who reported unfavorable comments primarily addressed concern about the scoring process, suggesting that changes be made to provide "more training for proofing and editing", "administrative support", and "meaningful and specific feedback". Some felt that the scoring was "inconsistent", "too focused on the format",

and "discouraging". Others suggested that the format was "restrictive and increasingly burdensome". One respondent questioned the process of using two evaluators, and posed the question "How can you judge a program based on two conflicting rubrics without a third opinion?" The overall consensus of these unfavorable respondents encouraged examination of the scoring process and questioned the "stringent" focus on grammatical errors.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The school counseling profession is in the process of embracing the culture of accountability (Brott, 2006; Gysbers, 2004; Myrick, 2003a; White, 2007). However, practicing school counselors are not often included in school-wide accountability efforts as members of the school leadership team. Furthermore, many school counselors have not incorporated the role of practitioner-researcher into their professional identities. Key elements of accountability include the assessment of school counseling programs and activities that are based on student outcomes and sharing the results of this assessment with school and community stakeholders.

The impact of SPARC on clarifying the school counseling profession's role has been significant for those who have engaged in the process. Superintendents at several districts currently require their individual school sites to develop an annual SPARC. Numerous counselor education training programs have incorporated the SPARC into their curriculums, and regional accreditation teams have begun to ask student services personnel if they have completed a SPARC (R. Tyra, personal communication, September 12, 2008). It appears that the SPARC has become a tool for influencing school counselors' identity as a member of the school-wide leadership team and action

researcher. Rowell (2006) asserts that such collaborative research holds great promise for helping school counselors adjust to the accountability environment in public education. This grassroots informed process seems to support the paradigm shift so ardently called for by the profession.

The results of this study indicate that participation in the SPARC process increased the use of student outcomes data, resulted in changes and/or school improvements, and led to increased awareness about student support programs among school stakeholders. Additionally, the researchers found that the implementation of AB 1802; legislation passed in California that increased the number of school counselors in middle and high schools, also had a positive impact. Respondents reported that AB1802 has positively influenced them to increase direct contact with students and parents, to identify impediments to academic achievement, and to provide more intervention and prevention resources for student success.

The impact of the SPARC process on system-wide policies, procedures, and programs is less clear. Despite the fact that SPARC applications require the written support of school principals, the choice to incorporate SPARC results into school-wide improvement efforts is dependent on the leadership team, especially the principal. At many schools, principals change every few years. The principalship, once seen as a long-term career destination, is now a relatively short-term position with high turnover rates. Studies on principal turnover reveal that this is a national phenomenon (Norton, 2002). Thus, SPARC may place school counselors in roles as participatory leaders who have institutional memory about what the school counseling program has done and what it is doing to support all students to live up to their potential.

Additionally, school administrators and school counselors, though both typically trained in schools of education, do not always receive cross-training to gain knowledge of the other's field. Administrators and school counselors do not know enough about each other's roles. Both professionals must identify ways to collaborate and incorporate school counselors in school- wide improvements and leadership. SPARC can be the basis for beginning the dialogue and working together toward goals defined in the continuing process of asking how students are different because of their collective efforts. Doctoral programs in Educational Leadership offer an ideal environment for incorporating such training into the curriculum. Professional conference workshops for administrators and school counselors could also help to initiate these conversations and bridge the gap in working collaboratively.

While 13% of our participants reported a "good" to" great" exposure to SPARC in their graduate training programs, 39% reported no mention of the SPARC in their training. One likely explanation is that many participants were trained prior to 2002 when the first SPARC was introduced. Allowing student interns to participate in the preparation of a SPARC appears to be a useful opportunity within the recommended school counseling paradigm (Kiggins, 2003). Counselor educators who incorporate this activity into their curriculum through assignments and field placement activities will be providing future professional school counselors with tools to track the transformation and development of their own programs.

In order for school counselors to incorporate accountability activities into their identity and daily activities, experienced site supervisors must mentor counselor interns to include these factors during their field experiences. The SPARC participants in this

study appear to have the skills as well as the mindset to offer this type of mentorship. Their participation reveals participants' professional identity, in part, by their high rate of professional association membership and their interest in finding ways to see what works and document what helps students succeed. White (2007) suggests that "professional identity development and affiliation can be of utmost importance and an initial step in professional school counselors' accountability" (p. 68). Participant professional association membership suggests a high degree of commitment to ongoing professional development, a quality that is highly desirable when selecting site supervisors for school counseling interns. SPARC applicants are required to include a statement about professional association membership in their applications.

However, there are still many site supervisors that do not have these skills or mindset and, therefore, are not able to mentor school counseling interns to take on these important roles. Counselor educators, working in collaboration with site supervisors, can play a critical role in assuring that internship sites provide the opportunity to observe and participate in student support services and school-wide accountability efforts. This type of collaboration between school counselor education programs and experienced counselors in K-12 schools has been identified as a critical step in the development of the profession (Paisley & Hayes, 2003).

Lewis and Hatch (2008) asserted, "counselor educators' success is best defined by the actions of school counselors trained in their programs in the school communities where they work" (p. 117). SPARC enables all school counselors to explore and assess a similar question that is at the core of what they do and who they are: how are students in the communities where we work better off because of what we do? SPARC has the

power to keep school counselors focused and honest with themselves and their stakeholders about the impact on the students they serve.

Limitations and Future Directions

The results of this study should not be generalized to all previous SPARC participants, particularly those from states other than California. Future research might include participants from other states to more fully determine the impact of SPARC. Also, it is difficult to determine whether the 35% of applicants who chose not to participate were equally positive about their experience. Another limitation is the use of participant perception data. Alternative methodologies designed to determine actual school counselor behavior and practice with regard to accountability efforts are recommended. Additionally, the limits of the methodologies used in this study prevent a complete understanding about the impact that this experience has had on participants. Perhaps the use of a case study approach might add more understanding about the use and impact of the SPARC on school counselors' behaviors and their system-wide impact.

Further research on the role of the school counselor in school-wide accountability efforts is suggested along with an assessment of counselor education training models with regard to the strengthening of school counselors' identity as researchers. Research on the site supervision of school counseling interns is recommended to identify the training needs of site supervisors as well as identifying best practices of supervision for school counselors.

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