

School Counselors' Attitudes Towards Providing Services to Students Receiving
Section 504 Classroom Accommodations: Implications for School Counselor Educators

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Abstract

Questions have arisen regarding counselor's capabilities in assisting students with special needs (Milsom & Akos, 2003; Studer & Quigney, 2005). This study examined school counselors' training and attitudes toward providing services to students with learning disabilities who qualified for services only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The results indicated that although counselors strongly support providing services to students with special needs, those who lack educational experience reported feeling unprepared to implement specialized services. These findings suggest that school counselors would benefit from additional training when counseling students with learning disabilities. Implications for school counselor educators are provided.

School Counselors' Attitudes Towards Providing Services to Students Receiving Section 504 Classroom Accommodations: Implications for School Counselor Educators

Students with learning disabilities may encounter many obstacles in the educational process including discrimination pertaining to their special circumstances (Milsom, 2006). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) includes a stipulation in its guidelines for school counseling programs that school counselors address the needs of, and serve as advocates for, all students (ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs, 2005). According to ASCA's guidelines, advocacy includes serving on the school's special needs multidisciplinary team that (a) identifies students with special needs, (b) determines students' eligibility for services, and (c) develops individual classroom accommodations (ASCA Position Statement on The Professional School Counselor and Students with Special Needs, 2004). The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, resulted in (a) additional services for disabled students, and (b) an increased obligation for school counselors to address the needs of these students (Milsom, 2002). A significant barrier to a successful school counseling program is confusion as to the nature, function, purpose, and role of school counselors. This confusion is evident in the attempts of organizations, individuals, and professional associations to reach an agreement on the type of services that should be provided by the school counseling community (Dahir, 2004; Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005). Regrettably, this lack of clarity regarding the role of school counseling is a current quagmire.

Role of the Professional School Counselor

Historically, school counselors have had difficulty describing and defining their roles to principals, school personnel and the general public (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Liberman, 2004; Murray, 1995). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, researchers defined the role of the school counselor, as a combination helper and consultant role (Ginter & Scalise, 1990). O'Dell and Rak (1996) attributed this role confusion to the lack of a clear definition of school counseling by the profession even though ASCA had been responding to the need for clarification by publishing position statements in 1966, 1974, 1981, and 1990.

A contention regarding school counselors' responsibilities is the concern over school counselors performing dual roles, such as counselor/disciplinarian role that can adversely affect the trust of students. Other dual roles including clerical duties, administrative tasks, hall monitoring and scheduling have also become common counselor responsibilities (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Murray, 1995). The roles of school counselors are usually determined by school principals, many of whom lack the knowledge of appropriately sanctioned counselor roles (Fitch, Ballesterro & Marshal, 2001).

Authors have supported the role of counselors assisting students to achieve academic success by addressing the personal and societal pressures in children's lives that contribute to their failure in school (Capuzzi & Gross, 1996; Keyes, Bemak & Lockhart, 1998; Lecapitaine, 2000). Over time, the risk factors for school failure include academic difficulties resulting from learning disabilities, particularly as the inclusion movement placed increased numbers of students with learning disabilities into the

mainstream classroom. Greer and Greer (1995) assessed the special education issues and predicted that the inclusion movement would have a major impact on the school counseling profession, as counselors would be expected to head the multidisciplinary team, coordinate input from various disciplines, present information to parents, and facilitate a partnership between the parents and the team.

To be qualified to fulfill this new role, Greer and Greer acknowledged that counselors would need new information, training, and awareness of a wide array of issues and opinions. Scarborough and Deck (1998) agreed with those predictions and outlined a number of challenges school counselors would face as the inclusion movement grew. Their list focused on the need for counselors to change negative attitudes, to provide developmental and academic information, to expand their own professional identity development and to create psychologically healthy school environments by acting as consultant, advocate, trainer, and humanitarian. Traver-Behring, Spagna, and Sullivan (1998) emphasized that the collaboration and consultation role was critical in supporting the needs of students with learning disabilities, particularly as it pertained to acknowledging and eliminating the resistance of general education teachers unfamiliar with students with special needs. For example, school counselors can assist general education teachers in obtaining outside resources, arranging collaboration with special education teachers, and promoting acceptance of students with disabilities by their non-disabled peers.

ASCA National Model

To assist with the delineation of roles, responsibilities, and expectations of school counselors, in 2003 the American School Counselor Association formulated a national

model of comprehensive school counseling to serve as a standard for the profession (ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs, 2003). The basis of ASCA's model focused on the four distinct themes; (a) leadership, (b) advocacy, (c) collaboration and teaming, and (d) systemic change. Leadership is established by school counselors working to close the achievement gap among students of color, poor students, or underachieving students, and their more advantaged peers. School counselors can become successful advocates by supporting every student's right to have specific needs addressed in order to achieve academic success. The theme of collaboration and teaming involves understanding and appreciating the efforts of others towards educating all students and being a resource to parents, the community, and the school staff. Finally, systemic change results from school counselors' examination of critical data for obstacles which prevent students' access to an equitable rigorous curriculum that can increase postsecondary options. Also included in this model is an overriding theme of school counselors' obligation to meet the needs of, and advocate for all students.

According to the ASCA National Model for School Counselor Programs (2005), a school counselor is a specially trained educator who is responsible for calling attention to school situations that defeat, frustrate, and hinder students' academic success, and who has the leadership ability to assess school needs, identify issues, and collaborate with others to develop solutions. To ensure that school counselors implement all aspects of the specified themes, ASCA stipulates that a qualified school counselor maintains state credentials, possesses at least a master's degree, and, if not a certified teacher, should have received training in student learning styles, classroom behavior

management, curriculum and instruction, student assessment and student achievement (ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs).

School Counselors Interfacing with Children with Disabilities

Yet, school counselors who are unfamiliar with individuals with disabilities might be hesitant to participate in academically related tasks such as individualized education plans (Milsom, 2006). Some studies have indicated that many school counselors feel inadequately prepared to meet the needs of all students (Greene & Valesky, 1998; Milsom, 2002; Milsom & Akos, 2003). Other studies have shown that school counselors can utilize ASCA's model to improve students' academic achievement (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Frye, 2005). Praisner (2003) indicates that negative attitudes of school personnel often result from a lack of adequate training regarding individuals with disabilities; yet, the majority of counselor education programs do not require courses on disabilities, or field experiences with students with special needs (Milsom & Akos, 2003; Studer & Quigney, 2005).

Presently, all children with disabilities are entitled by law to a free and appropriate public education (H.R. 1350, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004). Depending on the severity of the learning disability, children may be eligible for services under three different federal legislative acts, namely the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L., 94-142) of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Even though each of these acts contains specific provisions regarding eligibility, and services for students with learning disabilities, misinterpretation or misunderstanding of these provisions has

in many cases resulted in implementation of services becoming complicated, inconsistent, inappropriate, and costly. Such mistakes often lead to students being mislabeled or unidentified as eligible for services.

At the center of the confusion regarding the rights of children with disabilities are the tasks of determining which children have learning disabilities, diagnosing the type and severity of the disabilities, and identifying the specific federal act that pertains to each child's situation. An examination of the requirements of each federal law serves to illustrate the complexities faced by members of the schools' multidisciplinary teams.

Comparison of IDEA and Section 504

Both IDEA and Section 504 are federal mandates designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. Because these two laws are so similar in their intent, it is often difficult to understand how they are applied. Essentially, both laws are categories under the broader law of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- Telecommunications Act
- Fair Housing Act
- Air Carrier's Access Act
- Voting Accessibility Act
- National Voter Registration Act
- Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons
- IDEA
- Rehabilitation Act
 - Section 504
- Architectural Barriers Act

To be eligible under Section 504, an individual must have a disability that substantially interferes with a major life function: walking, seeing, speaking, hearing, breathing, working, caring for oneself, learning (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 *et.seq*). To be eligible for IDEA an individual must have a diagnosis of at least one of the following disabilities: Autism, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairments, Emotional Disturbance, Traumatic Brain Injury, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Deafness, Mental Retardation, Deaf-Blindness, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impaired (H.R. 1350, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004)

Other differences between the two laws include:

- Section 504 is a civil rights statute; IDEA is a federal programmatic statute,
- IDEA receives federal funds, but Section 504 does not,
- Section 504 pertains to all public facilities including schools, whereas IDEA pertains only to schools,
- Eligibility for IDEA is more specific than for Section 504,
- Some students who qualify under Section 504 may not meet the narrower criteria to be eligible under IDEA (deBettencourt, 2002).

Students who qualify for services under both laws receive those services from the education mandates of IDEA. Students who qualify under the civil rights laws of Section 504, but not IDEA, do not receive services based on the special education mandates and must rely on non-funded services provided by the school and the regular classroom teacher. Because the majority of students with learning disabilities qualifies in both categories and automatically receive IDEA services, those who qualify only under

Section 504 are often overlooked and may not receive adequate services (Brady, 2004; deBettencourt, 2002). Because IDEA is federally funded and Section 504 is not, IDEA became the primary focus of schools, while Section 504 was deemed to be less important (Smith, 2001). As the number of students deemed ineligible for services under IDEA increased, parental awareness also increased, thus shifting public attention to Section 504.

Social/Emotional Risks of 504 Students

As a result of the lack of appropriate services, it is common for 504-only students to experience emotional and/or behavioral difficulties (Bowen, 1998). The emotional and behavioral difficulties of students with mild learning disabilities can mask other learning disabilities, and may result in misdiagnoses. Therefore, students are exposed to ineffective classroom strategies and consequences designed to address behavioral and not learning issues. Researchers have explored the social/emotional ramifications associated with students with special needs and are in agreement that these children are at greater risk for depression, anxiety, poor peer relations, low self-esteem, family discord, behavior difficulties, loneliness, dropping out, substance abuse, crime, and suicide (Bryan, Burstein, & Ergul, 2004; Kavale & Mostert, 2004). As is the case with most studies on learning disabilities, these studies looked at the entire learning disability spectrum with no differentiation between learning disability levels of severity or eligibility categories. Because many students who qualify only under Section 504 are underserved, held to higher expectations, and viewed most negatively by teachers (Bryant, Dean, Elrod, & Blackburn, 1999; Cook, 2001), it is conceivable that they are at an even greater risk of experiencing social and emotional difficulties. This increased risk

for social/emotional difficulties raises the question as to what school counselors can and should do to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities, as well as how school counselors feel about their roles in serving these students.

Rationale and Purpose of this Study

There exists a lack of studies in the counseling and educational literature on the role and attitudes of school counselors towards students with learning disabilities who qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and not under IDEA. The vast majority of existing studies focus on the population of all students with learning disabilities (Milsom, 2002; Milsom & Akos, 2003). Thus, it is unlikely that many members of the educational field understand the specifics of Section 504 and special education laws (Fossey & Hosie, 1995). This lack of general knowledge pertaining to Section 504 laws sometimes translates into a lack of services provided to 504-only students (Katsiyannis & Conderman, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to: (a) identify school counselors' attitudes toward providing services to 504-only students (b) examine the extent of preparation, field experience, and personal awareness school counselors have in regards to learning disabilities; (c) compare the attitude of school counselors based on their background variables of preparation, field experience, and personal awareness of learning disabled students; and (d) identify common themes in school counselors' responses to an open-ended comment question regarding school counselors' roles with students with learning disabilities.

Methodology

Participants in this study were members of the Southern Region of the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), which represents approximately 1/3 of the United States encompassing states from Texas to West Virginia. Participants were identified from the ASCA membership directory which lists approximately 18,000 members' email addresses, home addresses, telephone numbers and work settings. As ASCA membership is not restricted to school counselors, participants were chosen from the subset lists of K-12 school counselors. Participants were contacted directly through email by means of a mass email message. Of the approximately 3,000 members of the Southern Region of ASCA who were contacted and after allowing for non-respondents and inaccurate email addresses, 332 participants responded.

Characteristics of the Sample

The 90% female to 10% male ratio of the sample closely approximates the gender composition of ASCA, which has a total female to male ratio of 80% to 20%, as well as to the composition of secondary and elementary public school teacher ratio of 75% female to 25% male (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Most of the respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/European (86.4%). African Americans made up the second largest ethnic category, while representing less than 10 percent of the sample (7.8%). Of the remaining categories, 3% of the sample identified themselves as Hispanic, while Asians and Native Americans represented .3% and .6% respectively. Respondents who selected the ethnic category of "other"

represented fewer than two percent (1.8%) of the participants and included the self-described nationalities of Russian, Jamaican, Spanish, and Black-West Indian.

Participants were asked to select all currently held certifications. As it is common for members of the counseling profession to hold multiple certifications, totals for frequencies of responses exceeded the total number of respondents. The certification of Nationally Certified School Counselors was held by 85% of the sample. Less than half (37.8%) of the survey participants were certified teachers. Licensed Professional Counselors comprised 12.3%. Social worker and school psychologist represented 1.5% and less than one percent (.9%) respectively. The approximately 14% who identified themselves as others included Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, Ministers, and Registered Nurses. Approximately 28.3% of the respondents held certification in both education and counseling.

A plurality of the respondents (36%) worked at the elementary level, while the percentages of participants from the middle and secondary school levels were similar with 18% and 21% respectively. A majority of respondents (65%) were from public school systems. The respondents from parochial and private school systems together comprised less than 10% of the sample, with approximately 5% and 3% respectively.

Instrument Development

The Attitudes toward Learning Disability Instrument (ATLDI) is a 37-item survey designed to assess school counselors' attitudes and self-efficacy towards providing services to students with special needs who qualify for classroom accommodations under Section 504 of the Americans with Disability Act. The ATLDI is divided into four parts. Section I pertains to participants' demographic and background information. This

information was used to construct the independent variables. The second section asks participants to respond to 15 statements describing school counselor roles using a 7-point Likert scale with anchored responses from inappropriate (1) to appropriate (7). The selected roles were chosen from (a) the guidelines of the American School Counselor Association National Model for School Counseling Programs (ASCA National Model, 2005), (b) documented school counselor tasks in the school counseling literature (Foster, Young, & Herman, 2005, Fry, 2004; Geer & Geer, 1995), and (c) the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005). Although ASCA's guidelines do not specify any particular type of classroom accommodations, they do indicate that school counselors should assist with the establishment and implementation of plans for classroom accommodations (ASCA Position Statement: Students with special needs, 2004). Therefore, the third section of the ATLDI asks participants to respond to 12 opinion statements regarding a selection of classroom accommodations by the use of a 7-point Likert scale with anchored responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

The selected accommodations were chosen from (a) the guidelines of the Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE, 2001), (b) a study on the differences in faculty willingness to provide accommodations based upon academic divisions (Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990), (c) a study on rural general education teachers opinions of accommodations (Bryant, Dean, Elrod, & Blackbourn, 1999), and (d) a higher education faculty survey on technological assistance (Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brulle, 1999). Section IV asked participants to respond to three semantic differential categories related to six statements on meeting the needs of 504-only students.

The semantic differential categories used in the instrument were adapted from Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) who believed that knowing the location on a continuum where a person classified an idea would indicate the meaning of that idea to the rater and thus could be used to measure attitudes (McCroskey, Prichard, & Arnold, 1968).

Procedure

Data were collected anonymously via SurveyMonkey, an on-line survey and data collection service (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). The ATLDI was developed for use as an on-line survey through SurveyMonkey.com. The creation tools and a secure electronic link were created through which respondents accessed the survey. Although the total population of potential participants was identifiable by means of their electronic mail addresses before data collection, the ATLDI did not contain questions that could reveal the identity of individual respondents.

After school counselors from ASCA's southern region were identified, their email addresses were entered into a generic electronic mailing list titled *ATLDI*. This electronic mailing list only contained the addresses of ASCA school counselors and no other identifying information was collected. Thus, participation in the study was completely voluntary and anonymous.

Because of the increased number of comparisons in all the analyses, a conservative alpha level of $p < .01$ was employed to control the Type 1 error rate.

Results

Results are presented in terms of school counselors' agreement with and reaction to the specific services for students with special needs. The three individual

areas relating to services for 504-only students (a) school counselors' roles; (b) classroom accommodations; and (c) reaction statements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Multivariate F for Study Variables

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>Multivariate</i> <i>p</i>	η^2
Certified - Uncertified Teacher			
Roles	1.10	.38	.05
Accommodations	1.70	.07	.06
Reactions	2.10	.02	.09
Master's Degree – Doctoral Degree			
Roles	1.30	.22	.06
Accommodations	1.70	.07	.06
Reactions	0.85	.62	.04
1 or more LD Courses Taken – Zero LD Courses Taken			
Roles	1.01	.45	.06
Accommodations	0.82	.63	.03
Reactions	1.43	.13	.07
1 or more LD Workshops Attended – Zero LD Workshops Attended			
Roles	1.05	.39	.06
Accommodations	0.88	.63	.04
Reactions	1.62	.02	.09
5 or more years of Counseling Experience – Less than 5 years of Counseling Experience			
Roles	1.28	.22	.06
Accommodations	0.71	.74	.03
Reactions	2.25	.02	.10
5 or more years of Educational Experience – Less than 5 years of Educational Experience			
Roles	1.04	.41	.05
Accommodations	1.97	.03	.08
Reactions	2.19	.01	.10
5 or more years of Disability Experience – Less than 5 years of Disability Experience			
Roles	0.75	.73	.04
Accommodations	1.75	.06	.06
Reactions	2.16	.02	.18
Personal Awareness of Disabilities – No Personal Awareness of Disabilities			
Roles	2.13	.02	.09
Accommodations	1.19	.29	.04
Reactions	0.72	.76	.03

Using multivariate analyses, all three areas were examined based on eight independent variables: certification type, educational experience, number of disability workshops completed, number of disability courses completed, number of years of experience in the field of education, number of years of experience in the field of counseling, number of years of field experience with students with learning disabilities and personal awareness of disabilities. Table 1 shows the multivariate analysis for each independent variable. Of the eight independent variables, only educational experience for reactions was significant (Multivariate $F = 2.19$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$). A post hoc analysis to determine which reactions contributed to the overall multivariate F used univariate analyses and is presented in Table 2 together with overall means and standard deviations.

Overall Findings

The overall means and standard deviations for the thirty-seven items in the ATLDI survey indicated that school counselors strongly agree with the types of services listed in the ASCA national model regarding school counselors' roles in working with students with special needs (see Table 2). The overall means ranged from 3.32 to 6.46 on a 7-point Likert Scale. Twenty five of the items ranged from 5.01 to 6.46 indicating counselors' strong agreement with ASCA's guidelines on counselors' roles and the appropriateness of classroom accommodations. The remaining 12 items which had a range of 3.32 to 4.95 pertained to statements about counselors serving on the 504 team and assisting with the development of classroom accommodations. The low mean scores suggest that counselors feel unprepared or anxious about participating in these educationally-based tasks even though they agree such tasks are appropriate. As shown in the Reactions section in Table 2, counselors with greater educationally

experience reported higher feelings of preparedness and confidence than counselors with lesser educational experience. The Reactions section of the independent variable of educational experience is the only one of the eight variables to show a significance difference at the $p < .01$ alpha level.

Appropriate school counselors' roles. Respondents indicated their opinion of the appropriateness of 15 different school counselor responsibilities. There were no statistically significant differences between any of the eight comparison groups listed above, thus indicating that the counselors in this study fully supported ASCA's guidelines regarding appropriate school counselors' roles. Of the 332 responses to questions regarding appropriate school counselors' roles, six items (analyzing standardized test scores, advocating at IEP meetings, collaborating with teachers on instructional interventions, identifying students with special needs, serving on the multidisciplinary team, and providing small group counseling to parents of students with learning disabilities) had overall means ranging from 5.01 – 5.91 on a 7-point Likert scale indicating participants' agreement with the appropriateness of these roles. Three items (providing small group counseling for academic purposes, for self-esteem purposes, and social skill purposes) had overall ratings ranging from 6.43 – 6.46 indicating participants' strong agreement with the appropriateness of these roles. One item (develop academic accommodation plans for students with LD) had an overall means of 3.92 indicating participants slightly disagreed with the appropriateness of this role. Participants' disagreement with this item follows ASCA's guidelines that specify it is appropriate for school counselors to assist in the development and implementation of

Table 2.

Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables and Multivariate and Univariate F tests.

<i>Item</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<u>Multivariate</u>			<u>Univariate</u>		
							<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Roles							1.04	0.41	0.05			
Analyze standardized test scores	5.23	1.87	5.35	1.87	5.00	1.88						
Advocate for students at IEP meetings	5.56	1.61	5.59	1.62	5.60	1.51						
Collaborate with teachers on instructional interventions	5.72	1.51	5.88	1.43	5.57	1.58						
Develop academic accommodation plans for students with LD	3.92	1.84	4.04	1.88	3.88	1.80						
Assist in identifying students with special needs	5.01	1.62	5.24	1.58	5.02	1.71						
Provide small group counseling in regards to academic needs	6.43	0.96	6.50	0.91	6.37	1.03						
Serve on the multidisciplinary team for students with LD	5.91	1.32	6.02	1.27	5.85	1.39						
Provide support groups for parents of children with LD	5.49	1.66	5.57	1.64	5.41	1.74						
Provide small group self-esteem counseling to students with LD	6.45	0.98	6.48	0.94	6.45	1.03						
Provide small group social skill counseling students with LD	6.46	0.99	6.45	1.02	6.47	1.00						
Accommodations							1.97	0.03	0.08			
Provide both oral and printed directions	6.03	1.24	5.94	1.31	6.11	1.18						
Allow student to dictate answers into a tape recorder	5.45	1.58	5.44	1.63	5.40	1.58						
Provide two sets of books, so that one set may be kept at home	5.91	1.50	5.94	1.55	5.85	1.52						

<i>Item</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<u>Multivariate</u>			<u>Univariate</u>		
							<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Give tests in separate room supervised by a proctor	5.54	1.65	5.45	1.80	5.62	1.53						
Allow student to tape record class notes	6.05	1.33	5.90	1.57	6.14	1.06						
Do not take points off for misspellings in content area subjects	4.95	1.73	5.12	1.65	4.83	1.80						
Allow the use of books on audio tape	6.00	1.39	6.06	1.39	5.92	1.40						
Allow student to give oral answers on tests	5.65	1.46	5.67	1.44	5.61	1.52						
Provide students with a copy of the notes	5.79	1.42	5.67	1.58	5.90	1.26						
Provide page numbers to help student find answers to in-class assignments	5.14	1.69	5.22	1.72	5.07	1.69						
Give directions in small steps	6.39	1.06	6.46	1.04	6.35	1.08						
Provide student with the same number of problems, but put fewer on each page	5.92	1.38	5.88	1.48	5.97	1.28						
Reaction Statements							2.19	0.01	0.10			
Counseling chairing the multidisciplinary team which determines plans and placement for 504-only students												
Unproductive – Productive	4.47	1.83	4.42	1.91	4.52	1.72				0.23	0.63	.00
Anxious – Calm	4.31	1.80	4.52	1.72	4.06	1.82				5.14	0.02	.02
Unprepared – Prepared	4.66	1.87	4.35	1.92	4.93	1.73				7.73	0.01	.03
Burdensome – Easy	3.32	1.74	3.43	1.76	3.12	1.69				2.47	0.12	.01
Ethically Questionable – Justifiable	4.40	1.83	4.35	1.83	4.45	1.80				0.23	0.63	.00
Counselors assisting teachers in developing 504 accommodation plans												
Unproductive – Productive	5.19	1.55	5.30	1.61	5.12	1.49				1.10	0.30	.00
Anxious – Calm	4.95	1.59	5.17	1.52	4.70	1.67				6.68	0.01	.02
Unprepared – Prepared	5.02	1.62	5.34	1.48	4.62	1.72				15.40	0.00	.05
Burdensome – Easy	4.23	1.66	4.37	1.68	4.12	1.59				1.85	0.18	.01

<i>Item</i>							<u>Multivariate</u>			<u>Univariate</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Ethically Questionable – Justifiable	5.24	1.55	5.39	1.47	5.12	1.64				2.27	0.13	.01
Counselors serving as consultants to the school staff regarding the characteristics of 504-only students												
Unproductive – Productive	5.04	1.92	5.16	1.97	4.83	1.88				2.30	0.13	.01
Anxious – Calm	4.45	1.98	4.70	2.03	4.08	1.91				7.68	0.01	.03
Unprepared – Prepared	4.69	2.01	5.01	1.97	4.22	2.02				12.03	0.00	.04
Burdensome – Easy	4.02	1.90	4.21	1.94	3.66	1.84				6.41	0.01	.02
Ethically Questionable – Justifiable	5.13	1.87	5.21	1.92	4.92	1.82				1.80	0.18	.01

accommodation plans, but they should not serve as the sole supervisor of implementing those plans (ASCA Position Statement for Students with special needs, 2004). The respondents' overall ratings on the appropriateness of school counselors' roles were congruent with ASCA's guidelines.

Classroom accommodations. There were no significant differences between any of the eight comparison groups indicating that the counselors in this study were in agreement regarding the appropriateness of classroom accommodations. Of the 332 responses to questions regarding appropriate classroom accommodations, the overall means ranged from 4.95 – 6.39 on a 7-point Likert scale indicating agreement with the appropriateness of these roles.

Reaction statements. In Section IV of the ATLDI respondents indicated the levels of their reactions to statements regarding involvement on the multidisciplinary team, acting as a special needs consultant to the school staff, and collaborating with teachers on developing accommodation plans. The overall means ranged from 3.32 – 5.24 indicating a somewhat neutral reaction to the statements. For all three statements (counselors chairing the multidisciplinary team, counselors assisting teachers in developing 504 accommodation plans, and counselors serving as consultants to the school staff regarding the characteristics of 504-only students), the reaction category which consistently had the lowest overall means was the level of ease or burden that the task presented. The reaction category which consistently had the second lowest overall mean was the level of calmness or anxiety associated with the statement.

In the Reactions category, statistical significant differences were found in the comparison group of educational experience. For the significant multivariate F for

educational experience, follow up univariate analyses were completed. The results are presented in Table 2. In this comparison group of educational experience, all of the items that revealed significant differences pertained to counselors' level of self-efficacy in providing educationally based services to 504-only students indicating a trend toward higher self-efficacy scores when counselors had more than 5 years experience in the field of education. Of the fifteen ANOVA procedures that were conducted, five items resulted in significant differences at $p < .01$ level. Ratings for feelings of anxiousness and calmness revealed significant differences at $p < .01$ level for two statements (counselors assisting teachers in developing 504 accommodation plans, and counselors serving as consultants to the school staff regarding the characteristics of 504-only students) indicating counselors with lesser educational experience felt more anxiety than counselors with greater educational experience. Ratings for feelings of being prepared or unprepared revealed significant differences at $p < .01$ level for three statements (counselors chairing the multidisciplinary team, counselors assisting teachers in developing 504 accommodation plans, and counselors serving as consultants to the school staff regarding the characteristics of 504-only students) indicating that counselors with lesser educational experience reporting feeling less prepared than counselors with greater educational experience.

Open-ended comment question. The open-ended comment question asked participants to express their opinions through comments, suggestions, questions, or personal experiences regarding 504-only students. The open-ended comment question elicited a strong response as 195 of the participants not only chose to answer this question (Table 3), but many of them also provided elaborate answers. Several

Table 3.

Themes of Open-Ended Question

Theme	#	%
Counselors lack training in LD	53	27
Counselors should not chair the multidisciplinary team	21	11
Providing services is overly time consuming	31	16
Counselors currently chairing the multidisciplinary team	22	11
Counselors currently engaged in developing accommodation plans	25	13
Believe accommodations need to be decided on a case by case basis	21	11
Believe 504 is being applied to students who do not meet the criteria	20	10
Counselors whose schools discourage providing 504 services	8	4
Believe teachers resist providing 504 accommodations	23	12
Believe teachers lack training in LD	12	6

Note: Percentages are based on the 195 participants who chose to respond to the comment question

participants reported feeling unprepared on the issue of the educationally-based tasks of developing classroom accommodations. ASCA's guidelines indicate that school counselors should be members of the multidisciplinary team and should be specially trained in educational issues (ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs, 2005).

Participants' responses to the comment question revealed that many counselors lack the specialized training. It is important to note that ASCA does not promote or require school counselors to be certified teachers, but rather emphasizes that school counselors should have some type of educational background or training. The prevailing tone of the responses to the comment question centered on counselors' feelings that without the educational training, the duties of serving on the multidisciplinary team seemed frustrating, eroded self-efficacy, and interfered with other counseling duties. Typical comments included, "I do not believe school counselors are prepared to help

504 or special education students with their academic concerns” and “Personally, I have no training in working with students with academic difficulties. I believe it is a little unfair and irresponsible to place such a great responsibility on those who have little or no training.” In spite of the frustrations and difficulties reported by some of the respondents on the comment question, all of the responses were supportive of providing assistance to students with special needs. The source of the negative comments seemed to lie in the absence of the specialized training needed to serve on the multidisciplinary team.

Discussion and Implications for School Counselor Educators

The results of this study are intended to bring greater awareness to both the school community and to counselor education programs regarding the role and preparation of the school counselor in providing 504 services to students with learning disabilities. The results of this study contribute to the knowledge base of the counselor's responsibilities for addressing the needs of all students. The findings indicate that virtually all of the counselors who responded to the ATLDI strongly support providing services to students with special needs. On all items related to counselors' roles in providing services to 504-only students, the counselors in this study agreed with the directives regarding services to students with special needs outlined in the ASCA National School Counseling Model. Since less than half of all school counselor education programs require training related to disabilities (Milsom, 2002), it is not surprising that this study found counselors' major concerns regarding 504-only students to be issues of feeling unprepared and anxious about services related to the development of classroom accommodations.

The most prominent theme to emerge from the qualitative results was that some counselors felt that they lacked adequate training on learning disabilities. Of the 195 counselors who chose to answer this question, 27% believed they lacked the training necessary to adequately provide services to students with learning disabilities. In regards to counselors' roles 11% of the participants indicated counselors should not serve as the chair of the multidisciplinary team. Even so, 8% of the participants reported that they were currently serving as the chair, while 13% indicated that they had participated in the development of accommodation plans. This finding is similar to Scarborough and Culbreth's (2008) conclusions that school counselors who are relatively new to the field experience high levels of anxiety regarding their professional abilities. According to Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, and Zlatev (2009) 55% of school counselors reported feeling inadequately prepared for their positions, especially in the areas of managing IEPs and 504 meetings.

Other noteworthy results emerging from the counselors who answered the open-ended question included 16% of counselors stating that providing LD related services was time-consuming. Also of interest were two themes related to counselors' perceptions of classroom teachers' attitudes that showed 12% of the participants believed teachers resisted complying with the LD accommodation plans, while 6% of the respondents thought teachers lacked adequate LD training. Finally, 4% of the respondents to the open-ended question stated that their schools provided few 504 accommodations.

The results of this study suggest that counselor education programs should examine the school counseling curriculum to determine if additional training or field

experience is necessary to adequately prepare school counselors to address the educationally-based needs of all students (Green, McCollum, & Hays, 2009), especially those with special needs. This would be especially important for students who are not trained in pedagogy as K-12 teachers, but want to work as K-12 school counselors. Studer and Quigney (2005) strongly recommend that counselor education programs incorporate pre-service training in special education either through introductory courses or the integration of content and issues related to students with disabilities into existing courses.

Results indicated that counselors reported negative attitudes only in the area of developing accommodation plans for 504-only students. This finding concurs with Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, and Zlatev's (2009) study that reports 55% of school counselors reported feeling inadequately prepared for their positions, especially in the areas of managing IEPs and 504 meetings. This suggests that tasks related to curriculum issues might be source of frustration for many school counselors. Confusion regarding school counselors' roles on the special education and Section 504 committees may stem from school administrators' misinterpretation of ASCA's guidelines. A study by Frye (2005) pointed out that administrators played a major role in determining counselors' duties regarding students with special needs. Frye discovered that school counselors felt undertrained in the area of learning disabilities, relied on personal research for strategies to help students with special needs, and sought out coordinated collaboration with other school professionals (e.g. special education teachers). It is important to note that although ASCA's National Model does call for school counselors to assist with the development of accommodation plans, it does not

require school counselors to be solely responsible for creating them. Furthermore, in light of studies which revealed that typical classroom teachers lack knowledge pertaining to students with learning disabilities (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Monahan, Marino, & Miller, 1996; Stoler, 1992), it seems imperative that school counselors be adequately prepared to collaborate and consult with teachers and to serve as a prominent member of the multidisciplinary team.

Providing special education training in school counselor programs is a positive step toward improving services for 504-only students; however, it does not address the issue of counselors who do not have disability training but who are currently working in schools.

A final implication of the results of this study pertains to the school counselors themselves. Counselors who had more than five years of experience in the field of education felt more confident in their abilities on educationally-based services for 504-only students. This finding is similar to Scarborough and Culbreth's (2008) conclusions that school counselors who are relatively new to the field experience difficulty implementing a comprehensive school counseling program due to feelings of high levels of anxiety regarding their professional abilities. In the absence of prior training, it seems likely that counselors who elect to increase their educational knowledge base by attending LD workshops may increase their confidence level in providing services to students with special needs.

Future research should focus on school counselor training and the role of the school counselor with 504-only students. In particular, future studies should focus on the social, emotional, and academic needs of 504-only students, as well as the

strategies school counselors can employ to meet those needs. In addition, there is a need for more research on teachers' attitudes towards 504-only students, as well as the impact those attitudes may have on students emotionally and academically.

The continued placement of school counselors into positions that require an understanding and knowledge of the needs of students with learning disabilities indicates that counselor preparation must be brought to the attention of the counseling community (Greer & Greer, 1995; Milsom & Akos, 2002). In addition to counselors' attitudes toward Section 504 services, future research should also focus on the extent of counselor knowledge in the field of learning disabilities. In particular, research should look at the long-term impact that working with a population for which one has not been trained has on counselors.

Further, the responses to the open-ended question in this survey revealed a number of areas that merit further study including, the appropriateness of school counselors chairing the multidisciplinary team, school counselors developing accommodation plans, and the ability for school counselors to advocate for students and still maintain a positive relationship with other school personnel.

A replication of this study using a more representative sample of the nation's school counselors would be beneficial. A paper and pencil survey used along with an electronic survey would help to ensure that counselors without internet access, and counselors who are not members of ASCA would also be included in the sample. In addition, qualitative studies of school counselors' experiences with 504-only students could greatly enhance an in depth understanding of the counselors' role. Qualitative

studies on the experiences of 504-only students and their families would also provide deeper insight into the particular needs of these students.

In light of the national push (NCLB) towards increased accountability within the school systems, it would be beneficial if the counseling community had research findings that demonstrated school counselors' success in the elimination of academic inequities, and the closure in the achievement gap among students of color, economically disadvantaged students, or underachieving students and their more advantaged peers.

As this study suggests—school counselors feel the most uncomfortable in dealing with educationally-based tasks, research is needed on the impact this lack of confidence has on counselors' ability to successfully advocate for students especially in regards to obtaining appropriate accommodations on high stakes testing. In particular, it is important to explore college counselors' ability to successfully advocate for students taking the SAT, ACT, or other entrance or admission exams. In a similar sense, future studies could also examine whether school counselors have the knowledge and confidence necessary to advocate with school administrators to secure appropriate counselor duties within the school.

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