

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORKING  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOUR SECONDARY ADMINISTRATORS AND  
FOUR SECONDARY COUNSELORS IN A PREDOMINANTLY HISPANIC,  
SMALL, RURAL EDUCATIONAL SETTING IN A U.S. – MEXICO BORDER  
REGION IN SOUTH TEXAS**

A Record of Study

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2014

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focused on conducting an investigation of the perceptions of the working relationship between secondary administrators and secondary counselors in a predominantly Hispanic, small, rural educational setting in a U.S. – Mexico border region in Texas. The study employed a mixed methodological approach, using a phenomenological framework to help validate the use of interviews and observations involving secondary school administrative leaders and counselors at four schools in the border region (eight participants in total). Information that could have led to the identification of any individual or school that participated in this study was not included in this work because of the key ethical considerations that underpinned the research project.

The findings highlighted that although the working relationships between the participants in the study appeared to be positive, there were certain issues that still highlighted a major difference in the perceptions of the school administrator and school counselor. The main issue was that of the ill-defined role of the counselor, which led to them having to complete other tasks, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the counseling programs. The support system for most of the schools was excellent, although the informality of the meetings between the two sets of informants perhaps facilitated the lack of understanding about the role of the counselor in the campus setting.

There were no apparent negative impacts of culture on the working relationship, but it was perceived that the Mexican American culture did reduce the desire to achieve above expectations for students in the region. The participants indicated that their perceptions were that Mexican American culture does not place a great emphasis on education. High school graduation is sufficient in many households. Other issues included (a) the strain of the working relationship between these two groups, due to conflicts of interest, (b) the difficulty in ensuring that the job description and roles were understood by all parties, (c) the lack of formal meetings, and (d) personal differences on professional matters. These tenets led to difficulties in the relationship between the administrators and the counselors. The findings revealed that positive relationships were likely to develop. However, the development of the relationship between counselors and school administrators will take years to manifest.

Further recommendations for study and implications for the schools in the region were also provided in the final chapter of this research work. The working relationships were generally positive; however, there is still an inconsistent perception on roles and priorities of secondary counselors. The findings indicate that much has not changed, regardless of policy or the changing demands of secondary school counselors.

The recommendations provided, if acted upon, could make a significant impact on the effectiveness of secondary campuses in the South Texas region and possibly in other areas.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Amador, and my two children Jessica Danielle and Lucas Gabriel. I love you with all my being and sincerely appreciate all the times you supported me throughout this difficult, yet rewarding journey. I find it difficult to believe that this endeavor would have ever come to realization had your encouragement and emotional support not been a constant in my life.

To my parents, Adrian Saul and Maria del Carmen Perez, your gentle support was always in the back of my mind and your love in my heart. I give you the credit for instilling in me the value of an education and the rewards of being a lifelong learner.

To my immediate family, extended family and friends, your words of encouragement and monitoring of my progress kept me moving forward. I truly feel that you've assisted me throughout this whole process. I thank you for accompanying me on this difficult, wonderful, and fulfilling journey.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I have worked toward completion of this dissertation, I have continued to live my life. I was not going to stop living, this project would have to become part of my life, it would have to take the back seat at times, but was always within reach. “Life” included some very exciting times and some very stressful times. There were deaths, marriages, births, and unbelievable events that tried my faith. I have to acknowledge the higher power of my Heavenly Father and the power of prayer in allowing me to get to this point. If I would have known the amount of time, dedication and learning this endeavor would encompass, I may not have undertaken it. I remember the initial classes that indicated that the odds were stacked against me in completing this program. I would not let that deter me. My cohort continues to work and I am grateful for Beth and Keri, their encouragement and support has been extremely helpful; regardless of the fact that they are both in two completely different states continuing their own educational journey.

To my committee members, Dr. Humberto Gonzalez, Dr. Trace Pirtle, and Dr. Jim Scheurich whose patience and guidance was truly appreciated. You guided me towards the best possible record of study. I am appreciative of the classes that were offered the Laredo Cohort, in Laredo, Texas during some very hot summers. I know that this could not have been possible without the persistent guidance of Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan. Thank you for opportunity of becoming a member of a very select group;

a female, Hispanic with a Doctorate of Education degree; you each made a difference in my life.

My friends and co-workers at the Jim Hogg County ISD and Beeville ISD, your support and monitoring of my progress was a crucial component in seeing this journey to fruition. There were many days that I just wanted to stop working and not invest any more time, but your redirection and encouragement was always given at the exact time it was needed.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### Overview

The role of secondary education level guidance counselors has been viewed as an important and integral part of the success of students as they move through the education system (Schmidt, 2003). However, it was also noted in the literature that “the relationship between counselors and administrators could have a significant impact on the ability of the counselors to complete their work effectively” (Brinson, Rivera & Windle, 2004, p.17). This study attempted to present a detailed assessment of the working relationship between secondary school counselors and administrators, as a result of investigating the perceptions of this relationship from interviews and observations of participants in a predominantly Hispanic, rural educational setting in a region in South Texas (a US-Mexico border region).

This chapter presents the problem statement, purpose and significance of the study. Moreover, it also details the overview of the methodology that underpinned the primary study when it was completed, the main research questions devised for the study and the major limitations that impacted on work. As well as this, key assumptions are discussed, key terms defined and the general structure of the study provided to help aid the reader in their understanding of this work.

## Background

### *Crucial Counseling Components*

It is thought that secondary school guidance counselors are an integral component of the success of students at the secondary level. Counselors are given the responsibility to make certain that students are academically, socially, and emotionally prepared and equipped to work effectively in a secondary setting and be prepared to transition to the post-secondary life of their choice: workforce, community college, vocational studies, military, or four year university. This is a huge responsibility that is placed on an individual, which is spread thinly within the secondary campus. A campus that is indicated by the research to be increasingly more complex and challenging each subsequent year and must serve a broad range of students with needs that are as diverse as the students themselves (Brinson et al., 2004).

School-based guidance and counseling programs have been developed on the argument that constructing a boy or girl is much simpler than fixing a man or a woman. School counselors therefore play a very important role in helping schools provide for the developmental requirements of students, socially and academically. A well-developed guidance program that begins at the elementary level and is carried on through early schooling facilitates students in becoming successful problem solvers and participants in decisions associated with their education (Ward & Worsham, 1998).

In order to address these academic, career, and social/personal development needs and to be considered a success in their position, counselors must be essential players in the school community. When assessed, the current literature indicated that in order for guidance and counseling programs to be effective they must be developmental and comprehensive in nature. Three key factors that contributed to this effectiveness were the need for a clear definition of the role of the counselor, administrative support at the campus level, and open communication and trust between the stakeholders (Ponec & Brock, 2000). It was the latter two factors that were the main source for the decision to undertake this type of study, with the researcher wishing to further enhance the knowledge of the relationship between counselors and administrators at the school level.

### ***Counselor Role Determination***

According to the research, the role that the school counselor plays has often been determined by the principal and the local school board (Coy, 1999). The result led to confusion amongst secondary guidance counselors and principals. Brinson et al., (2004) state that “school administrators are not always as familiar as they might be with the education and training of school counselors. As a result, school counselors may be assigned non-counseling work such as supervision or paperwork tasks that would be more closely suited to the duties of an assistant principal or member of the clerical staff” (2004, p.23). It is thought that these activities that do not involve counseling therefore

reduce the time spent with students, reducing the effectiveness of the counselor in the process.

Secondary administrators clearly control the atmosphere in their schools. What they feel is most important persuades their own actions and what they support positively or negatively in the values and actions of the subordinates, in their school rules. In essence, secondary administrators control whether school counselors can carry out the roles and functions as advocated by American School Counselor Association (Chata & Loesch, 2007). The power held by the school administrator, and the importance of the relationship between them and the counselor therefore indicated that this was a key part of the relationship that should be evaluated and analyzed in a critical manner.

It was also thought that the individual views from each side of the debate could be the culprit. It was noted that administrators have often felt that the school should be viewed as an organizational whole, whereas counselors were directed to utilize a more student-centered approach. There was also a varied training of principals and counselors. The research suggests that role confusion could be alleviated in the counseling realm by a principal that is educated on the appropriate role and duties of a counselor (Ponec & Brock, 2000).

The actions that were visible between what was advocated and what actually was transpiring caused a major rift, role ambiguity and conflict. These concepts were adding

additional stress to an already very stressful job (Lambie, 2004). It was clear from the assessment that there were potential obstacles in the way of the development of a harmonious and productive relationship between the administrator and the counselor in the secondary educational setting. Dodson (2009) reiterated in an article that there has been vast evidence revealing the persistent misperception regarding any consistency in the role of professional school counselors.

### ***Other Components to Address***

The House Bill 3 Transition Plan, which was presented by the Texas Education Agency in December of 2010, provided the plan that would impact the graduating seniors of 2015. In addition to the mandated 26 credit curriculum with the four by four requirements, the new testing requirements were, they needed to show mastery of 12 new End of Course exams. These exams included Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, English I, English II, English III, World Geography, World History, U. S. History, Biology, Chemistry and Physics. This new requirement increased from mastery of four exams to a total of 12 exams (technically 15 exams, due to the fact that the reading and writing test that could be successfully passed independently of each other).

Secondary guidance counselors were fully aware of the added stressors that are slowly being introduced at the high school level. Beginning with the incoming freshman of 2007-2008, the new mandates placed on students to meet the higher standards for

graduation, such as the new four by four curriculum requirements. All students in the state of Texas attempting to graduate on the Distinguished Achievement or the Recommended Plan must have 26 credits passed including four English Courses, four Mathematics courses, four Science courses and four Social Studies courses (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

These graduation plans and testing requirements were revisited and the 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature passed House Bill 5. House Bill 5 “moves from the states 4 X4 graduation plan to a 22-credit Foundation High School Plan that allows students to receive endorsements in specific areas. The end-of-course exams for chemistry, physics, Algebra II, world history, world geography, and English III are no longer required for high school graduation” (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Only 5 end-of-course tests would be required for graduation in 2015. The commissioner of education will provide the state with a New Transition Plan to be enforced during the 2014-15 school year.

Another component that fell within the realm of the secondary counselor was to make certain that students are testing and preparing for post-secondary colleges and universities. Counselors should make students aware of the impact that remedial coursework can make on their overall college journey. The college entrance exams most common in the state of Texas include the ACT (American College Test), the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the THEA (Texas Higher Education Assessment). High scores are crucial in these exams; mastery of these college entrance exams will not

warrant remedial course work upon entering college. The research indicated that many students are entering college and enrolling in remedial courses; 40 percent nationwide and 60 percent of students hailing from urban districts. This should be viewed as an overwhelming problem, both financially and educationally. More than \$1.4 billion dollars was applied toward remedial course work at the college level and only 17 percent of students having to take a remedial course would graduate with a four-year degree within eight years, in comparison to a student that does not have to take any remedial courses; that were graduating at a rate of 58 percent (Schnieders, 2010).

This dismal report is supported by the current college graduation rate of 38% and the unprecedented goal that President Obama has unveiled which is asking for our college completion rates to be at 60% or higher by 2020. Some of the points that have been discussed as reasons for the lack of success in college graduation rates; currently 13 other countries fare better than the United States, are financial assistance and accessibility to online course work. There was no mention to any reform in the K-12 sector, however, this is where there needs to be a vertical alignment that is meeting the needs of students, prior to enrolling in college; counselors play a pivotal role in this arena (Lee, 2011; Herr, 2002).

### *State Guidance and the Law*

In the 1989-1990 school year, the Texas Education Agency developed ‘A Model Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools’ (Texas Education Agency, 1990). The plan was also endorsed by the Texas Counseling Association (TCA). In 1997, the National Standards for School Counseling Programs was introduced and set the tone for current school counseling. These standards led to the model development of comprehensive school programs in 24 states and the standards can be credited with 400 school districts nationally implementing counseling programs based on these standards.

The Texas Education Agency reconvened a second Guidance Advisory Committee in 1998, to update the work of the first committee, by reexamining the current needs of the students (Pérusse, 2004). The plan was a guide that provides recommendations for school guidance counselors to appropriate their time to address the domains within their schedule. The four components were the Guidance Curriculum, Responsive Services, Individual Planning, and System Support. The TEA Model gave a recommended percentage of range of time distributions at the secondary school level. Guidance Curriculum ranges from 15% -25%, Responsive Services ranges from 25% - 35%, Individual Planning ranges from 25% - 35% and System Support ranges from 15% - 20%. Notably, on the plan, there is a percentage for Non-Guidance, which is 0 % (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

Guidance Curriculum provided guidance content in a systematic way to all students. Its main purpose was to promote awareness, skill development and application of the skills needed in everyday life. Some of the areas addressed in this component included motivation to achieve, communication skills, and responsible behavior. The counselor responsibilities in this component included guidance, consultation, professional standards, and program implementation and facilitation. Responsive Services addressed the immediate concerns of students. The two main purposes of this component were prevention and intervention. Some of the areas addressed in this component were academic concerns, relationship concerns, harassment issues, coping with stress and suicide prevention. The counselor responsibilities included counseling consultation, coordination, referral and professional standards.

Individual Planning assisted students in monitoring and understanding their own development. The main purposes were student planning and goal setting. The areas addressed were divided into three separate categories; educational, career, and personal/social. The counselor responsibilities that work on these areas included guidance, consultation, assessment, and professional standards. The notion of System Support included both support and services for the overall program and the staff involved. The main purpose was program delivery and support. The areas addressed include public relations, parent education, school improvement planning, community outreach and research and publishing. The counselor responsibilities included program management, consultation and professional standards (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

The Texas Education Agency has very clearly forwarded the information and law adopted during the 2001 legislative session to all districts in the state of Texas, as outlined in Appendix A. Senate Bill 158 and Senate Bill 518 have been implemented at a very basic level. Administrators have taken liberties with the language and utilized the language to meet their own inadequacies, housed on their campuses. Senate Bill 158 and Senate Bill 518 have provided school districts with very specific roles for the guidance counselors (Texas Education Agency, 2002). With this information, it became apparent that the knowledge of the role of the counselor was one that was confused and unknown outside of those immediately connected to the role in the education system. Moreover, the role of the counselor was also not necessarily understood by the school administrators and this, as viewed in the next section, was the main reason for the creation of this study.

## Problem Statement

### *Counselor Confusion*

From the brief assessment of the literature in the previous section, as well as the more detailed and informative review of the literature in Chapter II, it was apparent that there was a lack of research in a key area; that of the perceptions of those involved in the working relationship between counselors and school administrators. The analysis also underlined key problems in the relationship and the failure to adopt correctly the theoretical application of counseling in the secondary education system. There appeared

to be a gap or disconnect between what was being mandated by the legislature and what is actually transpiring on the campuses. The administrator lapse in proper implementation of the use of counselors in the most effective way was disturbing. The literature supported the notion that school guidance counselors were not being utilized in the way that best benefitted the students of the campus. They were loaded with non-guidance activities that impacted their ability to address and meet the needs of the students as mandated by the legislature in 2001 (see Appendix A).

The literature stated that counselors themselves did not know their role and responsibilities as defined by the American School Counseling Association. The literature also indicated that there are many clerical duties that are often required of them in addition to the counseling, consulting, and coordinating (Hutchingson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986). One study stated that “the school counselor as a part of the total educational team has important knowledge to share concerning the needs of students. Their knowledge, skills, and expertise are vital for the success of our future leaders, workers, and citizens. The school counselor, as a part of the total educational team, can assist students in building a bridge to the future” (Coy, 1999, p.64). Moreover, it was also noted by Dahir, Burnham, Stone, and Cobb (2010) that:

School counselors face continued role disparity, unclear responsibilities, the imposition of quasi-administrative tasks, and the evolution of a field in constant transition. School counselors find themselves caught in the middle of justifying, explaining, and defending the contributions they make as they focus their efforts to help students acquire the academic, career, and personal-social development needed to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some continue to take on non-counseling

roles assigned to them by administrators, which have further convolute the scope and sequence focus of their work. (p.145)

### ***Counselor or Clerk***

Therefore, guidance counselors, at the secondary level, in the state of Texas were not effectively implementing the Model Comprehensive, Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> Grade. The problem stemmed from an increased role of counselors that had a pseudo-administrative quality. A large percentage of time in a secondary counselors' day was filled with non-guidance activities; activities that did not allow counselors to effectively implement the program, which was recommended by the Texas Education Agency.

Furthermore, it appeared that secondary school counselors were performing duties that had little or no relationship to the stated policies and procedures adopted by the American Personnel and Guidance Association, American School Counselor Association, and Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. This problem has been around for decades. The literature indicated that this type of concern had been expressed by counselors with no relief since the early 1970's (Guthrie, 1971). Many of these duties included clerical tasks that could be demanding of valuable time needed for more appropriate counseling activities, on the secondary campus. These tasks could be

successfully completed by trained personnel; effective quality performances by individuals other than guidance counselors. This small change could be the initial step in an effective guidance counseling program (Lambie, 2004).

Another factor that played into the secondary guidance counselor assuming many other duties was the financial record of the school district. In this time of rising inflation and economic cutbacks, counselors are frequently called on to perform a wide variety of tasks, both administrative and clerical (Helms & Ibrahim, 1985). With these views combined, it is clear that the role of the counselor has often been compromised, whether it is via the attitude and actions of the school administrators or through factors such as lack of staff and budget cutbacks. This has evidently led to the development of a particular problem and this, coupled with the lack of research in the subject field, has meant that it was vital to conduct a study of this kind.

### ***Administrator Vision***

The literature stressed that school principals were often given the responsibility for shaping the job descriptions of the counselors. The concern was that counselors were not given the opportunity to address the needs of the students as indicated by the state mandates. In this deficit, administrators should be cognizant of the fact that their students were not being serviced in relation to the model currently in place by the state. Administrators have lacked the ability to redirect work assignments and allow

counselors to work in the capacity with which they have been expected to do so (Dahir et al., 2010).

Some principals have considered school counseling as an ancillary administrative function, with only individual counseling as the service of choice to be rendered. Without the understanding, encouragement, and support of school principals to move toward new paradigms of comprehensive programs and improved delivery models, school counselors continue to serve in a responsive and reactive mode to limited numbers of students (Dahir et al., 2010). Lambie (2004) stated that there is role ambiguity within the school counseling context. Counselors have one perception, but are asked to perform something different within the school environment. This type of ambiguity is present when there is lack of clarity about work role, responsibilities, and peer expectations.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work was to find out how the perceptions of school administrative leaders and counselors impacted on the effectiveness of the secondary school counseling program. The context of the study was in a small, rural predominantly Hispanic school district, located in the U.S. – Mexico border region. The study conducted interviews and observations with secondary school administrators and counselors which work within the Lone Star Education Service Center in the state of

Texas, to identify the procedures that were currently in place that determined the assignments of counselors, the effectiveness of their guidance and counseling services and the actual responsibilities for guidance counselors at their specific campus.

The study took the perceptions of the administrators into account and identified the gaps that are present and identified the themes that emerged at the secondary campus level in relation to job duties and descriptions of secondary school counselors working in a rural academic setting. Research underlined that support by the school principal when creating and maintaining a school counseling program is vital (Beale & McCay, 2001; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994). The working relationship between principal and counselor was also seen as a key factor in determining the overall effectiveness of the program (Ponec & Brock, 2000).

The purpose of the study was also to redirect school guidance counseling programs to focus on counseling, guidance, consultation, coordination and referrals; which has been encouraged by the American Counseling Association. The three critical areas which counselors address are social/personal, educational, and career. Attending to non-counseling duties takes counselors away from their vital role. The students have a multitude of issues to deal with; issues that definitely interfere with their ability to learn. Counselors should address topics such as violence, date rape, poverty, homelessness, drop-outs, self-esteem, drug abuse, and peer pressure (Coy, 1999).

Pérusse (2004) stated that the National Standards for School Counseling Programs gave examples of what were appropriate and inappropriate tasks for school counselors. The data showed that there was not clear agreement from school counselors or school principals about what were appropriate or inappropriate tasks for school counselors. There was also a discrepancy between what the National Standards identify as appropriate and inappropriate tasks, and what school counselors and school principals identified as appropriate and inappropriate tasks. With regard to the performance by school counselors of various inappropriate tasks, the data showed that the exact same tasks that were most highly endorsed by school principals at each level were also the most frequently performed inappropriate tasks by school counselors at each level. The American School Counseling Association (2004) provided a list of inappropriate and appropriate counseling responsibilities. These duties are located in Appendix B.

Hart & Prince (1970) investigated the job description versus job demands of school counselors. They surveyed secondary school principals in the state of Utah and compared their answers with six counselor educators from different areas of the country. The principals disagreed with the counselor educators on factors of clerical duties, working with students who have personal-emotional problems, and confidentiality. The principals believed that it was the counselor's responsibility to perform clerical duties such as class changes; registration; attendance checking; and fill-in as an assistant, monitor, or teacher. However, although this study was conducted over forty years ago, it is evident in the literature that there is still a gap.

Kirchner & Setchfield (2005) emphasized that “developing and defining appropriate roles for school counselors continues to be a source of concern for the counseling profession” (2005, p.10). Coy (1999) cautioned that the school counselor has the “skills and knowledge for providing counseling, coordination, guidance and referrals within the total framework of the educational system. To ask these individuals to use their skills and knowledge simply to make schedule changes and test is a misuse of their education” (1999, p.7).

It was also acknowledged that equally as important, professional school counselors must also be clear about what are appropriate tasks for school counselors. They must define their roles so that school principals will not define their roles for them (House & Martin, 1998). Therefore, it was perhaps apparent that in the rural school settings, school administrators had taken unprecedented liberties with the role and responsibility of the counselor. Dodson (2009) stated it this way, “If school counselors and administrators do not define the counselor role, principals will continue to view school counselors as free agents with flexibility in their schedules to take on assignments no one else in the building will cover” (2009, p. 481).

There is no gap in the literature; the same concepts are still in place. Literature from the 1970’s to the present indicates that counselors are not being utilized to the best of their ability in addressing the needs of all students. Many of the same activities have fallen within the four walls of the counselor’s office. The need to make certain that

counselors and administrators work collaboratively to define the role of the counselor is crucial. The need to find a way to change a mindset and start a dialogue to address this discrepancy is a main purpose of the study.

As a result, the main purpose of this study was to (a) assess the perceptions of both school administrators and counselors regarding their working relationship, (b) the role of the counselor and (c) potential difficulties and barriers that existed in their relationship. This was conducted within the context of socio-cultural factors inherent in a border region such encompassing the Mexican American culture.

### Significance of the Study

The brief review of the literature in this introductory chapter acknowledged there was great significance attached to the development of knowledge concerning the working relationship between school administrators and guidance counselors at the secondary level of education in the United States. Although the study was only a relatively small one, using only four small, rural schools as the basis for the analysis, the results of the work could have a significant impact on the way that the guidance counselor role is viewed within these rural schools, as well as leading to a much larger study across a range of geographical and socio-demographic locations.

## Overview of the Methodology

This methodology overview gives a brief description of the phenomenological study that was undertaken by an individual researcher. The phenomenological position allowed the researcher to interact with participants. The reality is considered subjective and multiple as perceived by the participants and how individuals experience varied phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The mixed method approach was used to make the study more robust by using both quantitative and qualitative research. The small sample size is usually found in phenomenological studies as well as a natural location. The sample size had eight participants and the interviews and observations were conducted at each of the respective school districts. A concept that the researcher kept in mind during the interview process: the research world is left behind and the researcher enters into the world of the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Data analysis was conducted using coding. The interviews afforded the participants anonymity and gave them the researcher the opportunity to utilize member checking. Member checking is at times referred to as respondent validation. This practice allows “the researcher to solicit the participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). The use of member checking has the advantage of giving participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what

are perceived as wrong interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard member checking in very high regards. They consider it to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314).

There are two interview styles to promote discussion between interviewees and the interviewers during member checks. The interview type utilized by the researcher was the Confrontation Style. This style is only effective when there is a trusted, warm, and open relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; this was the setting during all eight interviews. This style promotes discussion empowering the interviewee to have confidence to "fight back" when his/her opinion is questioned (Tanggaard, 2008).

### Research Questions

The literature regarding research study underlined that for any study to be considered a success, the researcher needed to develop key research questions to help complete the main aim of the study (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, as well as focusing on the main purpose (aim) of this work, it was also necessary to create key research questions that allowed the data to help develop the understanding of the main aim further through primary study. As highlighted in the review of the literature in the second chapter in this work, it is apparent that there were a number of discrepancies that existed

in the current literature concerning the working relationship between administrators and counselors within the education system.

The questions developed revolved around the development of understanding regarding the working relationship between school administrators and counselors at the secondary level in a small, rural academic setting located along the U.S. – Mexico border region. Moreover, the study wished to find a unique angle for the research, helping to provide data and findings that could reduce the gaps in the pre-existing empirical literature on the subject. Therefore, the researcher focused on a specific area of cultural challenge, identifying the US-Mexico border as a potential area of conflict and disharmony. The research questions included:

1. What are the perceived difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor?
2. What counseling issues exist that the paired administrator and counselor perceive are not being addressed due to their working relationship?
3. How do the paired administrator and counselor perceive each other's positive and negative support system that is currently in place?

4. What perceived impact does the Mexican American culture have on administrators and counselors working relationships?

The creation of these research questions allowed the researcher to focus on specific aspects of the working relationship between the school administrator and counselor within the localized region. The questions covered the direct relationship, perceptions of issues that exist and socio-cultural factors that were clearly important (or would play a role) in the development of the working relationship between the two. Having created the research questions, it was also important to develop research objectives for the work, enabling the researcher to continually focus on the correct and narrow topic of analysis rather than become distracted by the relatively broad area of study in which the working relationship between administrators and counselors was situated. These objectives included:

- i. Conducting a review of the literature that discovered the major gaps in the literature, as well as the pre-existing knowledge of the specific subject involved.
- ii. Creating a research methodology that would enable the researcher the best possible chance of answering the research questions in a successful manner.
- iii. Using data analysis techniques that could adequately convert raw qualitative data results into usable findings.

iv. Working in an objective and professional manner, leading to a heightened level of validity and reliability in the overall study.

### Limitations

There were a number of limitations associated with the study. These are covered in more detail in Chapter III but it was necessary to present them at this juncture as well. Perhaps the major limitation associated with this work was the possibility that there would not be a good return of involvement with the interviews. Secondary administrators are often inundated with a heavy workload and may not have found that the interview was a priority. Another limitation was that secondary principals might feel the inclination to answer the questions untruthfully, due to the fact that they may not be supporting the guidance and counseling program in the correct manner. They may have felt defensive and apprehensive about answering the questions accurately.

### Assumptions

There were also a number of assumptions involved in this study. It was assumed that all administrators were familiar with the description in the Model of Guidance description from the Texas Education Agency state adopted guide of 2001. As well as this, it was assumed that all secondary administrators were familiar with the Model

Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools. One other assumption was that all secondary campuses in the Lone Star Education Service Center employed a guidance counselor. The final assumption was that administrators and counselors would be truthful in answering the interview questions.

### Definition of Key Terms

Several terms and constructs are used throughout this study, with the following operational definitions established from conducting an extensive literature review. Key terms and their definitions included:

**Border Region.** Region in South Texas bordering the U.S.-Mexico boundary.

**Hispanic/Latino(a).** Of, relating to or being a person of Latin American descent living in the United States; especially: one of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin.

**Lone Star Education Service Center.** The state of Texas has 20 education service centers. These centers serve as a liaison between the districts and Texas Education Agency headquarters, providing support to the districts such as conducting workshops and technical assistance. The ESC's do not have any regulatory authority to

monitor the districts. The Lone Star ESC is located in South Texas, serving 37 school districts and 10 charter schools in a 7 county region.

**Mexican American.** A U.S. citizen or resident of Mexican descent.

**Model of Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools.** A Texas Education Agency state adopted guide, which provides recommendations for school guidance counselors, to appropriate their time, amongst four critical components. The components are: Guidance Curriculum, Responsive Services, Individual Planning, and System Support.

**Non-counseling duties.** Non-counseling duties refer to those duties identified as inappropriate by the American School Counselor Association and fall into these categories: clerical (e.g. scheduling students in classes, maintaining student records), fair share (e.g. performing lunch duty, organizing the standardized testing program), and administrative duties (disciplining students and covering classes).

**Rural.** Of or relating to the country and the people who live there instead of the city.

**Secondary school guidance programs.** Programs serving students in grades 7-12.

## Organization of the Study

The research work was written up and divided into four further chapters following the completion of this introductory chapter. Initially, a comprehensive review of the literature took place, providing the researcher with the current level of knowledge surrounding the relationship between school administrators and guidance counselors. The review focused on the impact of a weak guidance counseling program, identifying how the guidance counselor made a difference in the transition into secondary education, cultural factors involving Mexican American education, the role of the school administrator in impacting the effectiveness of the guidance program, teacher expectations and cultural deficiencies and stereotypes that exist. Following this, the research methodology was provided in Chapter III, with a discussion of the research paradigm selected as well as the main research design for the study. Choices were justified and supported with claims from the literature, helping to acknowledge that the study selected an appropriate methodology from which to gain the data.

Chapter IV focused on presenting the findings of the raw data and emphasized the attitudes of both school administrators and counselors in terms of the working relationship and the challenges inherent in it. The final chapter presented the main conclusions and recommendations from the study. The study provided the main conclusions (also seen in the abstract for this work), allowing the researcher to outline the major findings concerning the perceptions of working relationship between

secondary administrators and secondary counselors in a predominantly Hispanic, small, rural educational setting in a U.S. – Mexico border region in Texas. As well as this, recommendations for both policy and practice have been provided and possible ideas for future study in the same research field.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### Introduction

The review of the literature in any research study is viewed as a vital part of the process, allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of the previous work conducted in the subject field. The main aim of the chapter was to present a synthesis of the findings of past studies that relate to the main research questions posed by this current research. The critical analysis of the information helped to further the knowledge of the researcher and the reader concerning the relationship between the school administrators and the counselor, as well as presenting a context for the understanding of the cultural impact of the region where the study took place. The main aims of the research focused on assessing the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor and the counseling issues that exist that the paired administrator and counselor perceive are not being addressed due to their working relationship.

Furthermore, the study also intended to analyze how the paired administrator and counselor perceive each other's positive and negative support system that is currently in place and the level of impact that the Mexican American culture had on administrators and counselors working relationships. With these research questions in mind, this chapter aimed to reflect the potential findings by identifying the nature of the role of the

guidance counselor, the historical development of the position of the guidance counselor, perceptions of both the school administrator and counselor towards each other's role and the relationship that exists and the impact that the Mexican American culture has on this working relationship. The review of the literature aimed at presenting a synthesis of the current knowledge of the subject before the primary research for this work was completed. This aligned it with the nature of the empirical literature review, a tool used by researchers to help identify key gaps in the knowledge or debates that can often be argued with new data (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the literature review had one main aim, as well as a secondary aim of providing information as to how previous studies have collected their data (methodological approaches). Using this information, the researcher was able to identify the most suitable methodological approach to use for this study, resulting in the application of the mixed methodological approach, aiming to reduce associated limitations with other forms of approach.

## Historical Role of Guidance Counselor

### ***Guidance Development***

First, it is important to discuss the historical development of the role of the guidance counselor. The identification of the historical role of the guidance counselor is important because it shows that it is a fluid position that has developed as society has also developed, changing the role of the counselor to suit the needs of the wider

education system. It has also helped provide knowledge of how the attitudes towards the guidance counselor have changed and have come to dominate the modern thinking on the role within the education system. The literature underlines that the counseling profession has changed dramatically over the past century. It has been stated that “the counseling profession has not progressed in a vacuum; rather, it has been influenced by social, cultural, economic, and governmental forces as well as by numerous professional issues nationally and globally” (Cook & Vacha-Haase, 2010, p.19). This statement is accurate and reflects the viewpoint of other literature on the subject. The changes that have manifested are all linked to the concepts mentioned. The training, preparation, and role of secondary school counselors have changed remarkably over the years (Coy, 1999). In an attempt to understand the progression of counseling through the last 100 years, it is important to ask certain questions in this review, including how people make sense of events in the world around them. One way is by drawing on previous personal and historical experience. This ‘lens of history’ is used to attempt to acquire a good knowledge of the actual background to the events being studied. In this case the history of counseling is our subject, School counseling, can be defined by its historical story. School counseling's historical narrative constructs the lens through which society interprets the profession.

The lens of history is felt by most historians as the best way to grasp a fuller and more realistic understanding of any concept. To comprehend and possibly lessen the current incongruence between the actual and the model professional identity of

secondary guidance counselors, the historical narrative configuring the profession needs to be understood, valued, and then maybe reconstructed (Lambie, 2004). Historically, guidance counselor responsibilities and duties have been considered supplementary to school operation (Taylor, 2002). Coy (1999) states, “the role of the school counselor has changed and the information available for redefining the role of the school counselor has accumulated through approximately 100 years of research and practice. The profession of school counselor is relatively young but its' history can be traced back to the 1880's” (p.234). The social reform movement catapulted the need for assistance in relation to what was transpiring in the social arena. Children living in slum conditions and being utilized in the workforce via child labor, upset society and began the compulsory education movement and inadvertently moved to the vocational guidance movement.

These issues were the roots of a movement that is still transforming today. The first recorded school guidance program was introduced by Jesse B. Davis in 1889. As a school principal in a Detroit high school, Davis introduced guidance as a curriculum component in each English period in the school. The literature states that educators were the first guidance counselors. They were given additional assignments or duties in relation to counseling (Coy, 1999).

At the turn of the century counseling was becoming even more evident. In the early 1900's, one of the first entities clearly identified as a counseling facility included the Vocational Bureau in Boston, Massachusetts and the National Vocation Guidance

Association, located in Michigan. Its leader was Frank Parsons, who is often referenced as the 'Father of Guidance' (Coy, 1999; Myrick, 2003) His main focus was on supporting young men's transition into suitable vocational placement based on a mutual beneficial match between the young person's aptitudes and abilities and an occupation's requirements and environment (Schmidt, 2003). Parsons was a graduate of Cornell University with a degree in engineering. He authored several books, taught school and passed the bar exam in the state of Massachusetts. His diversity was inspiring and possibly allowed him to be such a beneficial individual in his ability to link students to appropriate occupational and career choices (Zunker, 2002). His impact in vocational guidance not only impacted the United States, but other countries such as Uruguay and China (Pope, 2000).

The goals of school counseling in the 1900s, was very different from the current functions advocated by the American School Counselor Association (2004) professional role statement. The phrase used during the early 1900s for the profession was vocational guidance, which was linked to roles that were similar to present day career counseling with a plan to help assist with an effective transition from school to work, focusing on a suitable client-occupational placement match. There was also a great demand for assessment, due to the United States' entry into World War I. This war was in search of individuals with leadership potential and valid psychological assessments were valuable to the national government, and then found their place in the educational setting.

Alfred Binet developed intelligence scales that helped to classify students educationally in Paris, and the United States used these scales during World War I for military recruitment purposes. Wartime and the need for troops to be assessed and placed appropriately within the armed services fell toward the counselors. This vocational guidance movement was effective in its ability to generate a positive transition from secondary school to the post-school vocational adjustments of young graduates.

### ***Focus on Vocational Guidance***

An early group, which laid the foundation of what is currently in place, was the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA). This organization, established in 1913, was made up of a variety of entities, not just in the education field. These stakeholders included business representatives, governmental representation, and psychological representation. This organization eventually joined with the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Guidance Supervisors and Counselor Trainers and the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education, which morphed into the American Personnel and Guidance Association and today, is currently known as the American Counseling Association.

By 1918 there were over 900 schools in the United States that were employing the vocational guidance counseling concept. The inception of the NVGA was a catapult

to what is currently in place in the educational counseling field profession. It is clear to see how some of the counselor duties and responsibilities, manifested into their location within the day-to-day activities of the secondary guidance counselor; activities such as testing, scheduling, academic and vocational planning are connected to this early history.

Therefore, the current situation does have some links to the early counseling program, however, it was never anticipated that the problems that students must contend with on a daily basis today were present in counseling early inceptions. During the decades of the 1920's and 1930's there was significant movement, disagreement within the vision of counseling, and it lacked assistance as the decades moved forward. The job market was impacted by the Great Depression and testing to assess job skills also was delegated to the counselors. They were located at high schools and were proficient in intellectual assessments (Myrick, 2003).

### ***Not Much Change***

More recently, the growth of the number of school guidance counselors has increased, but this has not necessarily led to an improvement in their position (as regarded by the system and by individual educators) within the school. It is noted that “despite the presence of more than 100,000 school counselors in every school district across the 50 states, the school counseling profession was omitted from most of the educational reform agendas of the past” (Dahir & Stone, 2012, p.10). Furthermore, the

traditional relationship between the administrators and counselors has always been strained, with the view that the administrators have not valued the role that the school counselor could play in terms of developing the students.

The same study notes that “the assignment of non-counseling activities suggested that the role of the school counselor and the school counseling program were poorly defined and not valued by the school administration” (2011, p.11). In this manner, it is apparent that historically, there has often been the undervaluing of the role played by the counselor. However, it is important to discuss how this has developed in modern society, before discussing the current type of relationship held between the administrators and school guidance counselors.

### Modern Role of Guidance Counselor

#### *Association Impacts*

As well as discussing the historical role of the guidance counselor and how it developed over the past century, it was also vital to consider the modern role of the guidance counselor for the purposes of this work. A major change occurred in 1997 when the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published national standards for school counseling programs. These are what “the ASCA believes to be the essential elements of a quality and effective school counseling program” (Campbell & Dahir,

1997, p.3). The changes in American society within the last four decades have placed an increased demand on schools to ascertain that students' needs are being met. Burnham and Jackson (2000) stated that, “the role and function of the school counselor has been redefined and broadened through the years. The services provided have characteristically changed and developed in response to various societal events and influences” (p.42). This supports the assumption that the varied groups that are incorporated into the school setting have multiplied extensively and the role of guidance counselors has broadened tremendously.

Boyer (1988) and Humes (1982), in describing a school counselor, said that in most high schools, counselors are not only expected to advise students about college, they are also asked to police for drugs, keep records of dropouts, reduce teenage pregnancy, check traffic in the halls, smooth out the tempers of irate parents, and give aid and comfort to battered and neglected children. School counselor are expected to do what our communities, our homes, and our churches have not been able to accomplish, and if they cannot, we condemn them for failing to fulfill our high-minded expectations (Boyer, 1988, p.3). Ironically, the most recent form of public law once again omitted reform efforts in relation to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2011. Counseling organizations, such as the ASCA, are working diligently to push for legislation and move toward the implementation of initiatives to increase the school counseling profession at the school district level. The ASCA National Model: A Framework for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (ASCA, 2003) is what is being promoted.

The ASCA Model, its abbreviated name, specifically emphasizes school counselors' practices of data usage, program evaluation, advocacy, collaboration, systemic change, and leadership, all elements vital to a school counseling program that will fruitfully effect school improvement and student achievement (ASCA, 2003). This model is the first framework of its kind and is endorsed, published, and marketed by ASCA, the largest organization representing more than 25,000 school counselors (Mason, 2011). The literature poses the question is secondary school guidance in the United States in peril? Some of the data suggests that it is positively in jeopardy.

### ***Moving Forward***

The path forward is for “secondary counselors to assume the initiative in stimulating their communities (and states) to assist in revitalizing their guidance programs” (Peer, 1985). Here it is apparent that there is a need for school guidance counseling to be viewed as an integral part of the school system and that this is gradually occurring through recent legislation. It is argued by a recent study by Guindon (2010) that the school counselor has to find their place within the overall mission of the school. This mission is to “educate, with student achievement being the primary focus of the school and one of the major concerns for the community. School counselors support the school mission by implementing various services that target academic, career, and personal needs of students” (p.92). Moreover, it is felt that in modern society, the “professional school counselors implement a thorough and detailed school counseling

program focuses on the promotion and development of the achievement of all students in the school” (Guindon, 2010, p.92). With this viewpoint in mind, it is apparent that the counselor within the school offers a vital and fundamental service for students, helping them develop their needs and providing support as they pass through the education system.

This importance of the role of the guidance counselor is supported by a range of studies. Sharma (2002) indicates that counseling in the form of a guidance program is one of the most vital aspects within a school setting, with the belief that the development of a student’s personal and emotional wellbeing can directly impact on the level of achievement and maturation that they reach while in the education system. This view is supported by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) with the belief that school guidance counselors can help to develop partnerships with families and communities, enabling a more positive approach to the educational development of the individual student. In this way, the literature underlines the importance of the role of the school counselor and the way in which it has become an integral part of the education system in modern society.

### ***Culturally Responsive Counselor***

The literature has indicated that the need for culturally responsive counselors is a growing concern. In the Hispanic realm, and notably in areas where there is a significant amount of increase in the Hispanic students, it is crucial. Counselors need to be able to

make certain that the needs of these individuals are being met. The culture tends to hinder the relationships between the counselor and the student/client. There are very specific morals that are prominent in Hispanic society; if these values are not acknowledged it is almost impossible for change to take place. Direct one-to-one contact can help establish good relationships and if the counselors have a mastery of the language that and like ethnicities will assist in building a trust between the counselor, the parents, and the student (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006).

#### Campus Administrative Leader

The literature is clear in how it has tried for many years to identify the role of the principal; trying to discern how they spend their time and what they do throughout the day. The role of administrator is a one of leader. The head of the campus makes decisions that impact all facets of the campus. Throughout the literature it is referenced that the administrator of the campus makes all the crucial decisions. Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford (2006) state that “in most countries it is the principal who is regarded as the key educational leader and the one person in a school that has the most opportunity to exercise leadership” (2006, p. 371). Some decisions may be made with the help of committees or departments, but for the most part the responsibility and success or failure of initiatives or implemented policies lies with the campus administrator.

### *Qualities of Successful Administrators*

One of the most important criteria to determine success as an administrator is the ability to “create change and develop policy while empowering others” (Catano & Stronge, 2006, p. 225). In order to be successful in a job, that requires so much; including multitasking, prioritizing, organization, and knowledgeable about current educational trends, administrators must be diligent and committed to excellence in education. Administrative leaders of the campus must first and foremost have a clear mission and vision statement to focus on. The principal should set attainable and rigorous goals, assesses the campus progress regularly and encourage creativity amongst the staff and of themselves. (Fredericks & Brown, 1993)

The literature has identified that there are gaps in the training of quality administrators. This is a concern and many programs have begun to emerge in the area of appropriate training and development needed to support and prepare administrators. However, Jackson and Kelley (2002) indicate that regardless of “these efforts many preparation programs continue to lack the curricular coherence, rigor, pedagogy, and structure to provide the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to produce a large supply of exceptional school and district leaders” (2002, p. 193). This could definitely contribute to the inability of administrators to make the best choices for their campus counselors.

## *Administrator Responsibilities*

It is not easy to generate a list of responsibilities that administrators must be held accountable for. Catano and Stronge (2006) state that “defining the role of the school principal is a difficult task because of a complex set of job responsibilities, skills necessary to perform the job, and values” (2006, 225). As the campus leader, the job placement and duties and responsibilities are funneled via the administrator’s office. This is where there is significant concern in relation to the duties of counselors. The literature indicates that there are many administrators that are not aware of the duties and responsibilities that should be delegated to the counselor’s office.

The literature has seen little change through the years. Fredericks and Brown (1993) generalized some of the responsibilities of the campus administrator:

Principals spend time on school management, personnel, student activities, and program development. Principals believe it is appropriate to spend time on these issues. However, they also felt that more time should be spent on personnel, program development, and planning and that too much time was spent on student behavior and district office issues. The concern appeared to be that the principals’ time was too heavily driven by job demands rather than educational goals. (p.10)

The literature supports that the administrator is responsible for personnel. In relation to the study and the role of the counselor, administrators must advocate for their counselors and the counseling program; the leadership must begin at the district level. If the movement toward transformation is not supported it will not be achieved and

maintained (Lopez, 2002). The leading entities; the College Board, the NASSP and the ASCA agree that the success of a counseling program in relation to educational administration begins at the campus level with full support of administration and equitable involvement (Dahir et al., 2010).

### ***Culturally Responsive Administrator***

An integral component of this study rests on the active component of a culturally responsive administrator at the campus. The effectiveness of the administrator definitely impacts the effectiveness of the counselor. The culturally responsive administrator is vital in this research. In a border region, such as the one in this study, the administrator must be of the mindset that all campuses can achieve equity and excellence. Scheurich & Skrla (2003) clearly write a goal that should be achievable:

we are aiming to create schools in which virtually all students are learning at high academic levels. We are aiming for schools in which there are no persistent patterns of differences in academic success or treatment among students grouped by race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language. In other words, we are aiming to foster schools that literally serve each and every student really well. (p. 2)

In a study by Murakami, Garza, & Merchant (2012) define the culturally responsive administrator “by the way the principal manifests his or her advocacy for the children he or she serves” (p. 66).

As it relates to the context of this study, the culturally responsive administrator is a critical component in the academic success of school districts such as those which are part of this study. Gonzalez (2009) is very straightforward in her research. She states that “Heightened expectations are non-negotiable and administrators must assume full responsibility for ensuring academic programs are implemented and integrated into the classrooms serving Latino students” (2009, p. 487).

Taking into account these three important areas in quality administration, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between school administrators and counselors; aiming to discover the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor. Also to be included in the discussion is the counseling issues that exist that the paired administrator and counselor perceive are not being addressed due to their working relationship. Lastly, how administrators and counselors perceive each other’s positive and negative support system that is currently in place. These are the major questions posed in this research study and it is believed that the analysis of the relationship between school administrators and counselors apparent in the literature will enable this discussion to be further enhanced.

### The Relationship Between School Administrator and Counselor

The main focus of this record of study is on the development of the relationship between school administrators and counselors. Having placed the discussion of school

guidance counseling in context by looking at the history and the modern role of the secondary guidance counselor and the administrator, it is now imperative to highlight the opinions of the literature towards this working relationship. First, it is important to note that there is often confusion concerning the role of the counselor in the school and this can lead to disappointment on behalf of both the administrator and other parties involved. It is noted that “when schools fail to clearly define the counselor’s role, school administrators, parents with special interests, teachers or others may feel their agenda ought to be the school counseling program’s priority. The results often lead to confusion and criticism when they are disappointed” (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994, p.1). Due to this, it is important to consider how the relationship between the school administrator and school counselor has developed in individual situations, mainly because it is the decision of the school administrator to assign the role of the counselor and dictate the ability of the counselor to be successful in this role.

This traditional level of confusion has led to the development of the ASCA national standards, as alluded to earlier. The American School Counseling Association (2003) underlined that the nature of the relationship between the administrator and counselor had often led to the counselor being asked to complete non-counseling tasks and activities, reducing their effectiveness within the school setting. A study by Blakely (2009) indicated that:

at most schools, administrators determine the role of the counselor, suggesting the school counselor’s functions are often incongruent with state and national role statements. It is important that school counselors and school administrators are aware of the school counselor roles mandated by ASCA national standards

and the state (p.15).

Therefore with this in mind, it is clear that there is a high level of importance placed upon the relationship between the school counselor and the school administrator and the views on this relationship are discussed in this main section of the review of the empirical literature.

The literature suggests that principals have expanded their level of information on the school counseling program and the role of the school counselor through their training and through current research (Coy, 1999). It is believed that rural administrators must wear many hats. Their duties range across the spectrum; from lunch duty, grant writing, supervision, teacher appraisal, and campus budgeting. It is understood that their rural campus numbers are smaller, however all functions of campuses must be maintained. There are rarely any specialized assistants, so all campus responsibilities must fall on the lead administrator. Reynolds and Cheek (2002) clearly state, 'administrators inherently have power by reason of their position and can be key to a program's success or failure due to their ability to control the outcome of budgets and job responsibilities' (p. 91).

Keeping this in mind, research supports the view that principals are still very hesitant in delegating the duties that have been incorrectly assigned to counselors, to others such as assistant principals or deans. This continues to adversely allow counselors

to work more effectively with students (Reynolds & Cheek, 2002). McCandless (1975) is accurate in his opinion when he states the success of a given counseling plan hinges upon the collaboration and integrative efforts of counselors and administrators. This is a crucial aspect of the relationship and one that has existed since the 1975 study.

It is desirable that these groups share common perceptions of the functions of the guidance services at least to the degree necessary, for the program to function efficiently and effectively. School counselors are expected to add to the bottom line of school progression and ultimate success. High academic success is expected by the educational community, including the counselors (Dahir et al., 2010).

Counselors must be their own advocates. It is apparent that many times, administrators are not knowledgeable about the requirements or recommendations from the state. Counselors must educate their administrators, if they want to see a positive change in their duties, responsibilities, and how they can create and sustain a beneficial comprehensive guidance program. These needs for education highlights how poorly prepared a large percentage of administrators are in the field of counseling and how important the role of the guidance counselor is in the individual schools. This view is supported by a recent study by Johnson, Rockind and Ott (2010). Their study focused on why guidance counseling in schools needs to change. Their study announced that their findings showed that:

high school guidance counselors carry heavy student loads and are expected to perform a wide range of other duties. It is suggested that as a first step, schools improve student-counselor ratios, relieve counselors of other duties, and improve counselors' preparation and training. More important, the work suggests that "the time has arrived when educators should ask more basic questions about how schools can help students plan for the future and the nature of the role that school personnel can play in this development (p.74).

This study, completed as recently as 2010, indicates that there are a number of aspects wrong about the relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor, particularly when the school counselor is often given tasks that do not fall inside their official remit. This means that important and crucial time for students is taken up with other menial tasks and this reduces the overall effectiveness of the school counselors and the guidance program in general. This hints at the fact that there is a lack of understanding held by the school administrator as to the precise role that the school guidance counselor has and this needs to change, hence the suggestion for planning, student-counselor ratios and training for all staff on the role of the counselor within the system.

Counselors, even those with the most experience, can become frustrated with the continued lack of support from administrators; which are not utilizing counselors in the manner that is deemed most appropriate. Counselors are frequently required to complete a slew of clerical jobs, non-counseling related activities, and assume many administrative roles (Reynolds & Cheek, 2002). Most frustrating and contradictory is the assumption of disciplinary duties. Counselors, many times, are asked to function in a

disciplinarian role on the campus. This is extremely contradictory of their role. It is crucial that administrators not place counselors in that position (Monteir-Leitner, Asner-Self, K.K., Milde, C., Leitner, D.W., & Skelton, D., 2006).

Henderson (1989) was correct when she stated that, “making a commitment to change is no small task. Change requires that some hard decisions be made, involves work, and takes time” (p.31). One of the most difficult things in an effective leadership is to implement change when there is a need for change. Grady (2004) notes that, “change is a natural and constant part of organizational life” (p.62). Change can enrich the organizational life and the instructional life of a school. Principals who perfect the art of implementing and managing change have the ability to create positive learning environments (Grady, 2004).

To be successful, the literature underlines that there needs to be wholesale change in the way that the school guidance counselor and guidance program is viewed within the school system. A study by Gysbers and Henderson (2012) underlines that the role of the school administrator is key in developing a system that places the counselor at the center of the program, rather than having the counselor constantly involved in tasks that detract from their primary role. Moreover, their work focuses on providing an established structure for the improvement of a school’s guidance program, by identifying five key phases that the school needs to go through. These stages include thorough planning, designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing through reflection (2012,

p.21).

In this way, it is highlighted that although the relationship between the school administrator and school guidance counselor is important, it is also necessary to have a key structure in place that can help to increase the ability of the counselor to conduct their role effectively. An early study by McCandless (1975) underlined that the need for this form of structure and positive relationship was vital to the overall success of the school guidance counselor. His view was accurate in the opinion where he states the success of a given counseling plan hinges upon the collaboration and integrative efforts of counselors and administrators. It is desirable that these groups share common perceptions of the functions of the guidance services at least to the degree necessary, for the program to function efficiently and effectively.

When considering rural schools, such as those that will be used in the primary study in South Texas, it is important to discuss the nature of the challenges and difficulties that face these specific schools, rather than combining urban and rural schools together. The literature assesses that rural schools have a range of difficulties (perhaps more difficulties) as opposed to others. The most evident has to do with financial limitations. The fact that there are limited resources, which can be utilized to implement a comprehensive school counseling program, is a major deterrent. Studies indicate that this is a common reoccurring problem in most rural school settings. Many counselors share the same concerns in the rural settings. They are concerned with their

salary, the number of days in their contract and the high percentage of time that is used for non-guidance activities (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton, 2006).

As well as the viewpoints from the literature concerning the school counseling program and the difficulties that exist, it is also necessary to present a consideration of the perceptions held by counselors and administrators towards the working relationship. One earlier study in a similar area to that of this current work was completed by Armstrong, MacDonald & Stillo (2008). This is crucial because it is underlined by the study that because school administrators “directly impact school counselors’ roles, programs, priorities and directions, the counselor-principal relationship is a key factor in counselor effectiveness...In most schools, principals have the power to stop change and define school counseling programs” (2008, p.3).

Furthermore, their study was completed for reasons that underpinned this current work, with the view that if school administrators “lack understanding of appropriate counselor roles, they may unintentionally move counseling programs into quasi administrative directions that fail to capitalize on the talents and training of school counselors in promoting student growth and development” (p.3). Due to the similarity of this study to the one undertaken in this work, it is necessary to discuss the findings from the earlier work in detail in this review of the literature. Their study assessed a range of principals and counselors from both elementary and secondary schools and

conducted surveys and questionnaires. Their work found that there were key implications for both counselors and school administrators.

When considering the relationship from the point of view of the counselor, it was important that the counselor should be more assertive, define their own role clearly to the school administrator and that they should communicate clearly “with the administrator about the goals and achievements of the counseling program” (2008, p.18). Furthermore, a key finding was the view that school counselors and principals are:

not trained to work collaboratively with each other. This finding indicates that approximately half of these counselors believed they were not trained adequately in this area. Given the importance of collaboration between principal and counselor in today’s schools, more emphasis should be placed on this critical aspect of the principal-counselor relationship (p.18).

Finally, it was also addressed that the school administrators had a number of key areas to work on. These included the need to work on the relationship and collaboration issues with counselors. Another study in the same field argued that “counselor education programs also need to collaborate with educational leadership programs to encourage dialogue between the two groups of trainees, increase understanding and provide meaningful experiences prior to graduation in which future counselors and principals are able to listen to each other and discuss critical aspects of this vital relationship” (Shofner & Briggs, 2001, p.2). It is also noted though that school administrators are beginning to understand the important role that the counselor can have in the school education system.

Work by Zalaquett (2005) and Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) on elementary school principal and high school principal perceptions of counselor roles (respectively) underlines that “school counselors positively affect the academic, social, and personal development of their students. In addition, most principals reported they would recommend school counseling as a career choice to others” (2012, p.89). In this manner, the perception of school administrators appears to be improving towards the positive role that the guidance counselor can have an effective role in the school organization. This hints at the fact that the administrators are more likely to have developed a positive relationship with their guidance counselors in the past few years, though the small sample population in this current study may or may not be able to emphasize this through its findings.

Through these results, it is clear that the relationship between the counselor and the administrator has a number of difficulties including the differing perceptions of each party involved, a lack of experience working together, a lack of training in collaboration and different expectations of the role that the school counselor plays in the school environment. This work aims to use this information to help assess the impact of the working relationship and the challenges that exist in a rural southern Texas region.

## Border Region

This study included school districts from the Lone Star Education Service Center. This area has unique characteristics. The area is an agricultural mainstay in the area of citrus and vegetable products. The production of livestock is also a prominent factor. Even with these large production areas, the region is considered one of the poorest in the nation. The one certain fact of the area is that it is constantly in the midst of the movement of legal and illegal immigration. The language of choice is Spanish; even among many of the Anglo-American residents. The ties to Mexico are very strong, via family that resides a walk away from the bustling downtown in most border towns. (Schmidt, S., Shelley, M. C., Bardes, B. A., Maxwell, W. E., & Crain, E., 2009)

The total enrollment of this border region is 417, 490 students. The area covers a total of 9,771 square miles. The main ethnicity of the students in the area is Hispanic; around 97%. All other ethnicities come in at around 1%. The most common special populations serviced include the Limited English Proficient 35%, Bilingual 26%, and Economically Disadvantaged 85%. Five of the seven counties serviced by the Lone Star ESC, are immediately adjacent to the Mexican border. (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

This border region is dealing with the biggest concern in relation to the Hispanic student. The literature states that “Hispanic/Latino students are at risk for failure in the current American educational system. Only half of Hispanic/Latinos 25 years or older

have completed high school, the populations dropout rate is higher than any other group in the United States and Hispanic/Latino students drop out twice as often as non-Hispanic/non-Latino White students” (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).

### Texas Rural Areas

The state of Texas is comprised of about 24 million individuals. Many of these individuals reside in rural counties. Of the 254 counties in the state of Texas, 177 are identified as rural counties. These counties experience a considerable amount of poverty, as compared to their counterpart metropolitan areas. 18% of children under the age of eighteen were considered poor in 2008. This percentage may be even higher for students that reside in these sparingly populated areas.

An effect of these rural areas that is manifested in children is the presence of social-emotional growth difficulties. The literature indicates that students are negatively impacted due to their instability; 10% tend to be more transient if they live in a rural setting. This leads to difficulty with relationships and academic deficiencies. (McCrary, 2012)

In relation to this study, the Lone Star Education Service Center services seven counties and of those seven counties three are identified as rural counties; 43% of the counties served. Two of the school districts were in two of the rural counties. The other

two were not located in identified rural counties, but their community met the definition of a rural community.

## Summary

In summary, it is possible to underline a number of key factors and findings that developed from this review of the empirical literature. Initially, the review of the literature helped to set the context for the traditional role of the guidance counselor in schools and how this has developed throughout the twentieth century. The review highlighted that the modern difficulties that impact on the effectiveness of the guidance counselor in the school setting have been developed throughout history, with the lack of regulation of the role of the guidance counselor in educational reforms. This appears to have been a major oversight and as such, it has led to the lack of understanding by school administrators concerning the important role that the counselor plays in the school setting.

More recently, studies have been conducted focusing on the perceptions of school counselors and administrators and these have provided important information regarding the way that the relationship has developed. It is clear that challenges remain that impact on the effectiveness of the school guidance counselor. These include lack of financing, the inability of the school administrator to understand the role, the inclusion of extra tasks into their daily work that reduces their time with students, communication

and collaboration have been stunted as well as the lack of an appropriate ratio of counselors to students that have undermined the ability of the student to complete their work and benefit the school in the way intended.

These results will enable this current study to develop a methodology appropriate for the research, especially using the findings from the study by Armstrong, MacDonald & Stillo (2008). This similar study focused on the same research area, albeit not in the same region as this current study and therefore the methodology could be outlined as a potential approach for this current research study. Regardless of this, the results of the review of the literature can be used in the triangulation of the data in Chapters IV and V, allowing for increased levels of reliability and validity when discussing the findings from this most recent work.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### Introduction

The research methodology chapter aimed to outline the key decisions taken regarding the research approach and design for the current work. This methodology underlines the practical solutions created that helped answer the major research aims and questions for this study. This chapter focuses on providing justification for the interview approach selected by the researcher within a phenomenological research paradigm that enabled the study to test the working relationship between secondary administrators and secondary counselors in the predominantly Hispanic rural education setting in South Texas. The chapter provides a discussion of the research paradigm, the mixed methodology used to allow triangulation of the data collected, a presentation of the physical research design, analysis of the schools used and the sample population, limitations and key ethical considerations that were taken when creating the methodology for this study.

#### Research Paradigm

Initially, it was fundamental to the discussion of the research methodology to assess the nature of the research paradigm chosen for this study. The literature underlined that for each study conducted to be effective and considered valid, it was

important for the researcher to decide upon the type of study that was being completed and where it fitted upon the research spectrum. Indeed, it was noted by Maxwell (2005) that one of the ‘most critical decisions that a researcher will take in designing their work are the selection of the paradigm within which they will situate their work’ (2005, p.34). His study defines the research paradigm as “a set of very general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world and how we can understand it, assumptions that tend to be shared by researchers working in a specific field or tradition” (Maxwell, 2005, p.36). Furthermore, it is clear that within the field of education, there are certain paradigms that are most appropriate for research studies (Hatch, 2002). The questions posed by research and the answers that are provided by the results are at the center of the decision in terms of the paradigm to be used within any given research study.

The two major paradigms that exist are the positivist and phenomenological paradigms. It is noted by O’Donoghue (2007) that research in education is often linked with phenomenology. His work stresses that “it needs to be recognized that phenomenological research cannot accommodate research questions where one is searching for sure-fired solutions to specific problems. The latter search tends to be the domain of those working within a positivist paradigm” (2007, p.181). This statement by O’Donoghue highlights that the majority of the research that takes place in an educational setting tends to be phenomenological in its nature. Positivism is a paradigm that focuses on providing an absolute truth, with the research conducted in a scientific and controlled environment (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). This is different to the majority

of studies within education, particularly due to the reliance on human subjects and the vast differences and number of variables that can impact on the results of any one specific study. Therefore the phenomenological paradigm was adopted for this current study.

As an alternative to positivism, it is underlined that the phenomenological paradigm is “concerned with understanding social conditions through the meaning individuals ascribe to their personal experiences. In essence, phenomenology maintains that there may be several versions of the truth and the version that a researcher adopts will depend upon his or her vantage point” (Krysik & Finn, 2013, p.34). In this way, the phenomenological paradigm is suited to this study because it acknowledges that the working relationship between counselors and school administrators is likely to differ depending on the individuals involved. Further the findings will be subjective and the knowledge of the subject can be furthered during this study but that no absolute truth can be achieved.

### Phenomenological Theory

The ability to disaggregate the written data of principals in their setting and shadow counselors provides a more in-depth insight into the lived experience of the individual. Phenomenological studies allow for a careful description of normal conscious experience of day-to-day life, as each of us experiences them. Schwandt (2007)

elaborates on phenomenology by stating that these phenomena we experience include perception (hearing, seeing, etc.), believing, remembering, deciding, feeling, judging, evaluating, and all experiences of bodily action. Phenomenological descriptions of such things are possible only by turning from things to their meaning, from what is to the nature of what is (p.225).

The research methods of the study will utilize a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The goal is to identify “the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 231).

Qualitative data was collected through personal interviews with secondary school principals and secondary counselors and observations of these individuals. The mixed methods research plan was used to gain meaning and understanding of administrators and counselors perceptions. This approach allowed for a careful description of normal conscious experience of day-to-day life, as each of the participant experiences them. These phenomena that can be experienced include perception (hearing, seeing, etc.), what we believe to be true, how and what we recall, making decisions, exploring feelings, and evaluating, all experiences of bodily action. Phenomenological descriptions allow us to acquire meaning from these various explanations of individuals lived experiences (Taylor, 2002).

In relation to this study, Smith et al. (2009) gave a very good explanation as to the researcher’s motivation, “In everyday life each of us is something of a

phenomenologist insofar as we genuinely listen to the stories that people tell us and insofar as we pay attention to and reflect on our own perceptions” (p. 32, 2009). The qualitative measures sought to discover the perceptions of the administrator and counselor as they related to the research questions provided by the study.

### Mixed Method Approach

Within this phenomenological paradigm, it was also necessary to decide on a methodological approach that could allow the survey to be conducted successfully. The paradigm allowed the researcher to highlight that the perceptions of the participants were only one possible set of results that could be achieved, thereby reducing the validity of the study, albeit in a necessary manner. The positivist paradigm would not have been successful because it would have demonstrated the naivety of the researcher in believing that there was an absolute truth that existed concerning the working relationship between the counselor and the school administrator. However, through the selection of the phenomenological paradigm, it was necessary to choose an approach that would help to reduce the associated limitations of the study, helping to raise the level of validity and reliability of the study.

To discover the attitudes and perceptions of individual guidance counselors and school administrators, it was felt that the most obvious form of approach was that of a qualitative methodology. However, for a number of reasons now discussed, it was felt

that the use of a purely qualitative methodology would introduce significant limitations and would reduce the ability to generalize the results from this current work. Qualitative research is an effective tool in the social science field (Cryer, 2006). Using the forms of qualitative research available, particularly through interviews, observations and case study, researchers are presented with a much greater insight into a specific subject.

However, it is also felt that the time-consuming nature of qualitative research, as well as the amount of data that has to be collected, can often limit this form of research, prevent generalizations from being made and can only assess a tiny fraction of any sample population (Creswell, 2007 & 2009). Therefore, although there was a need for qualitative research, it was not possible to simply just use this form of methodological approach as this would have decreased the value of the findings dramatically.

The researcher introduced the mixed methodological approach because of these findings when analyzing the literature on research approaches. The mixed methods approach is one that aims to combine both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and has become extremely popular in research over the past decade (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The literature defines the mixed methods approach as one that “combines the qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study or multi-phased study...the fundamental principle of mixed methods research is applied that methods should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and no overlapping weaknesses” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003,

p.352). Moreover, it is also stressed by Creswell and Clark (2011) that the mixed method approach helps to remove the limitations associated with single methodological approaches.

When discussing this in practical terms, this can be understood more clearly. The use of qualitative methods only could help to provide in-depth data but ultimately would be limited to a very small population, particularly if the researcher was limited in their resources. However, a study using only quantitative data would not be successful at highlighting the individual perceptions and subtle nuances of the working relationship between the counselor and administrator, especially if a closed question survey was presented as the method of data collection. Therefore, the combination of these approaches helped to achieve generalizable data (through quantitative methods) while also preserving the in-depth analytical ability of the data (through the use of the qualitative methods). For these reasons, the mixed methods approach was adopted for the purposes of this current study.

### Research Design

The use of both the phenomenological paradigm and the mixed methods approach to research allowed the researcher to design a study that was deemed appropriate to the needs of the main aim, research questions and overall subject at hand in this work. Creswell (2009) defines the mixed methods research approach as “an

approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches and the mixing of both approaches in a study” (2009, p. 230).

The physical research design focused on a triangulation of data collection and analysis, leading to a heightened validity of the data within the eyes of the wider literature. The triangulation of data is defined as “the use of different methods of research, sources of data or types of data to address the same research question” (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p.8). To achieve this triangulation, the research used quantitative data collection from the demographic survey presented at the beginning of the interview, the qualitative data collated from the interview process and the qualitative observations made by the researcher concerning the working relationship between the counselors and the school administrators. Furthermore, to ensure that the findings were assessed in relation to the empirical literature, the results were also analyzed in conjunction with the results of the earlier review of the literature (that took place in Chapter II). This utilization of a range of data collation and analysis techniques meant that the findings were assessed using the triangulation method, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the findings (Flick, 2009).

The research design is detailed further in this chapter under separate headings for the interview and observation process. However, it is important to highlight the process that took place. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, mainly

because of limitations associated with personnel resources, time and finances. This meant that it was only possible to conduct the research process in four schools in the South Texas area. In each school, the guidance counselor and principal (school administrator) were interviewed separately while the researcher also made observations regarding the role of the counselor during the school day and the working relationship that existed between the two individuals. The sample population used is discussed below.

### Population

It is vital to describe the population used in this study. The researcher had access to a handful of secondary school administrators in the Lone Star Educational Service Center and therefore this was selected as the area for the sample population. It was decided that secondary school administrators would be the target population due to the predominance of high school counselors, in working collaboratively with them in the secondary setting. The researcher made contact with the secondary principals in the form of a letter. This allowed for a comparison of themes amongst principals' answers and actual day-to-day actions. Lone Star Education Service Center secondary principals were housed on campuses servicing grade levels 7th - 12th grade. There were a total of approximately 145 Lone Star Education Service Center secondary school administrators and the study focused on four schools, using information from the interviews with counselors and principals as well as the observations made by the researcher on the

working relationship.

The four schools provided two participants, enabling the researcher to assess four working relationships between the counselor and principal. The study identified the schools as the Palo Blanco ISD, Nopal ISD, Rio Largo ISD and Sendero ISD. The information below (Table 1), helped the researcher identify its approximate position, the make-up of its students (ethnicity), the percentage of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students at each school, the ages of the students at the school, the level of limited English proficiency and the total number of students enrolled at the school.

Table 1

Background Information on the Schools Involved in the Study

Ind. School District	Count Of Students	Hispanic	White	Economically Disadvantaged	Limited English Proficient	At-Risk	Campus Grades	Ages
Palo Blanco 34 miles SW of Mexico Border	291	97.9	1.4%	83.5%	16.8%	37.1%	7 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	11-18 Years old
Sendero 85 miles East of Mexico Border	361	86.7%	13%	73.1%	4.4%	44%	7 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	11-18 Years old
Rio Largo 44 miles East of Mexico Border	371	93.5%	6.2%	62.8%	7.5%	36.1%	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	14 – 18 Years old
Nopal 75 miles North of Mexico Border	1,512	98.7%	1%	82.6%	2.8%	57.8%	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	11-13 Years old

## The Interview Process

The use of the interview process was an important decision taken by the researcher. It is noted in the literature that interviews are an important and key part of the qualitative or mixed method research approaches. A study by Denscombe (2010) found that interviews were better able to discern information from participants than the closed or open question survey, particularly because the interviewer was often able to change questions or follow up certain lines of inquiry depending on the shape of the interview.

Generally, the research states that participants should be interviewed in a comfortable and familiar location. There should also be a well-established rapport, with the participants. (Smith et al., 2009) This standard was established by the interviewer. Moreover, it was stated that interviews help to ‘provide the researcher with time to probe insights free from distraction, giving them time to express themselves. Further, they can be conducted at different settings and can be used to gather factual data’ (Kolb, 2008, p.151). As well as assessing the advantages, Kolb also underlines a few key disadvantages, including the fact that the use of interviews ‘requires a researcher skilled in interview techniques. The researcher used the mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (surveys, interviews, observations).

Therefore, this led to the inclusion of a brief demographic survey that took place

for all participants before the interview questions were asked. The demographic survey included in the study consisted of nine questions. Three items asked the participants about their personal demographic information (i.e. age, gender, and ethnicity) while four items asked about the participant's education and training in school administration and counseling. The further items asked about the school setting in which they work. The questions included:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your highest post-secondary degree?
5. How many years have you been an administrator/counselor?
6. List your current assignment and previous assignments through your educational career.
7. How many counselors are currently assigned to your campus?
8. How many students are currently enrolled on your campus?
9. What is the ethnic percentage makeup on your campus?

As well as the nine demographic survey questions asked pre-interview, each participant was also asked ten questions during the interview. These ten questions related to the working relationship held between the counselor and the principal. The questions were standardized to ensure that the responses between participants could be

comparable, with the researcher choosing a structured interview process to increase the validity of the findings. The ten interview questions were:

1. Tell me about your working relationship with your campus counselor/administrator.
2. Tell me about any difficulties in your working relationship with your campus counselor/administrator.
3. What do your typical interactions with your counselor(s)/administrator(s) look like?
4. Describe a specific instance when you felt strongly supported by your campus counselor/administrator.
5. Describe a specific instance when you did not feel supported by your campus counselor/administrator.
6. What do you think are the main counseling problems on your campus?
7. If counselors had more time, what would you add to their role?
8. What issues do counselors not have enough time to address?
9. What role do you think the Mexican American culture plays in the working relationship between counselors and administrators?
10. What administrative/counseling challenges arise in a rural Mexican American educational setting? How are they being addressed?

## Observations

The observations were conducted at each of the respective school districts. Emails and phone calls helped to set up the observations. With these interview questions in mind, it was felt that the researcher would be able to gain a detailed assessment of the working relationship between counselors and principals in the four schools in the study. Moreover, to help triangulate the data, the researcher also introduced the observation to be completed by the researcher personally. This focused on whether counselors and administrators confer on a daily basis, what they conferred about, what activities/roles the counselor focused on during their day and what activities/roles did the administrator focus on during the day.

Furthermore, the observations identified if the roles of the two individuals were overlapping, how they overlapped and if there were times where Mexican American students required varied counseling services. The final three observations focused on the limitations evident by the rural setting in relation to counseling services, how many students visited the counselor's office on average per hour and the visible administrative roles that the counselor addressed or handled during the observation period.

Using these three methods of data collection, it was assumed that the researcher would be able to gain enough information to help further the knowledge of the working relationship between school guidance counselors and principals at the secondary

education level within a region of cultural diversity, such as South Texas.

## Data Analysis

The discussion of the method of data analysis is also deemed by the literature to be a vital part of the research process. Hardy and Bryman's (2009) work underlines that the data analysis method is perhaps the most critical stage of the research process, as it attempts to turn raw data into usable findings that can help further the knowledge of a research topic. Furthermore, it has also been outlined that qualitative data findings (such as those received from the interview process and observation) can often be hard to analyze, due to the sheer amount of data received and a difficulty in sifting through the raw data (Boeije, 2009).

Through this, it was important to introduce the method of coding as the central form of data analysis in this study. Coding has been defined as 'the most interesting stage of data analysis. Coding involves further examination of the data sets and subsets and further organizing, manipulating, dissecting and reconnecting the information to create an intricately woven picture of the research phenomenon' (Craig, 2009, p.189). It is also stated by Craig that the use of coding with qualitative data allows the researcher 'to use creativity as a researcher and an expert in creating categories, defining attributes and explaining what took place in the research environment through descriptive storying' (2009, p.189). In this manner, the use of coding provides the researcher with

the ability to control the raw data and ensure that it can be transformed into usable data sets for the purpose of the study.

Therefore, all data was categorized and placed into thematic codes. General themes were grouped and the data was disaggregated. This process is generally referred to as thematic analysis. Boyatzis (1998) elaborates that ‘thematic analysis enables scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations’ (1998, p. 5). Member checking and triangulation were also utilized by the researcher. These two processes allowed for the researcher to determine trustworthiness of the study. The component of member checking is another strategy through which researchers tried to ensure the trustworthiness of their research. It entails the incorporation of participants in the data analysis process. It affords them the opportunity to read, elaborate, and give feedback on the findings. It helps the researcher determine if the data is similar to the participants lived experiences (Curtin & Fossey, 2007) Tuckett (2005) states, some writers will define member checking as a ‘process of confirming or refuting meaning as ‘sending it back’ to the participants to ensure that what was understood was credible.’ There is not an overwhelming agreement on the value of member checking, some researchers do not feel that it serves a useful purpose.

As highlighted earlier, triangulation in qualitative research assumes that if two or

more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, and types of data collected, or researchers touch on the same end, then the conclusion is more credible. Trustworthiness includes records of numerous data collection methods and a variety of triangulation procedures (Kline, 2008). Often triangulation is used to try and combine data to present a depth that leads to a better understanding of the studied phenomenon. The literature indicates that at times to attain completeness it is just as important to study divergent results to explain certain phenomenon, and generate ideas with data that does not converge (Curtin & Fossey, 2007).

When assessing the data collection procedure, it was initially felt that the Lone Star Education Service Center secondary school administrators should be mailed a questionnaire. However, it was subsequently deemed important for the interview process to take precedence and therefore each school was mailed the consent forms after contact from the researcher. This then led to the ability of the researcher to make appointments with counselors and principals, ensuring that the interview process could take place. The surveys were integrated into the interview process. Upon review of both types of studies, it was felt that the most appropriate study was the mixed methods study. The qualitative study lends itself to a more thorough explanation and elaboration of the questions but it was necessary to compliment this with quantitative findings as well to help augment the findings.

## Coding

Before the data was analyzed for the purposes of this study, the researcher transcribed the interviews of each participant into the computer immediately (within a day and no more than two days after the interview has occurred to ensure evidence of quality), as well as the observations that took place. In this record of study, the researcher utilized a computer-based (Microsoft program) to facilitate the process of storing, organizing, analyzing, categorizing and making sense of the data. Indeed, Creswell (2014) refers to this process as ‘organizing the material into chunks or segments of text and assigning a word or phrase to the segment in order to develop a general sense of it’ (p. 241). The analysis of this data in the research involved strategies such as open coding (assigning code to pieces of data), axial coding (grouping the open codes), and selective coding (developing a core category) (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the researcher provided transcript reviews after transcribed interviews for each participant to check to ensure validity and accuracy for the interpretation of the data.

The investigator also used open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify, classify themes, and patterns. This process was used for each individual transcript review; so each transcription was treated separately and categorized for the analysis (Merriam, 2002). When categorizing the data, the researcher identified themes that served as subcategories. This process continued until researcher identified and labeled all relevant themes. Then, they were compared to each other and reported with a

qualitative narrative, ‘use the wording from participants’ (Creswell, 2009, p. 194), which allowed the reader to interpret the responses of both the counselors and the principals used in the study.

The final step of the data analysis involved the methodological triangulation approach which consisted of analyzing multiple data sources from the interviews, the use of demographic data collated through the pre-interview surveys and the observations made by the researcher when in each individual school. Afterward, feedback was also provided to enhance credibility and validity.

### Limitations

When considering this study from an objective standpoint, it was apparent that there were a number of limitations associated with the work. It should be pointed out before these limitations are discussed though that often the existence of limitations can be a positive development. Shipman (1997) noted that the existence of limitations occurs in any research study, with all researchers held by some form of boundary in their attempt to discover and further knowledge of a particular subject. These limitations can occur through a lack of knowledge or a lack of resources that can prevent the researcher from attempting too much. Rather, it is thought that it is more effective to focus on a small and achievable target within a research study than try to attempt too much (or too broad an aim) and fail (Cryer, 2006). With this point made, it was evident that this study

had limitations due to its sample size and the methods selected in achieving the data necessary to present conclusions.

The study's main aim was to further the knowledge of the relationship between the principal and the guidance counselor within secondary education in the United States. However realizing the limitations, the study focused on a small area in South Texas, aiming to develop knowledge on the impact of the Hispanic cultural influence on this relationship and how it had manifested itself in this local region. Therefore, the use of four school districts (eight participants) meant that the findings were localized in their circle of influence, although the research did also suggest possible challenges for the successful development of the working relationship on a wider scale. However, the reliance on qualitative research data for the most part (although some quantitative data was collected) and the small sample size meant that the findings were limited. Moreover, it should be noted that the results only reflect the opinion of eight participants in four schools and this does not provide a fair reflection of the entire geographic area of South Texas. Therefore, it is clear that further research is needed on the subject. However, the research has helped to fill a gap in the empirical literature and has shed light on this situation, the cultural influence and the overall challenges faced in the development of the successful working relationship. The findings from this study; while not conclusive could be used by others to help further enhance the knowledge on the subject.

Other limitations include the fact that only one researcher worked on the project, meaning that the data selection, creation of categories and the analysis findings were completed by one individual. This may have led to a certain amount of subjectivity in the analysis, although the researcher tried to be objective throughout. This is a great benefit of using the phenomenological paradigm, because it highlighted that the findings would represent the perceptions of individuals involved in the study and not an absolute truth. Despite these limitations, it was assumed that the results of the study could help to further the knowledge of the role of the guidance counselor and the potential challenges that exist in the working relationship between them and school administrators.

### Ethical Considerations

As well as covering the limitations of the study, it was also important to outline the key ethical considerations taken by the researcher before the work was conducted. For any research study, this is important but it is known as particularly pertinent for research based within the education system, where studies might refer to students that are still children for legal purposes. Within the discussion of work with children, even when children are not primary participants (or even any form of participant) in the study, it is necessary to take a number of precautions to ensure that the civil liberties of children and the participants involved are not placed in jeopardy. It is noted that general research ethical standards 'state that researchers are ethically required to protect the

confidentiality of both the participants and the data' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p.116). This is an important consideration and meant that at all times, the researcher had to ensure that any personal information was not presented that could lead to the identification of the participants in the study.

Several precautions were taken by the researcher to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout the study. When detailing information about the participants and the schools involved in the study, no direct information was revealed about the location of the school, the names of participants or any student names, meaning that only generalized information was presented. This information (age, gender, experience) meant that it was possible for the researcher to highlight the level of expertise and key demographic information of the participants without giving away any information that could lead to their identification. This anonymity and confidentiality was important because of the need to gain the trust of the participants, as well as the belief that participants are more likely to be truthful when commenting on contentious issues if their personal information is kept private and they are protected under a confidentiality agreement (Denscombe, 2010).

Therefore, participants were assured of their identity protection, with the researcher keeping the data encrypted on a computer that will then be destroyed as per Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Furthermore, all participants were informed that up until the publication of the research, they were able to withdraw from

the study at any time and all information regarding their participation would be removed. To counter this need for anonymity, participants were given codenames, located in Table 2. For example, the counselor at the Palo Blanco ISD was codenamed Mr. Melo.

Table 2

Codes for Participants on the Study

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Codename</b>
Palo Blanco ISD Counselor	Mr. Melo
Palo Blanco ISD Administrator	Mrs. Alaniz
Nopal ISD Counselor	Mrs. Vela
Nopal ISD Administrator	Dr. Valdez
Sendero ISD Counselor	Ms. Soliz
Sendero ISD Administrator	Mrs. Garcia
Rio Largo ISD Counselor	Mrs. Cano
Rio Largo ISD Administrator	Mr. Saenz

The use of codenames for participants ensures that the findings are easy to follow and also meant that the participants did not have to worry about any information being provided about their identity. Any discussion of students was kept to a general discussion with no personal information about any particular student provided, thereby in keeping with research-standard ethical procedures concerning research in an educational setting (Shipman, 1997). Also, no students were used as participants in this study and all participants were over the age of research consent.

## Summary

In summary, the researcher developed a certain type of methodological approach that would allow the researcher to understand the major difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor, the existence of potential counseling issues that the paired administrator and counselor perceived were not being addressed due to their working relationship, how the paired administrator and counselor perceived each other's 'positive and negative support system that was in place and the impact that the Mexican American culture had on the working relationship between the administrators and counselors in the study. These main aims were targeted through the use of a mixed methodological approach set within a phenomenological theory paradigm. The study used interviews, brief quantitative surveys and qualitative observations in four schools, using eight participants (four guidance counselors and four principals) to help provide the necessary data. Following the data collection, the results were assessed using a coding process to help arrive at the findings that are presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### Overview

This chapter presents the main findings from the research study, conducted using the mixed methodological approach and combining the qualitative interview and observation techniques with the quantitative survey format for the pre-interview process. The presentation of the findings reports a synthesis of the results in a stand-alone format, before the discussion takes place in Chapter V that introduces the results within the context of the findings from the review of the empirical literature. This chapter also introduced the possible demographic factors that may have impacted on the findings produced by the study. When analyzing the demographic data for both the participants and the schools in the study, it was apparent that there were certain issues, such as years of experience, gender and age (for the participants) and student to counselor ratios and ethnicity of students (for the schools) that could have had an impact on the results. Therefore, these demographic differences are highlighted and discussed at length before the presentation of the research data in full. This allows for the reader to become fully aware of the situation of this study and the possible independent variables that existed as the study was being completed.

The study aimed to answer four key research questions. These questions included the major difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the

administrator and counselor, the existence of potential counseling issues that the paired administrator and counselor perceived were not being addressed due to their working relationship, how the paired administrator and counselor perceived each others' positive and negative support system that was in place and the impact that the Mexican American culture had on the working relationship between the administrators and counselors in the study.

The study gathered data via interviews and observations of secondary school administrator and secondary school counselors. To identify the procedures currently in place that determines the assignments of counselors, the effectiveness of their guidance and counseling services and the actual responsibilities for guidance counselors at their specific campus. The main goal of the study was to take the perceptions' of the administrators into account and identify the gaps that were present and identify the themes that arise at the secondary campus level in relation to job duties and descriptions of secondary school counselors. The current literature indicated that in order for guidance and counseling programs to be effective they must be developmental and comprehensive in nature. Three key factors that contributed to this effectiveness included a clear definition and understanding of the counselor's role, administrative support at the campus level, and open communication and trust between the stakeholders.

Using these three key factors, the researcher was able to code the data from the

interview process and establish key themes that emerged. This chapter focuses on the presentation of the data in terms of communication, support and understanding of the role of the counselor in the secondary education system. These three themes, found in Table 3 below, make up the subheadings for the presentation of the data in this chapter.

Table 3

Themes Emerging from the Data

Theme	Description	Evidence
1	Systematic Support	Findings generally positive Length of relationship led to this positivity Informal support and friendship often led to friendly delegation Participants planning curriculum together (not part of counselor role) Appeared as though principals took advantage of the close bond that had developed
2	Communication Conundrum	Strong levels of communication at an informal level Lack of formal meetings so counselors never raised the issue of the lack of understanding of their role Daily communication but not effective
3	Understanding of the Counselor's Role	Lack of understanding in relation to the appropriate tasks of a counselor Lack of knowledge led to development of issues that did not allow counselors to work effectively with students No transparency of role Staff unaware of assignment of inappropriate tasks assigned to counselor. Continued assignment of new tasks to counselor as opposed to delegating to other personnel.

Within these subheadings, the interview results and findings from the observations are provided. Prior to this presentation of the main qualitative findings, the chapter also presents the demographic and quantitative data from the participants in the study.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceptions of the working relationship between secondary school administrative leaders and secondary school counselors in a predominantly Hispanic, small, rural educational setting in a U.S. - Mexico border region in South Texas, using the four major research questions as a way of breaking this down into an analysis that could take place in a suitable manner.

### Background Demographic Information

Prior to the presentation and discussion of the results concerning the working relationship between the school counselors and school administrators in this study, it is necessary to underline the key demographic information that could have an impact on the results. The table below (Table 4) presents the demographic data on the eight participants in the study. This demographic data helped in the quantitative component of the study. These factors helped to give the study a more robust feel. These qualities helped the researcher to get a firm grasp of his participants, and allowed the researcher to make mental connections, when compile his data.

During the pre-interview survey participants were asked to disclose their age, gender, level of education, ethnicity and years of experience in their current employment. Although this personal information was released, the researcher ensured that confidentiality and anonymity was afforded the participants and there was no way that the information could be traced to the individuals. The information is coded using the codenames for each participant that is different from their actual names. As indicated below, the school counselor working at the Palo Blanco ISD is codenamed ‘Mr. Melo’, while the school administrator at the Nopal ISD is named as ‘Dr. Valdez’.

Table 4

Demographic Data on Participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Years Experience</b>
Palo Blanco ISD Counselor Mr. Melo	44	Male	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	12
Palo Blanco ISD Administrator Mrs. Alaniz	48	Female	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	13
Nopal ISD Counselor Mrs. Vela	56	Female	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	8
Nopal ISD Administrator Dr. Valdez	48	Female	White/Hispanic	Doctorate	15
Sendero ISD Counselor Ms. Soliz	56	Female	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	15
Sendero ISD Administrator Mrs. Garcia	50	Female	White	Masters Degree	13
Rio Largo ISD Counselor Mrs. Cano	61	Female	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	32
Rio Largo ISD Administrator Mr. Saenz	51	Male	White/Hispanic	Masters Degree	20

When looking at the table, certain pieces of information stood out. Initially, perhaps the most important aspect was that of gender. There were 6 female participants compared to 2 male participants (with gender evaluation not possible for males because of the fact that there was only 1 male counselor and 1 male administrator, meaning that male comparison between positions was not possible. However, it was felt that gender comparison between male and female responses could take place, as well as a comparison of the female responses to the interview questions. It should be acknowledged that the gender divide here was not necessarily representative of the wider school counselor and school administrator make-up, at either a local or state level. A similar study by Armstrong et al., (2008) used a 50/50 gender divide in their study and this was deemed as reflecting an appropriate gender divide in the positions at a national level. Therefore, the results achieved in this study may not necessarily represent the wider population of school counselors and administrators, especially because of the fact that eight participants were interviewed and two of these were male.

As well as identifying gender as a possible independent variable, it was also important to consider age and ethnicity. The age range was quite varied, especially for the counselors in the study. The ages of the four counselors were 44, 56, 56, and 61, while the ages of the school administrators were 48, 48, 50 and 51. In this way, the school administrators were all of an approximate age (around the age of 50) but the counselors varied widely in their ages from 44-61 years of age. This could have impacted on their experience within the school setting, levels of training, experience,

historical relationships with school administrators and other factors that might have impacted their responses to the questions. It was vital that the researcher, when analyzing, took this into account and made allowances for this possible independent variable. The age range of the participants could lead to different responses and attitudes, particularly since the guidance brought in by ASCA occurred in recent years. While considering age, it was also important to discuss ethnicity.

The study focused on providing a detailed analysis of the working relationship between secondary counselors and secondary administrators, investigating the perceptions of this relationship from interviews and observations of participants in a predominantly Hispanic, rural educational setting in a region in South Texas. Therefore, the ethnicity of those involved was also determined to be a possible factor in the responses provided, particularly in such an area as South Texas where there is a great variety of ethnicities. When analyzing the responses from the participants though, it was felt that the ethnicity factor would not necessarily play a large role, mainly because seven of the eight participants in the study were the same ethnicity (White / Hispanic) while the remaining individual was White. The school administrator at the red school was the only participant of White ethnicity, with the rest a mixture of White and Hispanic. Therefore it was believed that the ethnicity was not a primary factor in the differences of opinion and the types of response received in the study.

There were other demographic factors that could have played a part in the types

of responses received and the attitudes displayed by the participants in the study. Education generally and the highest level of education received more specifically was considered by the researcher. However, in a similar way to that of ethnicity, there was not a great deal of variance. Every participant had a Master's Degree and one participant, Dr. Valdez, had achieved her doctorate. The final demographic factor though could have a large impact on opinion of the individual participants and there was a wide range in the results. The participants were asked to provide the number of years' experience that they held in the position. It was in this area that the participants displayed the greatest range value.

The least amount of experience held by any of the participants was that of the counselor at the Nopal ISD. She had eight years' experience whereas the other counselors had 12 (Mr. Vela), 15 (Ms. Soliz) and 32 (Mrs. Cano) years respectively. This underlined a wide range of experience, although it was clear that none of the participants were particularly new in their position. For the school administrators, the gap was not as wide but there was still a considerable difference between the four candidates.

The lowest levels of experience were held by the Palo Blanco ISD administrator (Mrs. Alaniz) and the Sendero ISD administrator (Mrs. Garcia) at 13 years each. Following this, the Nopal ISD administrator (Dr. Valdez) had 15 years' experience and the Rio Largo ISD administrator (Mr. Saenz) had 20 years' experience. In this manner,

it was clear that the participants were well experienced in their position, with the lowest total at eight years still regarded as a relatively large amount of experience. However, the differences between the least and most experiences ranged widely, particularly for counselors and so this may have impacted upon their responses during the interview part of the research.

Having discussed the demographic data concerning the individual participants and reflecting about how there were potential differences between the participants that would be able to influence the overall results of this work, it was also important to underline the demographic data for the schools involved. This was because it was thought that the pressure put on counselors and their working relationship with school administrators could differ dramatically depending on the scale of their workload, the number of students at the school and the ethnic percentage of the student make-up.

The findings from the table (Table 5) that highlight the demographic data for schools show that there are clearly divisions between the schools involved. For example, the information below indicates that although each school had one counselor each, the number of students linked to that counselor varied dramatically. For the most part, the percentages of all three represented were similar, with small variances from one school to another.

Table 5

Demographic Data for Schools (Individual Campuses)

School District	Number of Counselors	Students	Hispanic %	African-American %	White %
Palo Blanco	1	77	90%	2%	8%
Nopal	1	354	95%	1%	4%
Sendero	1	171	99%	0%	1%
Rio Largo	1	126	97%	0%	3%

The student numbers vary greatly and the ratio of students per counselor can be seen to be wide ranging. The Palo Blanco ISD had 1 counselor per 77 students, which was the best and lowest ratio per student for all of the schools in the study. Following this, the Rio Largo ISD had a ratio of 1:126 while the red school had a slightly higher ratio of 1:171. However, these pale in comparison compared to the Nopal ISD that only had 1 counselor for its 354 students. This would suggest that the Nopal ISD counselor (Mrs. Vela) might have responded differently about workload schedules, development of the working relationship with the school administrator and the challenges facing the counseling program as compared to the responses of the Palo Blanco school counselor (Mr. Melo).

The range of ethnicities among students tended to be relatively similar at each of the four schools. Each school had at least 90% Hispanic students and a small number of white students (ranging from 1% to 8%). Only two of the schools had African American students (Palo Blanco and Nopal) and this would have changed the outlook of some of

the participants in the study. Therefore, it was apparent that the schools were relatively similar in terms of their student ethnicity division, but that they varied greatly in the ratio of counselor: student and this latter point could have a dramatic impact on the findings in this work.

### Interview Findings Data

Having assessed the demographic background data and identifying how the results may have varied through independent variables such as age of the participant, level of experience and the nature of the school guidance counseling program, it is now vital to present the main findings from this study. This part of the chapter aims to use the primary data findings from the interviews as much as possible, emphasizing the specific responses provided by small, rural school counselors and school administrators interviewed in the study. This section of the chapter, in aiming to present the results from the interviews, has been divided into specific subsections. This has allowed the researcher to focus on certain elements of the interview process including the level of support given or received by the school counselor from the school administrator, the nature of the communication between counselor and administrator, the understanding at the school of the guidance counselor's role and the difficulties in the relationship that have led to the development of challenges in the position.

Using these headings, the research was able to focus in on the major research

questions posed in the study. These questions included the major difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor, the existence of potential counseling issues that the paired administrator and counselor perceived were not being addressed due to their working relationship, how the paired administrator and counselor perceived each other's' positive and negative support system that was in place and the impact that the Mexican American culture had on the working relationship between the administrators and counselors in the study.

### ***Systematic Support***

The first section details the level of support received by the counselor and received by the school administrator. Part of the reasoning for gaining the perceptions of both the counselor and the school administrator from the same school was that it allowed a comparison not only of other schools from a similar geographic region but it also enabled the researcher to discover whether the two individuals from the same school perceived their individual relationship in the same manner. It was important to note that the participants in the study were mainly positive about their relationship with their respective colleagues.

When asked about the level of support provided and the general working relationship it was clear that most of the participants (both counselors and school administrators) were positive in their perception. The interviews with Mrs. Cano and

Mr. Saenz indicated a strong bond between them. This was perhaps to be expected though due to the long working relationship that the two had experienced in their careers. When asked to describe their general relationship, Mr. Saenz noted that ‘my counselor is my right hand! We have a great working relationship. We provide each other with feedback throughout all aspects of our day. She is a great asset to me and my campus.’ This viewpoint was echoed by Mrs. Cano, with the belief that they had an excellent working relationship, enjoyed great levels of communication and that they worked very well together. These two seemed to highlight that their working relationship was excellent and that there was a great deal of support.

When questioned specifically about the support experienced, Mrs. Cano stated that she felt supported by the Mr. Saenz and that ‘99% of the time we plan and work together. Things are completed in an orderly fashion.’ Moreover, the school administrator seemed perhaps more positive about the working relationship and the support received. As the only male school administrator, he noted that ‘I feel strongly supported at all times. When I question my own judgment I can always get good feedback from her and she is an awesome listener.’ Here it is clear that the two participants had a good relationship, spent a long time working together and provided high levels of support.

The other schools also tended to focus on the positive nature of the working relationship and highlighted that there was a great deal of support. When questioned,

Dr. Valdez stated that the relationship was good and cooperative and Mrs. Vela agreed, noting that they ‘work really closely together and we always plan together’. Moreover, Mrs. Vela could point to specific examples of this high level of support, with the view that the school administrator was helpful in planning different events for the campus.

Mrs. Vela stated that ‘I had wanted to organize two different events for the campus: No Name Calling Week and STAAR Rally. She was extremely supportive of my idea and supported me 100% with monies and personnel to have to very successful events.’ The school administrator at the Nopal ISD, Dr. Valdez, could not think of specific examples but indicated that ‘I always feel much supported by her and I am appreciative of the support.’ Through these examples, it is clear that both the Nopal ISD and Rio Largo experienced a high level of support within the administrator / counselor relationship.

The Sendero ISD participants were relatively new to their role and this was perhaps the most obvious chance to discuss a weak working relationship and a lack of support perceived by the individuals involved. However, although this lack of experience and working relationship was alluded to, it was still believed by the participants that the support was there. Ms. Soliz stated that ‘we have a very good relationship. We always confer on everything. I will not make any changes without her input or approval’ and that a personal experience has brought them close together. The Sendero ISD counselor stressed that ‘my father recently had a stroke...on a personal level she was extremely supportive while I dealt with the illness and getting him situated after his recovery.’ Therefore, from the perception of the Ms. Soliz, Sendero ISD

counselor, the working relationship has developed positively if only during a brief time. Mrs. Garcia, administrator at Sendero ISD also indicated a similar feeling. Her view was that ‘we are both new to the assignment at the Sendero High School. I do not have lots of secondary knowledge so I have relied heavily on her. She has secondary experience with two previous districts.’ Furthermore, when asked about the level of support, Mrs. Garcia, Sendero ISD administrator noted that ‘I feel strongly supported when we need to make changes to policies or procedures. The counselor always supports any new initiatives that I undertake.’

As well as the other three schools, it is also apparent that those participants from Palo Blanco ISD have also managed to develop a very positive working relationship. Mrs. Alaniz, Palo Blanco administrator, stated that in general terms, she and the school counselor worked wonderfully together, helping each other out. Furthermore, she could pinpoint a specific example of support, noting that ‘I was dealing with a teacher that was extremely upset and was not able to make progress. The counselor supported me and was able to calm the teacher so that we could find a solution to the problem.’ However, it was interesting to note that Mr. Melo was perhaps the least positive in their perception of the working relationship between himself and the school administrator. He noted that ‘I work closely with the principal. We have daily direct contact.’ As well as this, Mr. Melo highlighted that ‘when I interact with parents, my principal is 100% supportive. We are usually on the same page.’ Despite this though, it was felt that there was a lack of support provided by Mrs. Alaniz at times. Mr. Melo outlined that ‘we don’t place the

same emphasis on student and staff morale. I think that it is very important. She does not at times.’

These viewpoints stress that in these four schools the participants tend to view the working relationship in a positive manner and express that support is always there, regardless of whether the perception is from the administrator or the counselor. This was the consensus finding from the vast majority of the participants except for the Palo Blanco ISD counselor. There were signs that Mr. Melo did not necessarily feel supported during the working relationship with the school administrator, although this was not mentioned by Mrs. Garcia, the Palo Blanco ISD administrator.

When questioned about the lack of support, there were certain instances of negativity that appeared (as with the perception of Mr. Melo as highlighted above) and these experiences belonged in every school except for that of the Rio Largo ISD. For example, the Palo Blanco ISD administrator stated that she has ‘never felt not supported’, signaling that there were perhaps mixed perceptions at the Palo Blanco ISD and a possible problem in the relationship. For the most part though, the responses were similar to those provided by Mrs. Cano, the counselor at Rio Largo ISD. She stated that ‘sometimes they are not available to deal with certain things. I know that they have to be away at meetings, but maybe this is when I feel that I’m not supported, merely due to the fact that he is not present.’ This lack of access was a key factor when determining a lack of support. It is interesting to note though that Mr. Saenz could not think of any

time when he felt unsupported by the school counselor, suggesting that their perceptions differed in terms of the lack of support in the relationship. However, it must be noted that with the Rio Largo ISD in particular, the relationship appeared very strong.

The other two schools offered certain problems and lack of support in the working relationship. When considering the Sendero ISD, the situation was that of the reverse of the Palo Blanco ISD, in this study. Whereas with the Palo Blanco ISD, the counselor saw problems and a lack of support and the school administrator did not, it was the reverse here. The school counselor said that ‘I have never experienced that [lack of support]. She makes all final decisions and I respect that.’ However, the Sendero ISD administrator outlined that there had been occasions when she felt a lack of support from the counselor. Mrs. Garcia noted that ‘there was a time when I had to handle a teacher problem and I did not feel that the counselor supported my decision. I felt that at the time that was the best decision for my campus. At the end we agreed to disagree.’ This would underline the view that perceptions can differ between individuals regarding specific events in a school environment with the lack of support felt by Mrs. Garcia, the administrator, but not by Ms. Soliz, the counselor, at Sendero ISD.

At the Nopal ISD, the lack of support was felt by Mrs. Vela, the school counselor. This was perhaps an uncommon situation as it involved the principal’s son as a student of the school and therefore it mixed personal and professional interests. Nevertheless, Mrs. Vela stated that:

during a 504 meeting, that was for the principals son, she became very upset with the committee. It was difficult to agree to some of the things that she wanted for her son. This in my opinion was a conflict of interest. She was very upset and even yelled at the assistant principal. I did not feel supported in my recommendations.

In comparison, Dr. Valdez stated that she could not think of a time when she had felt a lack of support. In this instance, it was apparent that the counselor felt a lack of support but this was perhaps because of the mixing of personal and professional behavior that led to the school administrator yelling at the assistant principal. The study did not follow up on this question (due to the decision to conduct a structured interview process) but it would have been necessary to ask the counselor if the school administrator often yelled at employees or whether it was a one-off because it involved her son. If the yelling was frequent, then this would certainly give rise to the perception of a lack of support and a challenging working relationship. With these viewpoints, it is apparent that of the 4 schools, all seemed very supportive from both the perception of the counselor and the school administrator. However, within this context, there were examples of a lack of support from 3 of the 4 schools. One of these experiences was felt by an administrator while the other 2 were experienced by counselors. The lack of support was perceived in situations where emotions were running high and the individuals differed in their opinions, citing that when under pressure, it was more likely that the lack of support would appear.

### *Communication Conundrum*

The nature of the communication between counselor and administrator was identified as a key element of the working relationship during the review of the empirical literature in Chapter II. Here the researcher discusses the communication that occurred between the participants in their respective schools and how the perceptions of the school administrators and the counselors understood this communication. The issue was briefly touched upon in the last section in the discussion of the support provided to the individuals.

The Palo Blanco ISD counselor indicated that communication was effective, with the statement that their working relationship included ‘very open communications. We consult with each other on almost everything. We both interact with the superintendent on a daily basis.’ This was supported by Mrs. Alaniz, the administrator, who underlined this view by stating that they both had ‘continuous contact and very good communication throughout the day.’

The participants in the study focused on their positive relationship and development of communication. As well as the Palo Blanco ISD participants, it was also noted that the Nopal ISD participants enjoyed high levels of communication. Mrs. Vela described their typical interaction as one that was defined by a ‘great amount of collaboration that goes on at all times of the day, as we do morning duty, cafeteria duty,

and bus duty. We generally eat together every Friday.’ This indicated that the counselor and the school administrator had a number of meetings together each week, although the majority of these seemed to be informal and whilst completing another activity (such as having lunch or completing morning duty or cafeteria duty. Dr. Valdez backed this up by stating that the two of them had a number of interactions in the form of meetings throughout the school week.

The level of formality seemed to vary depending on the school involved. As with the Nopal ISD, the Rio Largo ISD seemed to favor informal meetings. Mrs. Cano, the Rio Largo counselor, stated that ‘usually some are informal. There are times when they can be formal. He’s very cordial in asking me for some of my time. We do like to plan our meetings, but there are definitely some times that the interactions are more spontaneous depending on the issues that are happening on campus.’ This informality was confirmed by Mr. Saenz and it was stressed that their meetings were an important part of their effective working relationship. Mr. Saenz underlined that ‘we discuss all aspects of our campus with the goal in mind of academic success of students. I love the fact that she is an awesome note-taker. Any discussions we have she takes notes and I can always rely on her thorough note-taking when I need to revisit a concern.’ The relationship between the Rio Largo participants emphasized an excellent working relationship and a high level of communication at all times.

One issue with the nature of communication was brought up by the school counselor at the Sendero ISD. It was the belief of this counselor that the interactions and communication held between the school counselor and administrator was often not focused on important counseling tasks but on other issues as requested by the school administrator. Mrs. Garcia noted in the interview that ‘our interactions usually deal with student scheduling, discuss testing components, Ms. Soliz stated, I do help deal with discipline, even though I should not deal with discipline. We will sometimes bring student groups into the office to discuss issues and co-mediate these meetings.’

Interestingly, the Sendero ISD counselor mentioned the fact that the school administrator wanted to discuss discipline even though this was not in her job description, but the Sendero ISD administrator did not discuss this issue at all when questioned. Mrs. Garcia’s response was that the ‘interactions are informal. We usually discuss students schedule changes, rankings and GPA’s of students. We meet 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the 6 week to discuss students’ successes and student difficulties and try to review interventions that can encourage academic success.’ This difference in opinion perhaps emphasizes that even when relationships are effective, there are certain aspects that could be improved or that lead to a difference in perception between those participants involved.

When discussing communication, only one school outlined problems with communication but it was found that the school counselors and administrators in

multiple schools tended to have informal meetings rather than formal meetings scheduled to discuss and communicate key issues. This could be an important factor because although schools such as the Rio Largo ISD appear to have thrived with the particular counselor and administrator, who see eye-to-eye on most issues, the lack of formality could also impact negatively on school counselors in their attempt to effectively guide students in their overall development.

Communication in a formal fashion was not evident in the school districts. This leads to a continued work environment that promotes, informal meetings and a reactive counseling program as opposed to a proactive counseling program in a small, rural academic setting. The need for formal meetings is evident in department head meetings, attendance committee meetings, and advisory council meetings; however the same consideration is not afforded to the small, rural guidance counselors at the secondary level.

### ***Understanding of the Guidance Counselor's Role / Difficulties***

Another crucial aspect of the working relationship was the understanding of the guidance counselor's role, how the school administrator viewed it compared to the counselor's own understanding and whether it caused difficulties in the relationship. The discussion of the understanding of the guidance counselor's role and the difficulties that emerged through a lack of understanding was perhaps the most critical issue that

developed through the review of the literature. This section focuses on the questions asked by the researcher in the interview process, including the main problems on campus, the issues that are not addressed and duties that could be included if guidance counselors had more time.

There are a number of issues associated with counseling and the challenges that are presented in the daily work of the guidance counselor. Perhaps the most important element was that of the administrative work required of the counselor that reduced face time with the students. The Sendero ISD counselor stated that ‘I don’t feel that I give enough attention to the lower levels. There is a TRIO program that does wonders with the 12<sup>th</sup> graders....if not they would not get enough assistance from me. There is just so much other clerical work to address.’ This was supported by the Rio Largo ISD counselor, who argued that their role was so demanding, particularly because of the clerical work expected as well as the high counselor to student ratio. The clerical work included ‘a constant request for records that are funneled through my office that requires me to spend lots of time trying to locate.’ In this manner, this type of situation led to the inability of the counselor to be effective in their primary role.

Mrs. Vela, the counselor at Nopal ISD, also indicated that extra duties were a serious issue. She stated that ‘there is no time in the day for actual counseling. The counselor has so many other duties, grades, report cards and progress reports, morning announcements, supervision duties, etc...’ Furthermore, the counselor at the Palo

Blanco ISD also emphasized that the role that they played at the school was too ambiguous and ill defined. The quotation from Mr. Melo was that ‘the roles need to be more clarified. Need to be more focused on roles and responsibilities. Some students are not being serviced. Bullying issues need to be addressed better.’ Therefore, every counselor involved in the study addressed the largest issue as that of a lack of understanding of the role of the counselor that led to their having to complete extra and administrative tasks that severely reduced the time that they had to spend with students.

The major difference in the perception of the school administrators when compared to the school guidance counselors can perhaps be found with regards to the main problems that impact on the counselor’s role. As seen above, all counselor participants focused on the lack of definition for their role and the fact that this led to an increased workload outside of their normal work requirements. When asked about the issues faced by school guidance counselors, only one of the school administrator participants highlighted the issue that had been brought up by the counselor participants. Dr. Valdez, from the Nopal ISD stated that ‘there is not enough time to counsel students’, briefly mentioning the challenge that was underlined by the counselors as the most important factor involved. However, the other three school administrators each focused on different areas not even considered by the counselors. Mrs. Alaniz, administrator from the Palo Blanco ISD, said that the major issue was that ‘the counselor has difficulty targeting high school student post-secondary preparation. I feel it needs to start at the junior high level.’ Other responses included the view from the Sendero ISD

administrator, that there was a ‘lack of adequate counseling from the counseling department’ while finally, the Rio Largo ISD administrator stated that ‘I don’t think there are any’, when asked about the challenges for counselors on campus.

In this manner, although the findings overall emphasized that the working relationships between the school administrator and school counselor were positive, it is evident from the study that the school administrators still failed to grasp the role of the counselor and the problems associated with counselors being given too many tasks to complete as well as provide guidance to all of the students on campus.

### ***Cultural Implications in the Rural Hispanic-American Setting***

The final section of this results chapter identifies the specific challenges that have emerged in the region because of the nature of the rural Hispanic-American setting. The schools, in South Texas, are all close to the Mexico border and this has presented specific challenges that are linked to culture. The participants were questioned on two aspects of this culture. Firstly, participants were asked about the role that the Mexican (Hispanic) American culture plays in the working relationship between counselors and administrators before being asked about the development of administrative / cultural challenges that arise in the rural Hispanic American setting and how they have been addressed.

First, it is pertinent to discuss the cultural implications on the working relationship between the school counselors and the school administrators. There was a range of perceptions on this issue. There were those participants such as the Sendero ISD administrator that did not think that culture impacted at all on the relationship. The principal at Sendero High School stressed that ‘I don’t think that culture plays into my relationship. I’m a White married to a Hispanic. I feel that I have a good grasp of the cultural barriers that I may come across.’ This was supported by the counselor on her campus, who highlighted that Mrs. Garcia was married to a Mexican American. The response was that ‘there is not a culture gap, due to the fact that she is married to a Mexican American. She initially may have had some difficulties early in her career, but none with me at our campus.’ In this manner, Ms. Soliz alluded to the fact that issues and complications might arise in the working relationship at the beginning of a career due to cultural factors but with the level of experience held by these participants, it was not necessarily an issue any more.

While there were those participants that thought that the cultural issue was a non-factor, there were also those participants that believed that it had a positive impact on the relationship. Mr. Saenz, the Rio Largo ISD administrator stated that:

it is a definite plus for our working relationship. Especially this small community and living here as long as I have. It’s a positive thing to know your students and to have been involved in their parent’s education as well. It is a definite positive for our relationship. You want them to do better. You have a special relationship with these students; you are an advocate for them.

Mrs. Cano also shared the same view, outlining once again that the perceptions of these two individuals were very much synchronized with each other. Mr. Saenz mentioned that ‘I think it plays a positive role for our district. We have similar backgrounds with the students that we service. We share the same values and morals.’ Those participants at the Palo Blanco ISD also agreed that it was a positive aspect of their relationship. The Palo Blanco ISD administrator stated that ‘I think that our culture does play a part in our working relationship. He knows that I’m very up front and blunt and he can read me and knows exactly where I’m coming from.’ The response from the Palo Blanco ISD counselor did not focus on the working relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor and may have been as a result of a lack of understanding on the part of the participant.

These relationships focused on the positive impact of the culture on the relationship but there were others in the study that stressed that the cultural issues could be a factor in a negative way. The counselor at Nopal ISD underlined that there was never an issue between the school administrator and the counselor but that the assistant principal had experienced negativity due to her surname. Mrs. Vela said that ‘the assistant principal is a White – Hispanic, but has an Anglo last name, and many thought she was White-Non Hispanic. Initially, there was a barrier with the assistant principal.’ This finding would suggest that although there was no problem between those that were White-Hispanic, the individuals that were thought of as White and non-Hispanic experienced negativity in their position.

This feeling would seem to fit with the view of the counselor at Sendero ISD, who underlined that the Mrs. Garcia, the principal, was a White Non-Hispanic that married a Hispanic and so may have experienced difficulty and challenge in the earlier part of their career. In this way, the perceptions suggest that the culture would possibly have a negative impact on the working relationship of the counselor and administrator if either was non-Hispanic. However, as only one of the participants was non-Hispanic, but had married a Hispanic and had plenty of experience in the position, this finding was hypothetical rather than practical.

It was also important to consider the relationship between the cultural setting and possible challenges that arise within the context of counseling and administration at the schools in the study. The Palo Blanco ISD counselor stated that there were cultural issues such as ‘the lack of communication between parents, school personnel, and students. Students sometimes perceive that as not caring on the part of the school and the parents. Parents feel intimidated by the school system. Our school is trying to reach out to the parents via meetings and home visits.’ This was supported by the guidance counselor at the Sendero ISD who felt that ‘the lack of parental support at the campus was a key cultural challenge. Students and parents may feel intimidated or uneducated and don’t feel that it is their place to question or challenge the school authority.’

This statement matches closely with the literature in relation to a culturally responsive staff. Smith-Adcock et al. (2006) “Many Hispanic/Latino parents report wanting to be a part of their child’s education but feel they are not listened to or welcomed by the school system” (p.93 ). It was apparent that the counselors were as a group, more concerned about immediate student and parent welfare due to cultural challenges (bullying, intimidation, fear), whereas school administrators tended to focus on wider issues such as the economic situation and the overall impact of the culture and how it impacted negatively on the development of students.

The school administrator at the Palo Blanco ISD had a different perception and stressed that the major issue was that ‘it was important to try and get our parents to understand that times are changing. It is a conservative little town and their perceptions are sometimes inaccurate.’ Here, the two participants at the same school had different perceptions about cultural difficulties that exist. It was also found at the Sendero ISD that there was a need to get parents involved in their children’s education. The observations noted by the researcher during the time spent at the Sendero ISD found that “keeping parents educated and students motivated to set high goals is a counseling service that is limited. There is not the availability of dual enrollment. Many students and parents are satisfied with the completion of high school. Students need access to outside agencies that can promote education as a lifelong event”. Here, it was apparent that the cultural aspects (both ethnic and geographic) played a part in leading to this contentment when leaving high school but it was believed that this cultural aspect could

be altered through the successful partnership of the school administrator and school counselor.

These factors focused on the parents though and it was argued by Mrs. Vela, that there were issues involving students and cultural differences. It was noted that ‘there was some baggage that comes into play in relation to students. Years back, any White students that would come to the campus were bullied. There was an initiative on my part to change the perceptions and have the students welcome all students to the campus.’ Here, Mrs. Vela placed the emphasis on the student wellbeing. Dr. Valdez, from the same campus focused on the cultural differences regarding historical development and economics, stating that ‘there is a challenge to the economic setting and the educational history of the family and that may or may not be linked to the culture.’ These viewpoints underline that the cultural challenges are vast and varied, with different perceptions existing for each individual in the study.

These cultural differences continued when examining the responses from the Rio Largo ISD. Mr. Saenz, the administrator, stressed that ‘the language barrier for the parents can be intimidating’; while Mrs. Cano, acknowledged that the culture often hindered the students by limiting their exposure to different cultures and ways of life. Finally, the principal at Sendero ISD argued that there was a cultural expectation attached to the students that did not expect students to require any more education past the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In this manner, it was viewed that the culture stifled their goals.

The perceptions of the administrators and counselors vary in this study in relation to parental support or the lack of. As a culturally responsive counselor and administrator, the deficit view must be addressed so that all parents must be perceived as participants in their child's educational journey. If there is a gap, then as culturally responsive educators it must be addressed. The literature states that parents do want to play a pivotal role in their children's education, but they must also find their voice and be advocates for what their children should be receiving and change the mindset that they do not care or are uninterested. Engaging parents should be a priority in all small, rural educational settings.

### Observation Results

Finally in this chapter it is important to consider the results of the observations made by the researcher during the time spent at the schools. It was felt that when assessing the relationship between counselor and principal, it would be necessary to observe the relationship working during the normal school day as well as obtaining subjective opinions as to the nature of their working relationship. Therefore, the researcher spent time observing each of the pairings in this study, assessing a number of facets regarding the types of relationship that existed between the two different sets of participants in the study.

The observations focused on whether counselors and administrators talk on a

daily basis, what they discussed during these meetings, what activities/roles the counselor focused on during their day and what activities/roles did the administrator focus on during the day. Also, the observations identified if the roles of the two individuals were overlapping, how they overlapped and if there were times where Mexican-American students required varied counseling services. The final three observations focused on the limitations evident by the rural setting in relation to counseling services, how many students visited the counselor's office on average per hour and the visible administrative roles that the counselor addressed or handled during the observation period.

The observation at the Rio Largo ISD found that the counselor and administrator met on a daily basis and that they conferred on 'attendance issues, scheduling for students not successful on state testing. They were focused on closing up the school year. This school was a year round campus district, so they were on a different time table than most schools.' As well as this it was also indicated that the school counselor was involved in activities such as the reviewing of state scores and working on post-secondary preparations for her outgoing seniors. The observation found that the roles of the two individual participants did not overlap in any way and the counselor was also not visited at all during the period of the observation by students looking for help or advice.

The administrator did come by the office and advised the counselor that he would be in the cafeteria eating lunch and monitoring students at lunch. He verbalized to her to

call to the cafeteria if she needed anything. It was apparent at the Rio Largo ISD counselor was not an integral part of lunch room duty.

The researcher did note that there were certain limitations that existed in the rural setting. These limitations included that of the ‘small amount of resources in this small town. Many students took advantage of dual enrollment courses and had some college credit. The counselor and administrator have worked collaboratively to allow the most students to prepare for post-secondary opportunities.’ The role of the counselor in helping the students prepare for post-secondary opportunities was part of the remit accepted by the counselor and the researcher did not witness the counselor engaged in any activities that could be deemed as purely administrative and that would take away from her ability to work as a counselor to the students.

The observation at the Sendero ISD provided similar findings for the research. The counselor and administrator met every day that the researcher was observing and discussed topics such as the recent change to state assessment and the nature of the summer students and how this change would impact them. The counselor was working on ‘the master schedule for the upcoming year. She was opening up courses and sections for the demand of particular classes that were not being offered the previous year.’ The researcher did underline a number of limitations through the rural setting. These included the fact that it was important to keep ‘parents educated and students motivated to set high goals within a counseling service that was limited. There was not

the availability of dual enrollment. Many students and parents were satisfied with the completion of high school and did not encourage further ambition.’ The observations made during the time at the school indicated that there were a number of limitations with the type and location of school, particularly through the lack of motivation held by the students and parents and this clearly impacted on the work of the counselor and the type of relationship held with the school administrator.

It was also noted by the researcher that the counselor did not participate in any administrative roles during the length of the observation, which would tend to go against the findings from the majority of the work in the field that suggests that counselors are often too busy with delegated work outside of their job description to work with students. There were no students that visited the counselors’ office during the time of the observation, but this could be accounted for because of the time of year and the lack of certain school year students at the school.

The Nopal ISD offered slightly different observations to those of the first two schools discussed. It was stated by both the school administrator and the school counselor that there were daily meetings between the two. However, during my observation, they did not confer. The counselor was prepping for a preregistration of an off-site school. The principal was trying to get last minute end-of-year miscellaneous activities completed and she was headed to a principal’s morning meeting.’ Therefore, during the observation these meetings did not occur, greatly reducing the effectiveness

of the relationship. Moreover, the school counselor was observed completing activities that were not in her job description. The observer found that Mrs. Vela was trying to complete a slew of activities, including working on a spread sheet that had to be completed with a variety of information that could have easily been compiled by clerical staff or assistant principals. She was also compiling the morning announcements and waiting on the students that would be assisting her.

The activities here were mainly administrative and it was found that the administrator had simply delegated these tasks even though she was not busy. The researcher found that ‘the counselor is assuming some administrative roles. It appeared that the counselor had arrived on campus and was going full speed. The administrator was having conversations with her secretaries and just basically talking about different things like compression garments.’ This type of observation reflects that the school counselor had to take on certain duties that were part of the school administrators role, especially concerning the morning announcements. As well as this, the observer also witnessed the counselor meet with 3 different students during the morning but this was due to the morning announcement tasks. It was felt that the announcements should be handled by the administrator and this was a major issue with the possible inability to complete the counseling tasks correctly.

Finally, the Palo Blanco ISD observations found that there was some overlap in the two roles, with the view that the discussion concerning the hiring of a male nurse

was not part of the counselor's role and that this lay with the role of the administrator. The two individuals did meet every day and 'they conferred about a variety of things. They were discussing the hiring of a new male nurse. They were discussing the preparations for UIL State competition. They were discussing students' graduation concerns.' Furthermore, it was also found that the counselor worked on a great many tasks during the day but that these all fell within the job description. The counselor focused on a variety of issues, mostly dealing with the upcoming graduation of seniors and preparation for post-secondary issues that were being discussed and clarified such as orientations, financial aid, and dorm applications. Despite the conversation about the hiring of a male nurse, it was apparent that the counselor had not been asked to undertake any administrative duties.

There was no real counseling interaction between students and the counselors. The limited amount of interaction was administrative in nature; preparing for morning announcements and questions about a procedure. It is important to note that there were limitations with the observations completed by the researcher. The observations only focused on a limited time frame in the overall relationship between the counselor and the administrator. Furthermore, the participants in the school both understood the role of the researcher when completing the observations and so may have acted in a different manner to their normal behavior because they were aware of the observations being made.

Despite this, it was felt that the observations provided an important service for this study, mainly because it enabled the researcher to gather objective findings and data about the nature of the relationship between school administrators and school counselors and this presented an opportunity to compare the results of the interview process to test the reliability and validity of the responses provided by the participants in this current study focusing on the perceptions of the working relationship of the school counselor and school administrator in rural South Texas.

### Summary

The earlier presentation of the results and key qualitative data from the primary study has addressed the major research questions that were posed in this study. The results focused on assessing the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor, the existence of potential counseling issues that the paired administrator and counselor perceived were not being addressed due to their working relationship, how the paired administrator and counselor perceived each other's' positive and negative support system that was in place and the impact that the Mexican American culture had on the working relationship between the administrators and counselors in the study. It is clear from the study that the majority of the results focus on the positive aspects of the working relationship and this was unexpected. However, when considering the nature of the relationships, the level of experience and the similar demographic factors involved with the eight participants involved, it was not

necessarily that surprising.

Despite this positivity, there were certain issues that seemed to highlight key challenges and difficulties within the working relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor. Several participants underlined that the working relationship was often strained due to conflicts of interest, the difficulty in ensuring that the job description and role was understood by all parties, the lack of formal meetings and personal differences in professional matters. These issues led to the development of challenges within the relationship that sometimes led to disagreement.

This study focused on four relationships and highlighted that while three were long-term relationships, one was a relatively short-term one and it was in this relationship that the most problems occurred. Having said that, the participants were generally positive in their attitude towards the relationship and also stressed that the cultural issue had both a positive and negative impact, depending on the perceptions from different participants in the study.

Perhaps the major issue was that the small, rural school administrators still fail to understand the precise role of the school guidance counselor. The findings underlined that although the working relationships between the school administrator and school counselor were positive, it was clear from the study that the school administrators still failed to grasp the role of the counselor in the campus setting. The school administrators

did not mention the problems associated with counselors being given too many tasks to complete as well as provide guidance to all of the students on campus. This was the primary complaint of the school counselors in the study and highlighted that the two sets of participants still differed greatly in their view of the role of the guidance counselor, despite the positive relationship that seemed to exist between the pairs of participants in this work.

These findings were presented here in a stand-alone format but it is also vital to consider the results through a process of triangulation, using the results from the review of the empirical literature as well as the observations made by the researcher in the primary research process. The next chapter identifies key themes that emerged through the coding process, including lack of understanding, the positive relationship, professional differences and culture that emerged as the main themes in the study.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This final chapter aimed to summarize the findings from the primary study, using them and analyzing them in the context of the wider results of the review of the empirical literature. Moreover, the work attempted to categorize the results in terms of the themes that emerged from the findings. The work identified key themes that emerged through the coding process, including the lack of understanding, the positive relationship, professional differences and culture that emerged as the main themes in the study. The use of these themes helped to summarize the findings, allow for easy to understand results and therefore provided the researcher with the ability to evaluate the study and present the main conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Initially, the results are compared with the findings from the review of the literature and the observations made by the researcher during the time spent in the schools. This allowed for a triangulation of the primary data and improved the reliability and validity of the results. Following this discussion, the main conclusions have been provided to the four major research questions that were asked during the study. Finally, the study noted limitations both in Chapter III and throughout presentation of the results. Therefore, the results of this work were not conclusive and the study highlighted key areas for future research. These are acknowledged at the end of this chapter.

## Discussion

The discussion of the primary results aims to include the findings of the empirical literature on the subject of the working relationship between school counselors and school administrators. As well as this, the section also discusses within this the results of the observation of the researcher when in the schools on a daily basis. The importance of the role of both the school administrator and the school counselor in leading the school guidance program and enabling its success meant that the research needed to discover the perceptions of both administrators and counselors during the study.

The literature underlined that at the majority of schools, it was the administrator that was in charge when considering the delegation of duties to the counselor and their role in the school system. Blakely (2009) stressed this indicated that this often led to the counselor being given the wrong tasks and duties, instead of focusing on their primary role of working with the students. Through this finding, it was clear that there has been a high level of importance placed upon the relationship between the school counselor and the school administrator. This heightened the importance of the research questions because of the nature of their relationship and the fact that the relationship development could lead to the level of effectiveness of the counselor at the school. Schoffner and Briggs (2001) state 'Collaboration and support among school personnel is becoming more critical for meeting students' needs effectively. It is critical for school counselors, teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel to understand and appreciate

their different roles, responsibilities, and paradigms so that they can engage in collaborative work that addresses student development and learning goals.

The results of both the interview process and the observations suggested that the importance of both the working relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor, as well as their own perceptions of the school guidance counseling program, were vital to the success of the program. The most effective relationship emanating from the interviews was that of the counselor and administrator in Rio Largo ISD. The level of communication and the positive working relationship, as outlined by the observation of the researcher when it was noted that they conferred on a daily basis, had high levels of respect for each other and had been working together for a long time, meant that the school guidance counselor was more likely to achieve their goal of being an effective component in the development of the individual students on campus. This indicates that the length of the relationship had an impact on how the two different types of participants perceived each other's support and their role in the system.

However, the literature also acknowledged that despite this importance, it was often the case that school administrators failed to clearly define the role of the counselor, with this leading to confusion and disappointment (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994, p.1). While observing in the Rio Largo ISD, Sendero ISD and Palo Blanco ISD, the researcher found that the school counselor and school administrator did not overlap in any of their duties and that the counselor was not asked to complete any administrative

tasks that were not within the job description. When completing the observation form and asked which visible administrative roles did the counselor address or handle, it was apparent that none were observed during the visit. However, this was not the case at the Nopal ISD school setting.

The counselor was focused on prepping for an off-site registration of 5<sup>th</sup> graders. She was making copies of booklets. She was also seen assisting with the morning announcements. These announcements were student led under her supervision. She also had a spreadsheet that needed to be completed with scores from the testing cycle. The counselor had to compile this data, which included grades, attendance, scores, and behavior.

Although this result perhaps reflects the majority of the literature in that school administrators often misused the counselor's role, this was not observed in the majority of schools in this study. However, when combining the results of the interview process, as well, it was apparent that although this misuse and lack of understanding was not witnessed by the researcher, it did occur at every school in the study.

This was a key finding for the study and perhaps underlines a vital answer to the first research question. The question focused on the nature of the difficulties that existed between the two participant types and the lack of understanding held by the principal towards the role of the counselor seems to be the major findings to emerge from this study. When asked whether they were asked to complete extra clerical tasks, each counselor from the four schools noted that this was perhaps the main issue at stake in terms of the different perceptions held by the school administrator and the counselor. This was proven because of the fact that the school administrators, when asked the same

question, tended to reply that there were no major issues involved in the delivery of a successful guidance program.

It was also stressed during the study that the working relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor was unlikely to improve without the school counselor being proactive. The observations and the interview results outlined that the majority of meetings between school administrator and school counselor were informal and this could perhaps be the root cause of the problem. The literature stated that the success of a given counseling plan hinges upon the collaboration and integrative efforts of counselors and administrators (McCandless, 1975). Moreover, it was stressed that counselors needed to be their own advocates and that the administrator were not that knowledgeable about the tasks that should be completed by the counselor. Dahir et al. (2010) argued that counselors needed to impose on the administrator the importance of their role and that they should educate them if they wished to witness a positive change.

The informal nature of the meetings meant that it was hard for the school counselor to ever discuss key issues in detail, thereby perhaps leading to increased misunderstanding in terms of the role that they should play in the school setting. Both the observations and interview results stressed that the informal nature was perhaps negative and positive; with the informality helping to increase the positivity surrounding the working relationship but also that it failed to help explain the role of the counselor. This was witnessed through the different perceptions as to the issues that hindered the

successful work of the counselor. All four counselors expressed disappointment at the administrative tasks given to them, yet this was not noted by the school administrators, despite the respective pairings working together for a long period of time.

Through this finding, it became apparent that communication concerning the role of the counselor was not effective, even if the communication during the working relationship and the collaborative tasks was successful. This highlights the need for fundamental changes within the relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor. Even at Rio Largo ISD School, where the two participants regarded themselves as a close friend and colleague of the other, there were definitely different perceptions as to the role of the counselor and the nature of the tasks that they were asked to do. This would suggest that the education of the school administrators still needs to occur at the vast majority of schools in this study and in the wider South Texas region more generally.

On another note, the empirical research indicated that the support of the school principal in the implementation and maintenance of a school-counseling program was essential. This made the relationship between principal (school administrator) and guidance counselors especially crucial in determining the program's effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to discover if schools had redirected school guidance counseling programs to focus on counseling, guidance, consultation, coordination and referrals. The data from the review of the literature as well as that of the primary study

noted that there is not any form of clear agreement from school counselors or school principals about what are appropriate or inappropriate tasks for school counselors. The school administrators did not seem to think that the extra clerical and administrative tasks given to the school counselors were unreasonable, whereas the counselors pointed to these as being a primary reason as to their lack of effectiveness at running a successful guidance program.

There was also a discrepancy between what the National Standards identify as appropriate and inappropriate tasks, and what school counselors and school principals identified as appropriate and inappropriate tasks. With regard to the performance by school counselors of various inappropriate tasks, the data underlined that the exact same tasks that were most highly endorsed by school principals at each level were also the most frequently performed inappropriate tasks by school counselors at each level. This could help support to the belief that school administrators help to influence those tasks that are performed by school counselors at each level.

In his study of immigrants, Ogbu (1991) determined that voluntary and involuntary immigrants maintain different considerations, orientations, relationships and representational thoughts regarding formal education. Voluntary immigrants perceived their education in the U.S. as superior to their native country. Thus, this comparison of orientation regarding educational experiences guided the voluntary minorities to sense U.S. education as exceptional to what they have experienced previously. However,

when establishing the impact of culture on this current study, it was found that there were no noticeable effects of the culture on the working relationship between the school administrator and the school counselor. It was suggested that this could perhaps be an issue but the participants in the study were primarily all of a similar ethnic background, and the one participant that was not had married into the Hispanic community. This meant that while problems may have occurred at first, at the time of the study these had dissipated completely. This is not to say that culture does not have an impact but that it was not present in this current work.

Finally, it was found in the study that the school administrators were often reluctant to delegate the clerical work given to counselors to others that would perhaps be more suited. This supported the findings of the Reynolds and Cheek (2002) who argued that school administrators adversely impacted the effectiveness of the counselor because of this inability to delegate. Moreover, this finding was developed by Fitch et al., (2001) who found that school administrators believed that ‘administrative and disciplinary duties were significant ones for the counselor’ (p. 89), highlighting the lack of understanding that existed on this subject. Although the observations only found one of the four counselors to have been given clerical work, the interview process also highlighted that it was common for all of the counselors in the study to receive extra administrative work. This perhaps was a culmination of the lack of understanding held by the school administrators concerning the role of the counselor, as well as the inability of the counselor to portray their role effectively in a formal manner. This therefore led

to the continuance of a misunderstanding that has plagued the working relationship of administrators and counselors throughout recent history and is one that needs to change dramatically if counselors are to be enabled in their job role, leading to greater effectiveness in developing students at this level.

### My Lens

The relevance of this study may be eye-opening for administrators in small, rural settings, but it is not a surprise to most secondary counselors in these same academic settings. As a secondary counselor in a small, rural predominantly Hispanic community for over 15 years, I knew that what was transpiring at the campus was not as a surprise to the counselors in this area. These same counselors had networked for years and had made all the same comments in relation to what was actually going on at the campus and what the state would mandate. The comments would range from, “There is just not enough time during the day” to “No one ever taught me this in any of my Master’s counseling classes.

Surprisingly, the newer counselors that are filling the positions of retiring counselors are not prepared for the work involved in meeting the needs of the administrator at the campus and the secondary counseling needs. If there is not an educated effort to make changes in what is occurring, there will be a lapse in either academic administrative issues or counseling issues. My experience is that the work

ethic of new counselors is dwindling. The true actions of counselors are falling by the wayside. These counselors are now more focused on salaries, work hours, and contract days. The trend does not seem to be to get it all done at whatever cost. When I left my last counseling position, I was met with “we miss you” and “please come back”. These co-workers did not feel that the new counselor had the same work ethic or nurturing component that many times is required of a secondary counselor.

The rural counselor wears so many hats. The ease with which new items are placed on their plate is unbelievable. It is coming to the point, with so many new mandates from the state in relation to testing and graduation requirements, which the counselors are starting to push back. It is so very difficult to meet the needs of everyone at the campus. Each entity feels that their issue, crisis or scenario should be the priority. I recall reflecting on one particular day the following transpired: I helped assist a student with an application to Brown University, scheduled a meeting with the Division of Rehabilitative Services to work cooperatively to provide our students with special needs an equal opportunity to post-secondary options, I completed four transcript requests, I made two schedule changes, I met one-on-one with a student that had drawn a comic strip with a gun pointed at a head with blood dripping off, I completed hall duty during passing periods and cafeteria duty for two lunch periods. The range of activities a rural secondary counselor has to address is a huge spectrum. These days were the norm. I remember telling my husband that I could stay at the office all night and always find something to do.

There are ways to curtail this. The administrator must step forward and advocate for change. It is likely that they are also juggling many of the same types of scenarios, at the administrative level. It would be beneficial for meetings to be held to discuss duties of varying positions at the campus; such as assistant principals, academic deans, consultants, PEIMS coordinators, and registrars. These meetings could open a dialogue and allow a conversation to take place to see how the campus can more easily balance the responsibilities of all of these individuals, and at the same time alleviate some of the counselor's non-counseling administrative tasks. My personal experience has indicated that assistant principals have plenty of availability in their schedule to facilitate in some of these areas of concern.

## Conclusions

This conclusions section focuses on providing the direct answers to the four major research questions asked in this work. The study aimed to conduct an analysis of the phenomenon of the working relationship between the administrator and counselor. Within this the research questions focused on discovering the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor, assessing the counseling issues that exist between the administrator and counselor that they perceive are not being addressed due to their working relationship, how the paired administrator and counselor perceive each other's' positive and negative support system that is

currently in place and the impact that the Mexican American culture has on administrators and counselors working relationships.

What are the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship between the administrator and counselor? The results found that the difficulties identified in the paired working relationship was the informal nature of this relationship as well as the lack of understanding of the specific tasks that a counselor should complete, leading to a lack of transparency of the role. The students were receiving less time with the counselor on average because of the time spent completing administrative tasks. It should be acknowledged that the relationship between the two individuals was generally positive at each of the four school districts, but that informal relationship often led to the administrator taking advantage of the counselor.

The following two questions were answered in the study. What counseling issues exist that the paired administrator and counselor perceive are not being addressed due to their working relationship? How do the paired administrator and counselor perceive each other's positive and negative support system that is currently in place? The results of the study highlighted that although the working relationships between the participants in the study appeared to be positive, there were certain issues that still highlighted a major difference in perception between the school administrator and school counselor. The main issue was that of the ill-defined role of the counselor that led to them having to complete other tasks, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their

counseling program. This was outlined in the results section with counselors often being asked to complete administrative tasks that were supplemented into their role as an additional workload, preventing the counselor from focusing on their main role. The support system for most of the schools was excellent, although the informality of the meetings between the two perhaps led to the lack of understanding about the role of the counselor in the campus setting. The school administrator and school counselor relationship, according to the findings, is one that is positive in many aspects but that it is underpinned by a severe lack of understanding that perhaps negates all of the positive aspects of the relationship. Despite each school highlighting a good working relationship from the perspective of both counselors and school administrators, it was also argued that there were issues faced by counselors that came about through an ill-defined role for them in the school system.

What perceived impact does the Mexican American culture have on administrators and counselors working relationships? When assessing the impact of culture on the working relationship it was clear that there were no apparent negative impacts of culture on the working relationship. However, it was felt that the Hispanic American culture did reduce the desire to achieve above expectations for students in the region. Negative cultural issues concerning the working relationship were apparent but only for a short time and they were dependent on the ethnicity of the individuals involved. Moreover, some of the participants stressed that the cultural factor was actually a positive, with the grouping of Hispanics allowing for community development

and a good relationship with students, parents, colleagues and others in the local region. Other issues included the straining of the working relationship due to conflicts of interest, the difficulty in ensuring that the job description and role was understood by all parties, the lack of formal meetings and personal differences in professional matters. This led to difficulties in the relationship. The research also found that positive relationships were likely to develop, as well as understanding between counselors and school administrators but that these took years to develop.

### Recommendations

My experience as a rural counselor in a predominantly Hispanic setting for over fifteen years has afforded me the knowledge and experiences to support the recommendations that are found in this section. There are a number of recommendations that could be made following the study. Recommendations could be made regarding both the methodological approach to the subject area and the policy dictating school guidance counseling programs in the region. The approach taken by this study was an attempt to achieve a mixed method study with a majority focus on qualitative research. To achieve this, the researcher used the resources available but this meant that the sample population had to be relatively small and used eight participants from the four different schools. It would be crucial to expand this study because of the belief that the findings could have a significant and positive impact on the change in role

for counselors, leading to them being able to focus more centrally on their main task rather than become sidetracked with other tasks that are delegated to them.

This finding was a key one for this study because of the lack of participants; it is not conclusive as to whether this finding was indicative of the school counselor role in general or simply these four school districts. Therefore the use of the larger study using a questionnaire to ask the pertinent research questions (allowing for a much larger sample size) would enable the research to decide conclusively as to whether counselors were taken advantage of in the school setting and prevented completing their main tasks in an effective manner.

In this manner, the study could be expanded greatly to include perhaps, approximately 30-60 participants. Using the same format as this current study, this would mean assessing at least 15-30 different schools and this would help to generate findings that could be generalizable in their results. The larger sample population would use a quantitative survey approach, enabling the researcher to test the hypothesis that school counselors are being utilized and working in an efficient way.

The results would provide a more generalized understanding of the topic and could help to address the issues uncovered in this work. The findings of this current study relied on four different schools in a wide geographic region and therefore the viewpoints of the participants considering the nature of the working relationship between administrators and counselors could not be generalized for the wider population.

The results from this current study, while important, can only help to assess how four counselors and four administrators viewed the subject. To attempt to generalize their findings for the wider education system would not be possible due to the small sample size. However, a quantitative survey using a range of schools in the area as participating schools, could help to ensure that the sample population was large enough that statistical evidence would be provided supporting the claims of this research.

Moreover, it is also important to discuss recommendations for the participants that were involved in this study. As noted, the results found that even when counselors and principals had been working together for years and had established a positive relationship, the counselor had been taken advantage of and asked to complete tasks that were not in their job description, leading to a lower ability to work with children, as is their main specified role in a school setting. The main issue was that the ill-defined role of the counselor that led to them having to complete other tasks, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their counseling program. As the researcher that conducted this study, it is personally recommended that schools redefine and draw up a more transparent list of duties that counselors are supposed to complete and that the counselor can refer to when asked to complete a task that is not on the list.

Furthermore, it is argued that the counselor in a school setting must be given a voice to raise concerns about mistreatment or being asked to complete tasks that do not fall within their remit. What was evident from the study was that in rural schools, the

attitude existed that each individual working in a school should pitch in and helps out with various tasks for the benefit of the school. While this is fine for support staff and other administrative individuals, roles that carry great weight and importance (such as counselors and teachers) should not be expected to be included in this group. These recommendations outline that schools create a list of tasks that a counselor can complete and also present the counselor with a heightened level of empowerment to speak out when asked to do a task not covered on the list.

The recommendations that have developed from this study are also provided in a list format to ensure that they are easy to read and understand. These recommendations are:

1. Conducting a larger study of 15-30 schools (60 participants) to gain statistical evidence to support the findings of this work.
2. Complete a study identifying how school counselors can improve their situation in a school with increased communication with the principal.
3. Use the findings to help implement a re-defined list of tasks that can be performed by a school counselor and implement this in the school workplace.
4. Test the implementation of this re-defined list of tasks at the end of a three-month period to measure whether the ability to complete the role has improved during the period of the study.
5. Empower counselors by providing them with a voice at formal meetings with the principal to discuss the ability to complete their role.

6. Continue to develop the relationship between the administrator and the counselor but in a professional manner and not in a way that allows the teaching staff or administrative staff to take advantage of the counselor.
7. Staff developmental training on the role of the counselor, the importance of this role and the specific tasks that a counselor is able to complete during their work hours.

These recommendations are vital because of the view that counselors have one of the most important roles in the modern school setting, due to the unique and developing pressures placed on students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, it is vital that students are allowed to visit counselors and that counselors are free to talk with students, rather than lose precious time by completing mundane administrative tasks that are handed down to them due to the lack of knowledge or the importance of their role. It was felt that the study conducted in this paper has helped to further the knowledge of the literature on the subject of the working relationship between administrators and counselors and proved that there are underlying issues within the relationship. Although the relationship was remarkable positive between the administrator and the counselors in the study, it was also noted that there were fundamental differences in perception over the role of the counselor that was holding back the potential success of the guidance counseling program. Therefore, this study acknowledged the need for greater communication, education for school administrators on the role of the school guidance counselor and the

view that counselors need to be more dynamic and proactive in their ability to champion their own role in the school education system.

This study could easily impact the need for reform at the master's level of counselor education and educational administration. The need to educate individuals with a potential of becoming employed in districts with these types of rural, culturally enriched settings is a distinct possibility.

Small, rural education is in need of reforms that are not always visible in the urban setting. A dialogue with a path forward is vital to make changes, even if small to work towards ascertaining that these students are afforded the same educational benefits of all other students, in the state of Texas and in the United States.

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## APPENDIX A

February 21, 2002

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 158 and Senate Bill 518

During the 2001 legislative session, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 158 and Senate Bill 518 pertaining to the work of the school counselor. Senate Bill 158 relates to counseling students regarding higher education. Beginning in the 2001-2002 school year, Senate Bill 158 requires each counselor at an elementary, middle or junior high school, including an open-enrollment charter school offering those grades to advise students and their parents or guardians regarding the importance of higher education, coursework designed to prepare students for higher education, financial aid availability and requirements.

Additionally, the high school counselor is required to provide information to a student and parents during the student's first year and senior year in high school regarding:

- the importance of higher education;
- the advantages of completing the recommended or higher high school program;
- the disadvantages of taking courses to prepare for a high school equivalency;
- coursework designed to prepare students for higher education;
- financial aid availability and requirements;
- instruction on how to apply for federal financial aid;
- the eligibility and academic performance requirements for the TEXAS Grant;
- information concerning the financial aid center operated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board under TEC Section 61.0776; and
- the automatic admission of students who graduate with a grade point average in the top 10 percent of the student's graduating class as provided by TEC Section 51.803.

Senate Bill 518 amends TEC Section 33.001, 33.005-33.006 and requires all school counselors to assume responsibilities for working with school faculty and staff, students, parents and community to plan, implement and evaluate a developmental guidance and counseling program. The guidance and counseling program shall include:

1. a guidance curriculum to help students develop their full educational potential;
2. a responsive services component to intervene on behalf of any student whose immediate personal concerns or problems put the student's continued educational, career, personal or social development at risk;

3. an individual planning system to guide a student as the student plans, monitors and manages the student's own educational, career (including interests and career objectives), personal and social development; and
4. system support to strengthen the efforts of teachers, staff, parents and other members of the community in promoting the educational, career, personal and social development of students.

In addition, the counselor shall:

1. participate in the planning, implementing and evaluating a comprehensive developmental guidance program to serve all students and to address the special needs of students:
  - a) who are at risk of dropping out of school, becoming substance abusers, participating in gang activity or committing suicide;
  - b) who are in need of modified instructional strategies;
  - c) who are gifted and talented, with emphasis on identifying and serving gifted and talented students who are economically disadvantaged.
2. consult with a student's parent or guardian and make referrals as appropriate in consultation with the student's parent or guardian;
3. consult with school staff, parents and other community members to help them increase the effectiveness of student education and promote student success;
4. coordinate people and resources in the school, home and community;
5. with the assistance of school staff, interpret standardized test results and other assessment data that help a student make educational and career plans; and
6. deliver classroom guidance activities or serve as a consultant to teachers conducting lessons based on the school's guidance curriculum.

*A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development Pre-K – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade (Third Edition)* is available from TEA Publications Distribution at (512) 463-9744 and contains information necessary for complying with Senate Bill 518.

We appreciate your attention to these matters and your ongoing support of students. Should you have additional questions regarding this new legislation, please contact the Guidance and Counseling Unit at (512) 463-9498.

Sincerely yours,

Jim Nelson

Commissioner of Education

Administrator Correspondence: Senate Bill 158 and Senate Bill 518 (Texas Education Agency Correspondence, 2002)

## APPENDIX B

### **Inappropriate (non-counseling) activities:**

- Registering and scheduling all new students
- Administering cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests
- Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
- Performing disciplinary actions
- Sending home students who are not appropriately dressed
- Teaching classes when teachers are absent
- Computing grade-point averages
- Maintaining student records
- Supervising study halls
- Clerical record keeping
- Assisting with duties in the principal's office
- Working with one student at a time in a therapeutic, clinical mode

### **Appropriate (counseling) responsibilities:**

- Designing individual student academic programs
- Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests
- Counseling students with excessive tardiness or absenteeism
- Counseling students with disciplinary problems
- Counseling students about appropriate school dress
- Collaborating with teachers to present guidance curriculum lessons
- Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement
- Interpreting student records
- Providing teachers with suggestions for better study hall management
- Ensuring student records are maintained in accordance with state and federal regulations
- Assisting the school principal with identifying and resolving student issues, needs and problems
- Collaborating with teachers to present proactive, prevention-based guidance curriculum lessons

The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs, Inappropriate and Appropriate Responsibilities, (American School Counseling Association, 2004)

## APPENDIX C

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS

A demographic survey will be included in the study. The demographic form will consist of 8 questions. Three items asked the participants about their personal demographics (i.e. age, gender, and ethnicity).

Four items asked about the participant's education and training in school administration and counseling. Two items asked about the school setting in which they work.

How old are you?

What is your gender?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your highest post-secondary degree?

How many years have you been an administrator/counselor?

List your current assignment and previous assignments through your educational career.

How many counselors are currently assigned to your campus?

How many students are currently enrolled on your campus?

What is the ethnic percentage makeup on your campus?

The 10 interview prompts are as follows:

1. Tell me about your working relationship with your campus counselor/administrator.
2. Tell me about any difficulties in your working relationship with your campus counselor/administrator.
3. What do your typical interactions with your counselor(s)/administrator(s) look like?
4. Describe a specific instance when you felt strongly supported by your campus counselor/administrator.
5. Describe a specific instance when you did not feel supported by your campus

counselor/administrator.

6. What do you think are the main counseling problems on your campus?
7. If counselors had more time, what would you add to their role?
8. What issues do counselors not have enough time to address?
9. What role do you think the Mexican American culture plays in the working relationship between counselors and administrators?
10. What administrative/counseling challenges arise in a rural Mexican American educational setting? How are they being addressed?

Observation Worksheet Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Do Counselors and Administrators confer on a daily basis? If yes, what do they confer about? Yes No

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What activities/roles does the counselor focus on during her day?

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What activities/roles does the administrator focus on during the day?

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Are the roles overlapping? If yes, how do they overlap? Yes No

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Are there visible times where Mexican American students require varied counseling

services?

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In relation to counseling services, what limitations are evident by the rural setting?

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How many students visit the counselor's office on average per hour?

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Which visible administrative roles did the counselor address or handle?

## APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM: Project Title: An Investigation of the Perceptions of the Working Relationship Between Secondary Administrators and Secondary Counselors in a Predominantly Hispanic, Small, Rural Educational Setting in a U.S. - Mexico Border Region in South Texas.

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done? The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of the working relationship between secondary administrators and secondary counselors in a predominantly Hispanic, small, rural educational setting in a U.S. - Mexico border region in South Texas.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study? You are being asked to be in this study because you are a secondary administrator / secondary counselor working in a rural, small, educational setting in South Texas, on the U.S. - Mexico Border region.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study? 8 people (participants) will be

invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of 8 people will be invited from the Lone Star Education Service Center Independent School Districts. What Are the Alternatives to being in this study? The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study? You will be asked to answer 11 interview questions. There is a possibility that an additional interview may be required. You will also be observed during your workday. Your participation in this study will last up to 60 minutes per interview and 1/2 day of observation and includes a possibility of 2-3 visits.

Visit 1 (Week 1) This visit will last about 60 minutes. During this visit the protocol director will interview the administrator/counselor using the 11 questions included in the protocol Visit 2(Week 2) This visit will last about 4 hours. During this visit the protocol director will be observing the working relationship of administrator and counselor. Visit 3(Week 3) If needed, a follow-up interview that will last 30 minutes. During this visit the protocol director will interview the administrator/counselor using any additional amended questions.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study? Audio recordings will be made of the interviews. Interviews will be conducted in English. The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the protocol director can transcribe the interviews and analyze the data. If you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

Are There Any Risks To Me? The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life. Describe risks, including physical, criminal, social, financial, economic, psychological risk as well as risks associated with breach of privacy or confidentiality. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to. The subjects may feel that the questions are personal or will have an impact on their job relationship, so they may choose not to answer the questions.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me? Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study? You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private? The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in my secure filing cabinet and/or my computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area. Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory

agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Who may I Contact for More Information? You may contact the Principal Investigator, You may also contact the Protocol Director, for questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program office at

What if I Change My Mind About Participating? This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your relationship  
STATEMENT OF CONSENT I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT: Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Presenter

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Date