

Running head: COUNSELOR'S ROLE

One District's Perspective of a Counselor's Role and Understanding of the Problem-
Solving Team Process Inclusive of Response to Intervention

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Abstract

Academic success for all students has caused schools to evaluate the roles of education professionals, including the role of school counselors. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) have caused schools to use alternative methods and personnel to assist students who are at-risk and increase student achievement. Eight counselors from an urban southwestern United States school district explained and evaluated their role and understanding of the problem-solving team process, which utilized a response to interventions approach. Counselors who had undertaken leadership roles in the problem solving team (PST) process were assisting their campuses with the academic success of at-risk students. Future implications of our study include further research which incorporates the effects of an elementary counselor's role on at-risk students or the effects of the elementary counselor's role on accountability in schools.

“The most recent reauthorization of elementary and secondary education, the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), has as its primary purpose the intent to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. The legislation requires strong measures of accountability and demonstrated results” (Dahir, 2004, p. 352). The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Education Act (IDEA) 2004 has brought considerable attention to response to intervention (RTI) initiatives and its role in the identification of students with learning disabilities (LD) (Marston, 2005, p. 539). IDEA 2004 allows school districts, for the purpose of determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, to use a process which determines if a student responds to scientific research based interventions as part of the evaluation process (Graner, Faggella-Luby, & Fritschmann, 2005, p. 93).

Response to intervention (RTI) refers to an array of procedures that are used to determine if and how students respond to specific changes in their instruction. RTI is used within a Problem-Solving Model or Team (PST), which utilizes a group of administrators and specialists to help identify effective instructional strategies and evaluate their effectiveness during a pre-referral process (Canter, 2006).

PSTs usually use a three tiered model to determine what instructional supports or interventions are needed to solve student achievement problems (Canter, 2006). PSTs are the driving force behind implementation of interventions for students who are at-risk for failing.

Significance of the Study

In a study by Dollarhide and Lemberger (2006) it was stated that, “The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a), the most recent reauthorization of elementary and secondary education, was designed to have a profound effect on American education: to make schools accountable for student learning and to ensure that at-risk youth were not ‘left behind’ academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b)” (p. 295). Dollarhide and Lemberger further stated, “In response to these mandates, schools have changed, and as schools change, so do school counseling programs” (p. 295).

Fitch and Marshall (2004) stated in a study concerning the role of a school counselor in high-achieving schools that, “School counselors are being challenged to redefine their roles to better support the overall academic performance of students” (p. 172). House and Martin (1998) recognized that:

School counselors are in key positions to be at the vanguard of educational reform. Issues of equity, access and lack of supporting conditions for academic success come to rest at counselors’ desks in the form of data, files and reports of school failure. Thus, school counselors are in a position to influence academic placement and the educational futures of all students. (p. 284)

Statement of the Problem

The need to reduce special education referrals and determine alternative ways to identify and assist at-risk students for learning disabilities, according to IDEA 2004 and NCLB laws and regulations, have caused the education profession to redesign special education referral techniques as well as review job descriptions of professional support

personnel. Therefore, a counselor's role and understanding of the PST process could be an asset to the education profession. The purpose of our research study was to address the following question in order to determine the counselor's role and understanding of the PST process inclusive of RTI: What can we learn about the counselor's role by utilizing the counselors' services during the PST process?

Review of Related Literature

In order to support the rationale of this study, our review of related literature focused on changing accountability standards in schools and the need for schools to utilize the services of the counselor during the PST process which is a process that includes how a student responds to interventions. What RTI entails is examined. Finally, our review of the literature explored the PST process.

Changing Accountability Standards

Accountability standards in public schools across America have caused educators to rethink and redefine the roles of professional support personnel. Research conducted by Dollarhide and Lemberger (2006) agreed that as the accountability standards for schools in America have changed due to key legislation governing education, so have the accountability standards and roles for professional support personnel in schools.

Dollarhide and Lemberger further stated that "The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a), the most recent reauthorization of elementary and secondary education, was designed to have a profound effect on American education: to make schools accountable for student learning and to ensure that at-risk youth were not 'left behind' academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b)" (p. 295).

In addition, Graner, et al. (2005) quoted IDEA (2004), Section 614(b)(6), which stipulated that:

when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in section 602, a local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning. (p. 94)

Compounding the changing accountability standards in public schools are federal funding changes that are contingent on students' academic performance. The NCLB legislation made federal funding for education contingent on students' school-wide performances on academic tests and outlined corrective measures for schools that failed to maintain adequate yearly progress toward statewide proficiency goals (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006).

Counselors are being asked to be increasingly accountable for their work with students. Increased accountability requires a shift from what counselors are currently doing to examining how students are different as a result of what counselors do (Brigman, Campbell, & Webb, 2005; Isaacs, 2003; Wong, 2002). Legislative policy, current reform measures and school improvement initiatives are all centered on academic achievement as a measure of accountability. Consequently, counselors are not included as an integral part of standards-based reform measures aimed at improved academic and social outcomes for students (Anderson & Reiter, 1995; Brigman, et al., 2005; House & Martin, 1998).

The Need for Counselors' Services

Dollarhide & Lemberger (2006) acknowledged in their study that:

In response to these mandates, schools have changed--and as schools change, so do school counseling programs. As reflected in the American School Counselor Association National Model® (American School Counselors Association, 2005), the national emphasis on accountability has resulted in a renewed emphasis on accountability for school counselors (Dahir, 2004). (p. 295)

Not only are the professional roles of support personnel changing as schools are more accountable, the professional duties of the school counselor are changing as well.

Dollarhide & Lemberger's recommendations for school counselors concluded that, "At the building level, school counselors are part of the educational team, and they must support building efforts to enhance student achievement, regardless of legislation" (p. 302).

Brigman, et al., (2005) stated that, "Robert Myrick (2003), a leader in the field of school counseling, recently addressed the concern for accountability by reemphasizing the need for school counselors to show how they are a part of the educational process and how they contribute to helping students learn more effectively" (p. 408). Brigman, et al., continued to state that,

House and Hayes (2002) concurred while suggesting that systematic change in our schools will be difficult without the involvement of all key players in the school setting, including the school counselor. The Education Trust's (2001) National Initiative for Transforming School Counseling has gone further and promotes counselor use of interventions that are linked to improved student

academic achievement. The combination of increased accountability and an emphasis on achievement outcomes creates a unique opportunity for school counselors to become more closely tied to the educational process affecting academic outcomes. (pp. 408-409)

Furthermore, the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2003) supported the school's overall mission of promoting the improvement of academic achievement for students. The intent of the ASCA National Model was to stimulate school counselors to develop comprehensive school counseling programs and to align the goals of their programs with the primary mission of today's schools, which is to increase the academic achievement of all students (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

For all education professionals including counselors, the new instruction, assessment, documentation, and collaborative activities required for RTI implementation will create new challenges. One change brings about a critical question concerning specific roles and competencies required of every education professional. Decisions concerning these roles and other critical questions will arise when determining how a particular RTI approach will affect the roles and competencies required of education professionals (Gartland & Strosnider, 2005).

Rationale for Response to Interventions for At-Risk Students

On December 3, 2004, President Bush signed into law IDEA 2004. The revised law differs from the previous version in at least one important respect. Whereas practitioners were previously encouraged to use IQ-achievement discrepancy to identify children with learning disabilities, they now may use "Response to Intervention", or RTI,

a new alternative method. It provides early interventions to all children at risk for school failure (Fuch & Fuch, 2006, p. 93).

For decades, according to Fuch and Fuch (2006), “policymakers and academics have been frustrated by the LD construct generally and by IQ-achievement discrepancy particularly. One prominent reason is economics. In a sense, LD became too successful for its own good-- if success may be defined by the number of children with the label” (p. 96). Fuch and Fuch went on to say that:

Shortly after LD was legitimized as a special-education category in the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the proportion of children with LD in the general U.S. population skyrocketed from less than 2% in 1976-1977 to more than 6% in 1999-2000. This increase has proved expensive for school districts because, on average, it costs two to three times more to teach children with disabilities. (p. 96)

Additionally, Fuch and Fuch (2006) stated that the IQ-achievement discrepancy which has been the standard method for identifying students with learning disabilities has been criticized greatly because of inconsistencies and discrepancies in how the IQ-achievement discrepancy was computed. Further criticisms of the IQ-achievement discrepancy method are that it represents a wait-to-fail model, and it reflects disability when in fact it could reflect poor teaching. Therefore, the use of RTI encourages appropriate use of evidence-based instruction across multi-tiers and should decrease the number of children incorrectly identified as learning disabled (Fuch & Fuch, 2006).

What is Response to Intervention or RTI?

RTI refers to an array of procedures that can be used to determine if and how students respond to specific changes in instruction or interventions (Canter, 2006). Schwanz and Barbour (2005) explained that an intervention is a new strategy or modification of instruction or behavior management designed to help a student (or group of students) improve performance relative to a specific goal. Interventions are evidence-based strategies, which means they have been proven effective in similar situations through well-designed research. RTI does not refer to a specific model, test, or single procedure. RTI is often used within a PST approach to help identify effective instructional strategies and evaluate their effectiveness (Canter, 2006).

Through a problem-solving process, test scores and other necessary academic information are gathered for which implementation of the academic interventions are reviewed or monitored to see if they are working for the student. PST often uses Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) to evaluate a student's academic performance and chart his or her progress in response to the interventions. Progress toward goals involves evaluating test scores, grades, tallies of completed assignments, as well other intervention methods. Effectiveness of the response to the intervention is judged by comparing the results of these measures with the student's baseline scores and with the goals of the intervention (Schwanz & Barbour, 2005).

According to a report prepared by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), core concepts of an RTI approach to assisting at-risk students are: “(1) application of scientific, research-based interventions in general education;

(2) measurement of a student's response to these interventions; and (3) use of the RTI data to inform instruction" (Gartland & Strosnider, 2005, p. 250). The NJCLD report also contained information based on the consensus of 14 organizations forming the 2004 LD Roundtable, which is a collaborative workgroup formed to provide recommendations and comments on IDEA 2004 regulations for the identification and eligibility of students with learning disabilities, which further clarified the RTI process and what the process should include. These recommendations further clarify RTI:

1. High-quality, research-based instruction and behavioral supports in general education.
2. Scientific, research-based interventions focused specifically on individual student difficulties and delivered with appropriate intensity.
3. Use of a collaborative approach by school staff for development, implementation, and monitoring of the intervention process.
4. Data-based documentation reflecting continuous monitoring of student performance and progress during interventions.
5. Documentation of parent involvement throughout the process.
6. Documentation that the timelines described in the federal regulations §300.532-300.533 are adhered to unless extended by mutual written agreement of the child's parents and a team of qualified professionals as described in §300.540.
7. Systematic assessment and documentation that the interventions used were implemented with fidelity. (Gartland & Strosnider, p. 250)

RTI is a multi-tiered process within a problem solving model, and the nature of the academic intervention changes at each tier. The interventions become more intensive

as the student moves through the tiers. The increasing intensity is achieved by using more teacher-centered, systematic, and explicit instruction by conducting the intervention more frequently; increasing the duration or creating smaller groups (Fuch & Fuch, 2006).

Graner, et al., (2005) explained the three tiered approach of RTI:

Tier 1

Instruction: Students receive “generally effective” instruction from a general education teacher in the general education classroom.

Assessment: Rate of growth for all students in the general education classroom as well as overall level of achievement is assessed. This procedure allows for determination of the validity of current classroom practice across the class so that expected growth can occur. If the rate of growth for the class is below that of comparable school, district, or national groups, alternative general education instruction should be selected.

Tier 2

Instruction: Students identified by assessment in Tier 1 as “non-responders” receive intervention instruction of a certain length of time, intensity, and duration. A support teacher may provide this instruction, but this practice is not universal.

Assessment: Rate of growth is assessed for all students in the general education classroom as well as overall level of achievement. Students who appear to improve rate and level to predetermined cut points are returned to the general education setting, where progress monitoring continues.

Tier 3

Instruction: Students who still do not respond to intense intervention instruction may be eligible for more formal special education evaluation.

Assessment: Further assessment for eligibility determination may be conducted, although data gathered from previous interventions are generally used. (p. 97)

What is a Problem Solving Model?

A Problem Solving Model involves utilizing a team of educators which is a school-based group composed of various school personnel, such as teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and administrators, who meet to provide assistance to children who are having academic or behavioral difficulties in school. This team is called a Problem-Solving Team (PST). The PST is responsible for identifying and intervening in response to the needs of students within the arena of general education. The team also develops valid interventions designed to resolve a student's academic or behavioral difficulties. The emphasis in problem solving is to meet the student's needs first and produce positive learning outcomes (Schwanz & Barbour, 2005).

The following steps are used in problem solving approaches used by PSTs to assist students who are at-risk according to Bahr and Kovaleski (2006):

- A request for assistance from a teacher
- An analysis of the presenting problem
- A precise statement of the problem
- The setting of a performance goal
- The identification and selection of an intervention
- The support of the strategy in the classroom
- Monitoring the student's progress during the intervention
- Evaluation of the outcomes of the intervention (p. 3)

Schwanz and Barbour (2005) suggested that educators and parents obtained training in the implementation of the PST process. Teaming requires good listening and collaborative skills, as well as a good foundation in the design of academic and behavioral interventions, measurement of student skills, and students' response to interventions. Schools seeking to implement a PST process are urged to start slowly and to start with training in team processes and intervention strategies. All school personnel need to be familiar with and trained in the process including how to make a referral, how to collect baseline data and how to help collect information to evaluate intervention outcomes.

Schwanz and Barbour (2005) further explained that PSTs, unlike traditional models of refer and place, sought to resolve student difficulties within general education through the application of evidence-based interventions and systematic monitoring of student progress. The students' responses to regular education interventions then became the primary determinants of the need for special education referral, evaluation, and service (p. 1). Evaluation for special education eligibility was only one possible outcome of the problem solving process. The goal of the PST was to help children in the general education setting succeed.

Our research study addressed the following question in order to determine a counselor's role and understanding of the problem-solving process inclusive of RTI. What can be learned about a counselor's role by utilizing the counselors' services during the Problem-Solving Team process?

Method

Design

Our qualitative study used a phenomenological research design to capture the essence of a counselor's experience with the PST process, as well as assess a counselor's knowledge of RTI, NCLB, and assistance with students at-risk. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) stated that:

Phenomenology originated as a philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl. He believed that the starting point for knowledge was the self's experience of phenomena, which are the various sensations, perceptions, and ideations that appear in consciousness when the self focuses attention on an object. (p. 481)

Instrumentation

Open-ended questionnaires were used in order to gain valuable knowledge from counselors on their perspective of the problem-solving process, NCLB laws and RTI strategies. The counselors were asked the following questions:

1. What grade levels are on your campus?
2. Are you a member of the PST? If so, what position do you hold?
3. What is your understanding of the PST process?
4. What is your understanding of RTI?
5. In what ways do you assist with the interventions designed by the PST?
6. How do you verify that the interventions have been executed by teachers or specialists?

7. What are your perceptions or understanding of NCLB in terms of “students at-risk”?
8. What role do you believe school counselors play in IDEA 2004 in terms of RTI?
9. What do you do on your campus to assist at-risk students?
10. How many years of counseling experience do you currently have?

Participants

A purposeful and voluntary sample of counselors was used in order to capture the rich data and understanding needed to inductively reach a conclusion in this study.

Purposeful sampling is a process of selecting cases that are likely to be information rich with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 633). Eight female counselors, (3) elementary, (2) middle, and (3) high school participated in this study. Their counseling experience ranged from first year (0 years) to eighteen years. All counselors in this state have master's degrees and have at least two years of classroom teaching experience. Participants were not required to participate in our study. The counselors were from an urban school district in the southwest with a student population of over 20,000. This school district according to records from the 2004-2005 school year had a 58.2% at-risk population and a 12% special education population. The ethnic population percentages were 20% African American, 68% Hispanic, 9.5% White, 1% Native American, and 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Data Analysis and Collection

Open-ended questions on a questionnaire were developed by the researchers and used to help understand the PST process and what role school counselors played in this process as well as the effects the counselors' role had on the process. Approval from the

University's Protection of Human Subjects Committee, as well as the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation were received for the study. The counselors answered the questions individually and voluntarily, based on their experiences with the PST process.

Afterwards, the questionnaires from the eight school counselors were analyzed and coded by the researcher and a faculty researcher in order to establish validity and trustworthiness. Responses to the questionnaire were read, sorted, coded, and categorized for emerging themes and commonalities in the data. Descriptive validity was used by reporting the results as stated by the participants. Critical self-reflection was done by the researcher to disclose any predispositions or potential biases to the research.

Results

The coded results revealed several categories of information and themes which were divided by elementary, middle, and high school. The following were the emerging themes in our study: (a) elementary counselors had a stronger role in the PST process than secondary counselors, (b) counselors' understanding of RTI was mixed, (c) counselors' understanding of NCLB was mixed, (d) the ways in which counselors assist at-risk students was different at each level: elementary, middle school, and high school. The categories explained the counselor's role or part on the team, a counselor's understanding of PST, RTI, NCLB, as well as assisting students who are at-risk as themes revealed that elementary counselors had a stronger role in the PST process. The three elementary counselors were either the PST chairperson or a case manager. PST chairpersons are responsible for monitoring all cases, overseeing case managers, conducting meetings with the team and entering student data. Case managers are in

charge of working with teachers and specialists to make sure interventions are designed and implemented to assist students who are at-risk. The two middle school counselors were team members only. The three high school counselors were not part of the PST on their campus.

Elementary Counselors Have a Broader Role in the PST Process

Another theme revealed that not all counselors on every level fully understood RTI and NCLB. Elementary counselors understood that their role was to assist students having difficulties in school. They realized their job was to brainstorm and suggest interventions for the students and to monitor these interventions. One counselor stated, "PST process is to review students that are at-risk academically or behaviorally and brainstorm interventions. Another counselor stated that, "We are developing and we are highly organized with interventions and data assessments. We do probes and record results. Our diagnostician organizes the data and directs us."

One middle school counselor felt the PST process was, "a way to force bad teachers to do what good teachers do normally, as well as collaborate to find remediation for students with problems." They felt it was not effective for teachers who "don't get it", and the paperwork process became a burden to those who would do these things anyway. The other middle school counselor stated that, "PST process was a way to help children without having to test them for special education."

The high school counselors since they were not members of the PST imagined that the PST consisted of members who brainstormed solutions to problems, intervened when students' academic or behavioral success was challenged. They felt it was a part of the process for referring a student to special education. One counselor stated that PST

was, "A group of teachers, nurses, parents, diagnosticians, and counselors that meet to discuss strategies to help students succeed." They further stated that the PST targeted specific tasks or functions to work toward improvement. They felt their role in assisting with interventions designed by the PST was to counsel students and make adjustment to their schedules.

Counselors' Understanding of RTI Was Mixed

Elementary counselors were aware that probes and documentation were the way that RTI was verified. One elementary counselor who was a case manager revealed that "That is what we measure when we 'probe' and it drives our plans." Another counselor who was a chairperson stated that, "RTI are educational probes that are used as a guide. Baseline data is gathered on each student that is academically at-risk. The

probes/interventions are implemented. We hope that the interventions are working."

When asked about assisting with interventions designed by PST for RTI, one counselor case manager stated, "I only point interventions out to the teachers and then try to make them accountable." The counselor chairperson stated, "The diagnostician and the classroom teacher with assistance of the case manager decide the interventions. I meet with the case manager to make sure that communication is flowing between the case manager and the teacher."

The middle school counselors were not aware of the term, "response-to-intervention", but they did suggest interventions for teachers. They help teachers understand specific interventions and record keeping techniques. Counseling is provided if it is a part of the intervention.

The high school counselors felt RTI was some type of follow up to an intervention that has been performed. They stated that counselors refer students and meet with these students to insure their challenges are overcome academically, emotionally, and physically. They also stated that the scope and limits of the interventions that the team executes are for the overall function of a resolution.

Counselors' Understanding of NCLB in Terms of Students At-Risk was Mixed

The elementary school counselor chairperson stated, "NCLB was designed so that all students are given an opportunity to learn. It prescribes to the 'learning for all' premise." One of the two elementary counselor case managers stated, "NCLB students at-risk must be given a fair opportunity to succeed. Before a student fails the school should intervene and assist the student to meet his or her needs." While the other elementary case manager counselor stated, "Schools must meet needs so that risk is minimized/overcome"

Middle school counselors explained that the current interpretation of NCLB seemed to say that all students should be functioning on grade level in all subjects. One middle school counselor stated, "The current interpretation seems to be saying that all students should be functioning on grade level in all subjects, even if they have an IQ of 50, have just entered the country, have a specific learning disability, etc. The law is garbage". The other middle school counselor said that NCLB is, "Trying to make sure everyone graduates by providing interventions when needed."

High school counselors stated that NCLB included anything in a student's life that would delay or prevent him or her from graduating. They made the following statements: "Anything in a student's life that would delay or prevent them from graduating", "All

students should be given the tools needed to successfully complete high school and attend a higher level educational institution”, and “All students should be given the proper resources to be successful in their academic process, to insure a fair education opportunity.”

At-Risk Assistance Different at Each Level

Elementary counselors stated that they monitor students who are at-risk, counsel, consult and tutor small groups of students during and after school. They stated that students who are at-risk must be given a fair opportunity to succeed and felt that the school should intervene and assist the student to meet his or her needs.

Middle school counselors stated that, “at-risk requires a lot of paperwork which reduces the time available to intervene.” They stated their role is to identify students who are at-risk and to monitor those students.

High school counselors perform counseling services for students who are at-risk and make phone calls to parents. They stated that, “We have an at-risk representative on campus and give that person the support needed for any students who are at-risk.”

Discussion

The results of our study revealed categories and themes that uncovered information about how counseling professionals understood the process of PST inclusive of RTI and how the role of counselors was beneficial in assisting with the PST process and students who are at-risk. Marston (2005) stated that the passage of IDEA 2004 brought considerable attention to RTI initiatives and its role in the identification of students with learning disabilities. IDEA 2004 allowed school districts, for the purpose of determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, to use a process which

determined if a student responded to scientific research based interventions as part of the evaluation process (Graner, Faggella-Luby, & Fritschmann, 2005). Counselors are being used to assist with the PST process utilizing RTI and their understanding of this process is crucial to assisting students who are at-risk.

Response to intervention (RTI) referred to an array of procedures that are used to determine if and how students responded to specific changes in their instruction. RTI is used within the PST, which utilizes a group of administrators and specialists to help identify effective instructional strategies and evaluate their effectiveness during a pre-referral process (Canter, 2006). PSTs are the driving force to ensure implementation of interventions for students who are at-risk. Therefore, the results of this study revealed that elementary counselors are more involved in the PST process. Elementary counselors had a stronger role and a better understanding of the PST process. More elementary counselors in our study serve in the role of chairperson or case manager, than middle and high school counselors.

PSTs usually use a three tiered model to determine what instructional supports or interventions are needed to solve student achievement problems (Canter, 2006). Elementary counselors in our study are more aware of what the PST and RTI process entailed in terms of interventions, than middle and high school counselors. As a result of their leadership role and understanding of the PST process, elementary counselors are in charge of overseeing the design and utilization of the interventions, as well as treatment fidelity which is insuring that interventions are implemented as designed. Consequently, the elementary counselor's stronger role in the PST process enables them to monitor

students who are at-risk and perform interventions such as counseling, small group instruction, and after school tutoring.

Middle school counselors who responded to our questionnaire serve as team members and work with the PST to design ways to assist students who are at-risk. The extent of their role is assisting with the design of interventions, as well as performing counseling interventions as needed. High school counselors who participated in our study are not part of PST nor are they fully aware of RTI or the PST process, but they are aware of their responsibility to assist students who are at-risk.

What can we learn about the counselor's role by utilizing the services of counselors during the PST process? We have learned school counselors at every level are an asset to educational professionals who are dealing with accountability issues, IDEA and NCLB laws, and regulations. Myrick (2003) stated, "To be accountable means being responsible for one's actions and contributions, especially in terms of objectives, procedures, and results" (p. 174). School counselors in our study are making contributions to the education profession by assisting at-risk students academically and behaviorally in a responsible role in the PST process. They are executing a vital role in assisting students who are at-risk and are an asset and contribution to the campuses which they serve.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Findings

The small sample of questionnaires returned by the elementary, middle, and high school counselors were used to represent an urban school district. The delimitation was the school district chosen for the study.

Implications of the Findings

Future implications of our study include further research which incorporates the effects of an elementary counselor's role on at-risk students or the effects of the elementary counselor's role on accountability in schools. Elementary counselors in our study who have undertaken leadership roles in the PST process are assisting their campuses with the academic success of at-risk students.

Could training of secondary counselors increase their role in the PST process? Research into the reasons why secondary counselors are less involved with the PST process could yield valuable results about a secondary counselor's role and duties. Are a secondary counselor's non-counseling activities or duties reducing the time they have to spend working with students at-risk? Are secondary counselors spending more time on non-counseling activities than elementary counselors?

The roles of school counselors are changing as the education profession changes due to IDEA 2004 and NCLB 2001, therefore, the future implications of our study could yield valuable results for the school counseling profession today and tomorrow. The changing roles of professional school counselors must include accountability for the duties that they perform. Developing a leadership role in the PST process may provide opportunities for school counselors to be accountable for student success.

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