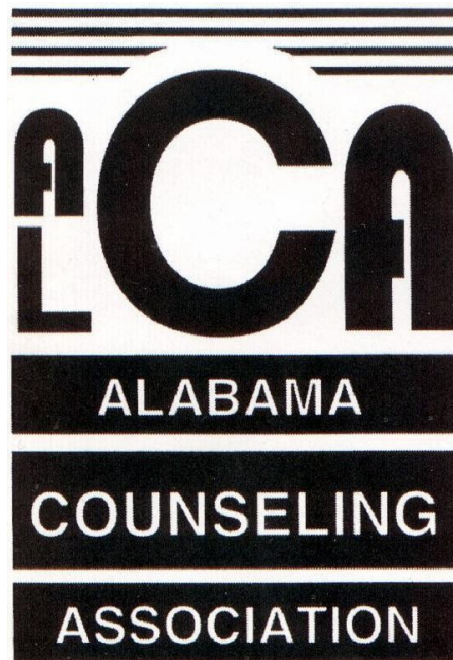


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**The Alabama Counseling Association**  
**JOURNAL**



Enhancing human development throughout the lifespan

Promoting public confidence and trust

in the counseling profession

Caring for self and others

Acquiring and using knowledge

Respecting Diversity

Empowering leadership

Encouraging positive change

### Letter From the Editor

According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), the *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling* is a major professional initiative co-sponsored by ACA and the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB). Thirty counseling organizations are represented, including ACA, each ACA division and region, AASCB, CACREP, NBCC, Chi Sigma Iota, CRCC, and CORE.

Thirty organizational delegates unanimously approved *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession*. This document sets seven basic principles for advancing our profession:

#### **Principles**

1. Sharing a common professional identity is critical for counselors.
2. Presenting ourselves as a unified profession has multiple benefits.
3. Working together to improve public perception of counseling and to advocate for professional issues will strengthen the profession.
4. Creating a portability system for licensure will benefit counselors and strengthen the counseling profession.
5. Expanding and promoting our research base is essential to the efficacy of professional counselors and to the public perception of the profession.
6. Focusing on students and prospective students is necessary to ensure the ongoing health of the counseling profession.
7. Promoting client welfare and advocating for the populations we serve is a primary focus of the counseling profession.

Currently, the American School Counselor Association has yet to endorse the 20/20 initiative and appears poised not to do so in the future. In 2010, then ASCA President Brian Law, stated in a letter sent to members of the 20/20 Oversight Committee, "ASCA's *Role Statement of the Professional School Counselor* contains a concise definition of school counseling. Adding the 20/20 definition would not add clarity to the definition; it would just make it unnecessarily longer and, ultimately, confusing." According to ASCA Executive Director, Richard Wong via an email conversation with me in 2012, "ASCA chose not to sign onto the 20/20 *Principles for Unifying and Strengthening the Profession*" in part because the principles required signers to support a unified profession, yet there was no definition of that unified profession. The 20/20 delegates then created a definition of counseling, but ASCA chose not to endorse the definition for several reasons. Without a definition of the counseling profession that was acceptable to ASCA, the Association never revisited the question of whether to sign onto the seven Principles." In April of 2012, ACA President Don C. Locke, in a letter to ASCA President Alan Burkard, responded to wording in ASCA's revised *National* stating, "..... the American Counseling Association does not agree with the statement on page 21 that working with one student at a time in a therapeutic mode is an inappropriate activity. School counselors may be the first – and sometimes the only – mental health professionals student see and they must be able to provide individual counseling to students as appropriate. This counseling may be clinical in nature."

As a professional organization, ASCA has worked hard to define the role and function of professional school counselors. I wonder if separating themselves from ACA's 20/20 Initiative and failing to recognize and endorse the clinical training school counselors receive has only helped to add confusion to the identity of a professional school counselor.

**Fall 2012  
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# Cyberbullying: What Middle School Students Want You to Know

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## Abstract

Cyberbullying is a growing concern because youth are technologically savvy. Much is to be learned about this pervasive phenomenon, especially during the middle school years when cyberbullying often peaks. This focus group study examined cyberbullying attitudes, beliefs, and opinions among middle school students in Alabama and describes conversations middle school students shared in the interviews.

### *Cyberbullying: What Students Want You to Know*

Cyberbullying is an emergent 21st century dilemma, largely because of the increased use of online and mobile technologies among school-aged youth (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Li, 2006; 2007; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Vandeborsch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Described as the "...most insidious aspect of modern technology in the schools" (Beale & Hall, 2007, p. 12), cyberbullying has gained momentum while simultaneously challenging the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation act that requires a safe learning environment for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement on "Bullying, Harassment, and Violence Prevention Programs: Supporting Safe and Respectful Schools" (ASCA, 2005, p. 5).

### *Defining Cyberbullying*

Cyberbullying often leads to traumatic experiences and a myriad of troubling physical, cognitive, emotional, and social consequences for school-aged youth (Carney, 2008; Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). In contrast to bullying, cyberbullying can reach deeper into the lives of youth because of the ease and convenience of technology and the anonymity, imparting menacing forms of teasing and taunting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010) that did not exist in previous decades. Defined as "...bullying through the e-mail, instant messaging, in a chat room, on a website, or through digital messages or images sent to a cell phone" (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 822), cyberbullying is challenging to monitor because it often takes place in "private chat messages, groups, closed forums, personal SMS texts, and other forms of communication that cannot be viewed by any parent" (Moire, 2012).

### *Pervasiveness of Cyberbullying*

Studies have shown that approximately one in four students will be cyberbullied (Li, 2006; Wright et al., 2009) and about one in six students will cyberbully others (Li, 2006). While these statistics offer information about the prevalence of cyberbullying, other studies have noted that cyberbullying records are “underestimated” (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 526).

Cyberbullying-related suicides exemplify the magnitude of cyberbullying and underline the need for immediate attention. During the past five years, reports of suicides have persisted in the media. In 2009, two female students found cyberbullying-related taunting at school so severe and unbearable that they committed suicide (i.e., Jesse Logan [Starr, 2009] and Hope Witsell [Inbar, 2009]). In 2010, Phoebe Prince, killed herself after taunting at school and on Facebook (McCabe, 2010; McNeil, Herbst, Mascia, & Jessen, 2010). In 2011, cyberbullying suicides continued. For example, Tyler Clementi, a student at Rutgers University jumped off a bridge after a video of him was released (Freidman, 2011), while Natasha MacBryde stepped in front of a train (Loveland, 2011) and Amanda Cummings stepped in front of a bus (Calabrese, 2012). Britney Tongel also killed herself after peers suggested on a website for her to kill herself (Leskin, 2011). These given deaths underline the need for cyberbullying intervention and education (Li, 2006, 2007) and the criticality for “... swift and decisive action” (Beale & Hall, 2007, p. 12) among counselors and other helping professionals.

### *Challenges*

Because cyberbullying profoundly affects youth and impacts the framework of 21st century schools (Wright, Burnham, Inman, & Ogorchock, 2009), counselors, teachers, and parents need to be aware of the current cyberbullying challenges. Cyberbullying challenges were identified by Hinduja and Patchin (2010). The leading researchers stated, “First, many people don’t see the harm associated with it” (p. 2). Secondly, Hinduja and Patchin asserted that another challenge is finding people who are “willing to step up and take responsibility for responding to inappropriate use of technology” (p. 2).

### *Call for Action in Middle School*

Cyberbullying has infiltrated into schools and homes of elementary, middle, and high school students. In one study, over 45% of the students were aware of cyberbullying incidents among their peers, while roughly 30% of the students were victims of cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009). No age is safeguarded against cyberbullying because technology continues to be “embraced at younger ages” and is “becoming the dominant medium” for interaction with peers (Mishna et al., 2009, p. 1224). Thus, the gap for youth vulnerable to cyberbullying has widened. Nevertheless, of the school-aged students, many view the middle school years as the most favorable time for cyberbullying to take place (Cassidy et al., 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Researchers with The National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) study (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby & Kracke, 2009), which involved nearly 5,000 youth, posited that the “peak risk period for Internet harassment was ages 14 to 17,” with more cyberbullying among girls than boys (p. 5).

In response to Hinduja and Patchin’s (2010) challenge (i.e., readiness “to step up and take responsibility” [p. 2]) and the ASCA Position Statement (2012), “Bullying, Harassment, and Violence Prevention Programs: Supporting Safe and Respectful Schools” (2005, p. 5), counselors need to inform youth about cyberbullying. Yet, prior to educating youth about cyberbullying, helping professionals may need additional knowledge and skills as cyberbullying quickly invades into the lives of students, likely not

diminishing in the years ahead (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). By describing the conversations middle school students shared, this study examined cyberbullying.

## Method

### *Participants*

After Internal Review Board approval (IRB) was granted, data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively in fall 2008 and spring 2009. The students who participated were from low income and high income families, based on available data from one school system. For the quantitative study results (Wright et al., 2009), 114 students participated in Grades 7 and 8 in five middle schools in one school system. For the qualitative study, the researchers returned to two of the five middle schools for focus groups. Twenty students were invited to participate in the focus groups; 13 agreed to participate (65%). One focus group had 4 males and 3 females. The racial backgrounds included: 1 White student, 5 African American students, and 1 Hispanic/Latino student. The other focus group had 4 males and 2 females. The racial backgrounds included: 4 White students and 2 African American students.

### *Procedures*

The aim of the focus groups was to add student feedback about cyberbullying beyond the information gathered from the Cyberbullying Survey (Li, 2007), (i.e., quantitative survey administered the prior semester [see Wright et al., 2009]). The research team (the authors and two graduate assistants) led the focus groups in pairs. The focus group interactions lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed a Cyberbullying Focus Group Guide.

At the two schools, written parental consent and verbal assent from the students was received prior to beginning the group activities. Once assent was secured, the researchers followed the procedures in the Cyberbullying Focus Group Guide.

### *Instrument*

The Cyberbullying Focus Group Guide was written for this qualitative study. The Cyberbullying Focus Group Guide included introductory remarks to the middle school students, ground rules, taping procedures, a confidentiality explanation, and a series of questions about cyberbullying. The guide was used to ensure consistency across the focus groups. Sample focus group questions included open-ended queries such as: "If you have been cyberbullied, did you know who was cyberbullying you? Was it a friend, just someone you knew, an adult, or did you ever find out?", "What did you do immediately after you were cyberbullied? Did you tell someone? Retaliate online? Anything?", "When you were cyberbullied, where were you? (at school, home, a friend's house?), and "What should adults know and do about cyberbullying?".

## Results

The focus group conversations with middle school students offered insight into their feelings about cyberbullying, the causes of cyberbullying, and where this phenomenon takes place. In addition, the focus groups allowed time for the students to tell how they dealt with cyberbullying and what they wanted educators and parents to know about cyberbullying. Quotes from the 7th and 8th grade students are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 offers the students' perspectives after cyberbullying incidences. For example, the students discussed the initial affect after cyberbullying (e.g., anger, worry, and confusion), the causality (e.g., gossiping, misunderstandings), and identified that they are more likely to be cyberbullied at home than at school. Also from the students' voices, Table 2 offers suggestions to adults to consider as they help with cyberbullying concerns.

Overall, three themes emerged from this study, based on the focus group discussions. The themes indicate that middle school students: (1) are frustrated with cyberbullying, (2) will seek help with cyberbullying concerns, and (3) see ineptness among many adults (teachers and parents) to deal with cyberbullying issues.

## Discussion

With students' increased access to technologies, such as online social networks and cell phones with Internet access, coupled with a lack of communication between adults and youth, we investigated middle school cyberbullying to raise awareness of cyberbullying. In an effort to explore cyberbullying in depth, this study focused on the feelings related to cyberbullying, the causes, where cyberbullying occurs, and positive and negative ways to deal with cyberbullying.

The voices of the students were articulated in Table 1 as they candidly described cyberbullying. Based on Table 1, the students acknowledged the affective side of cyberbullying (e.g., anger, confusion, worry, depression, suicide). The middle school students appeared to illustrate the multitude of emotions often experienced by youth and reported in the cyberbullying literature (Carney, 2008; Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The cyberbullying-related deaths that were prominent in recent years (Freidman, 2011; Inbar, 2009; Loveland, 2011; McCabe, 2010; McNeil et al., 2010; Starr, 2009) remind educators to be aware of the emotional aspects involved in cyberbullying and how quickly problems accelerate. This study, as well as the literature, underlines the need for educators and parents to watch for signs of trouble and distress among the student body at school. Several of the girls who committed suicide (after being cyberbullied) alerted school officials of peer issues prior to killing themselves. Adults must be prepared to listen, to intervene appropriately, and to make referrals to professional service providers (e.g., counselors, psychologists, community mental health agencies), when indicated.

Second, Table 1 offers insight about how cyberbullying happens. In this study, the different schools had unique cyberbullying offenses. For example, in one school, with limited access to technology, gossiping through cell phone text messaging started the majority of the cyberbullying-related offenses for the girls. In these situations a pattern ensued. The pattern was: (1) gossip spread quickly via text messages, (2) the text messages were strong and harsh with emotional impact, (3) anger built up among the girls, and (4) threats of physical and emotional harm often developed as a way to "get even."

On the other hand, in the more affluent school where students had access to computers, the methods of cyberbullying included more computer-based cyberbullying (i.e., Facebook, MySpace, and computer gaming). The students also offered different cyberbullying solutions. For example, the students at the second school talked more frequently about blocking or reporting the cyberbully, rather than physical fighting.

Third, the students from the focus groups reported that cyberbullying took place at home more than at school. Cyberbullying was also most likely to occur on social networking sites, through text messages, or with email. These findings reiterate that technology can be mishandled by middle school-aged students (e.g., text messages, Facebook and MySpace) and underlines that social networking accounts and other forms of technology should be monitored by adults, especially at home (i.e., where and inverse relationship occurs -- cyberbullying is more prevalent and fewer parents closely monitor online interactions).

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**Table 1**

Listening to the Voices of Middle School Students: Student Perceptions of Cyberbullying

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Related Feelings:

- Our initial feelings after being cyberbullied were: “angry, mad, ready to fight, worried, shocked, and confused...”
- “Depression, pain (both physical and mental), and increased chances of suicide...” are cyberbullying consequences faced by students.

What Causes Cyberbullying?

- “Threats, insults, and name calling.”
- “We see tons of people cyberbullying each day, especially on Facebook. Whether it is sending a person a message, commenting on a photo . . .”
- “...Gossip” is a leading reason why girls cyberbully.
- “Misunderstandings often dominate cyberbullying.”

Where is Cyberbullying?

- “Home is the most likely place to be cyberbullied” because of technological access.”
- “We experience cyberbullying on Facebook, MySpace, phone (text messages), and email.”

How Do You Deal with Cyberbullying?

- The “best thing is not saying anything, the worst is taking matters into your own hands and paying them back.”
  - “Least helpful responses to cyberbullying... letting it get to you, keeping it all inside... dealing with it by yourself, arguing with the person, continuing the talk.”
- 

The middle school students talked about ways to assist adults with cyberbullying concerns (see Table 2). In this aspect of the study, the students recommended steps to limit cyberbullying. They suggested: “warn students that cyberbullying may happen,” “give ways to effectively deal with it,” “educate



students,” and, “get someone who can really help.” Students communicated the need for educators and parents to proactively equip themselves with information and techniques to educate and raise awareness (Wright et al., 2009) about cyberbullying in the schools. Table 2 also offers additional information about cyberbullying and what middle school students think.

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**Table 2**

What Middle School Students Think about Cyberbullying

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- Remind teenagers that “cyberbullying can happen, watch the websites we go, and provide ways ... to deal with cyberbullying.”
  - “... we [often] go to friends to see what we could do about cyberbullying before we go to our parents.”
  - You can decrease cyberbullying by:
    - “Stopping cyberbullying before it happens”
    - “Restricting sites”
    - “Monitoring sites visited”
    - “Understanding what the technology offers (such as blocking techniques)”
  - “Parents overreact about cyberbullying.”
    - “Do not lash out”
    - “Consider blocking the site”
    - “Consider talking to parents of bully”
    - “Consider reporting the bully”
  - During cyberbullying, student concerns were:
    - “How and why did the cyberbullying get started?”
    - “Who started the cyberbullying?”
    - “How do I end the cyberbullying?”
  - What can educators do about cyberbullying?
    - “Find out who is doing the cyberbullying.”
    - “Find out where cyberbullying happens.”
    - “Warn students that cyberbullying may happen; and, give ways to effectively deal with it.”
    - “Educate students.”
    - “Get someone who can really help.”
- 

Three themes emerged from the study. First, students were frustrated with cyberbullying. The students formulated causes for cyberbullying in our conversations and outlined steps to stop cyberbullying. However, from the conversations, we observed inconsistent behavior among the students (i.e., they can articulate what to do about cyberbullying, but applying wisdom and insight in the heat of the moment is

difficult). At times, middle school students fall victim to impulsivity or “getting even.” In addition, numerous middle school discussions centered on confusion (i.e., in the eyes of students some of the cyberbullying incidents were misunderstandings or jokes that got out of hand, implying that many times malicious intentions did not exist, but once escalation started, cyberbullying became inevitable). This pattern suggests that educators and parents must consistently remind students of the inherent dangers of online interactions and how comments they make can be misinterpreted.

Second, based on our focus groups, students will seek help for cyberbullying. However, this study and the literature (Mishna et al., 2009) suggest that students “...go to friends before parents” for cyberbullying concerns. This leads us to believe that educators and parents may not be consulted about some cyberbullying issues until the issues have accelerated. The students prefer to go to peers first for advice and consultation.

Third, the students were frank about educators’ and parents’ understanding of cyberbullying (i.e., believing that they are often inadequate or inept in dealing with cyber issues and not technologically savvy). Students noted that some educators and parents were too overwhelmed to help and others were emotionally unavailable. Consequently, when adults are inept or ill-equipped, students will confide in peers rather than adults.

### Conclusions

This exploratory study examined cyberbullying attitudes, beliefs, and opinions among middle school students. Because this study involved two schools in one school system, generalizability to other middle schools is unclear. Similar studies in other middle schools in Alabama and in other regions of the U.S. are needed to offer further insight about cyberbullying. With the limitations in mind, this study revealed several findings that can offer assistance to educators and parents as they strive for a safe and supportive school environment.

For the educator or parent that believes he or she is inadequate with cyberbullying concerns, there were encouraging comments from the middle school students in this study. The middle school students reiterated the need for guidance and direction (with cyberbullying) from trustworthy sources. The results suggested that they want you to listen and to assist with this widespread issue. As a matter of fact, the students pointed out problematic traits that drive students away from confiding in adults during troubling times (i.e., overreacting, getting angry, being punitive rather than resourceful when students confide) and offered solutions to this problem (see Table 2). Students prefer adults that listen and facilitate their growth, rather than those that attempt to solve their problems or overreact.

Educators and parents must be informed about cyberbullying. While the students verbally formulated causes of cyberbullying and steps to prevent cyberbullying (Tables 1 and 2), their comments also suggested that educators and parents must be proactive in cyberbullying prevention. School professionals should educate and raise awareness of cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009), enforce zero tolerance to cyberbullying, and find ways to intervene and prevent cyberbullying in the future, aligning with NCLB legislation (2001) and the ASCA Position Statement (2005) about Bullying, Harassment, and Violence Prevention Programs: Supporting Safe and Respectful Schools.

In addition, as students seek help, educators and parents must reinforce problem-solving and conflict resolution skills for middle school students in addition to teaching tolerance and empathy toward others. Such skills can be integrated into guidance lessons with the school counseling program. School

officials often need to initiate training to educate teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents on cyberbullying intervention and prevention methods.

To be effective in preventing cyberbullying in middle schools, all personnel at school (e.g., teachers, school counselors, and administrators) and parents must be on the forefront. Informed educators and parents can be better prepared to educate, lead the fight against cyberbullying, and provide a safe place to talk when cyberbullying becomes troublesome.

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# Cyberbullying: A Research-based Content Analysis of the Psychological Literature

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## ABSTRACT

Research on the topic of cyber-bullying has proliferated over the past decade, particularly on its impact on children through adolescents. Thus, it would be of interest to examine the scope and extent of research interest on the topic in scholarly publications. This paper reports on a reference citation analysis of the database PsycINFO, using the term cyberbullying in a keyword search. In rank order, the major foci of the research involved the issues of intervention or treatment, profile of offenders, comparisons to traditional bullying, legal implications, risk factors, social dynamics, gender, prevalence, and measurement issues. In addition, the following journals were the top publication outlets for cyberbullying research: *Journal of Psychology*, *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *Journal of School Violence*, *Psychology in the Schools*, *School Psychology International*, and *Preventing School Failure*.

## Introduction

Mobile communications are undoubtedly a ubiquitous feature of modern life, particularly since the advent of the cell phone (Goggin, 2006; Hamill & Lasen, 2005; Levinson, 2004). Despite advances in communications technology, cyber-crimes seem to be increasing. Cyber-bullying, a component of Cyber-abuse, encompasses online abusive interpersonal behaviors that are overly aggressive in nature (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Moreover, the intent is to threaten, harass, embarrass, or socially ostracize a specific, intended victim. Recent research shows that the prevalence of cyber-abuse of children and youth is growing dramatically in the U.S. (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011), with detrimental effects on both psychological and academic functioning (see Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu, & MacFadden, 2011, for a review). Over the past decade, there has been increased attention devoted to the onerous issue of cyber-bullying (Chibbaro, 2007; Li, 2010). At the same time, much of the literature on cyberbullying has focused on the impact, abuse, and victimization of school-aged children (Jimerson, Swearer, & Espelage, 2009; Mason, 2008).

Students who are cyber-bullied have reported negative emotional responses such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and humiliation. One result of such affective states is the inability to concentrate and study, thus directly impacting grades and social relationships in children (Beran & Li, 2007). Previous research has indicated that students who are cyber-aggressive tend to be identified as socially inept, showing problems at home and with school authority. Moreover, these abusive students also exhibit substance abuse patterns and delinquency (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). For these reasons, cyberbullying has evolved as a major source of concern for parents and professionals, particularly today's educators.

The area of the behavioral and social sciences is a discipline involved in studying cyberbullying as a specific investigatory topic in research studies. The database PsycINFO indexes a large number of journals in the field of education. For this reason, the current research design utilized this major database to survey research trends in the literature on the specific topic of cyberbullying. In addition, previous studies have illustrated the benefits of research designs that involve trend analysis approaches

(Garfield, 1979; Piotrowski & Gallant, 2009; Reynolds & Sundberg, 1976). The present study aims to obtain an overview of the scope and research emphasis on the issue of cyberbullying. To that end, a reference citation analysis of published literature was performed, using a keyword search strategy (Piotrowski & Perdue, 1986).

### Method

Despite the fact that content analysis of the research literature have their limitations, recent studies in the social sciences field show that this qualitative research methodology has both practical and investigatory value (Krippendorff, 2004; Patton, 2002; Weber, 1990). Indeed, content analysis has been successfully applied in studies of instruction and curriculum (e.g., Houck & Boyle, 2010).

#### *Measuring Trends in Research*

The examination of research trends in the literature has served as an informative exercise in addressing the popularity or shifts in attention on a host of topics of interest to both practitioners and researchers across various disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Moreover, analyses of patterns and topical emphasis in research have recently been reported in applied fields (e.g., Furrer, Thomas, & Goussevskaia, 2008). Some issues that have garnered much attention in analyses of the literature include the popularity of major theories or esteemed theorists (Griggs & Proctor, 2002; Myers, 1970), schools of influence, conceptual or prediction models, statistical techniques in data analysis, and author citation searches. In another area, investigators have studied trends in the status or use of tests or measures as research instruments (Piotrowski, 1995; Polyson, Peterson, & Marshall, 1986; Reynolds & Sundberg, 1976).

Despite the drawbacks in the reporting of reference/citation data analyses (Herbert, 2004; MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989; Seglen, 1997), findings of these types of studies can inform the educator or researcher on reviews of a select bibliographic body of knowledge, as well as identification of potential research outlets for publication. The current findings should be of interest to three constituencies: 1) Academic researchers and faculty who have an inherent interest in scholarly work on contemporary educational issues (Kaya, Webb, & Weber, 2005); 2) Counseling staff in educational settings (Piotrowski, Perdue, & Armstrong, 2005); and 3) School administrators who have the unenviable task of handling aberrant behaviors that have legal implications for both the student and the school system.

#### *Online Search Strategy*

A keyword search of the term *cyberbullying* was performed (see Brand, 1979; Piotrowski & Perdue, 1986). The search was conducted on October 30, 2011. This procedure yielded 157 reference citations to empirical studies, commentaries, books/chapters, and dissertation summaries. Based on the abstract of the noted reference, the author tagged the reference with a descriptor that best represented that main topical focus of the research. A frequency tally, across the main categories, was maintained until all 157 references were scored. These scores were then tabulated for frequency counts on each descriptive category.

### Results and Discussion

The current bibliographic citation analysis indicates that a sizeable minority (40%) of the literature on the topic of cyberbullying is general in scope; for example, a commentary on a former article or a book review. However, there are several major aspects of this topic that have received much research

attention; i.e., examining the characteristics of abusers, comparing traditional vs. cyber-bullying, legal concerns, and the role of school personnel in controlling pupils' behaviors. As noted in Table 1, there seems to be investigatory efforts to determine the most robust approaches or interventions in either abating or mitigating the factors associated with cyberbullying. At the same time, several factors (that appear to play a key role in the occurrence and maintenance of this problematic, enigmatic behavior) seem to be largely ignored by researchers, such as gender and age factors. Moreover, there is a dearth of studies with a focus on family issues and socio-economic factors. Overall, research studies seem to provide equal emphasis on the level of educational setting. That is, researchers have focused across all three major school levels: middle school, high school, and college.

One area that has been largely ignored is the elementary level, where there is the potential to promote preventative measures during the early developmental years (see Sabella, 2009). For example, both teachers and school personnel could incorporate some seminal training on the proper use of mobile tech devices for young students, both at school and elsewhere. Violations of school standards could be referred to school counselors (Bauman, 2008; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). For older students, several authors have suggested a host of intervention strategies that include web-based resources and lesson plans/activities which serve a preventative function and provide both teachers and their students a realistic framework to cope with cyberbullying (Couvillon & Llieva, 2011; Sabella, 2009). Furthermore, it seems that educators are challenged by the moral and legal implications of cyberbullying (Patchin, 2011; Shariff, 2004). The major drawback is that current laws are rather ambiguous, with little consensus across school districts. Moreover, civil rights issues restrict the implementation of interventions promoted by both educators and administrators. Perhaps, initiatives to promulgate Best Practices at the national level would not only address the concerns of parents, teachers, and school administrators, would also provide a legal framework for local school boards.

The current analysis also provided data based on a sidebar database function of the search results, regarding the most frequently cited journals on the topic of cyberbullying. Table 2 shows the rank order of the 'Top 10' scholarly publication outlets in this area. By comparison, the database ProQuest-Education has indexed only a limited number (n=42) of scholarly articles on cyberbullying, across a wide variety of educational journals. Only two journals (Preventing School Failure, Computers in the Schools) had more than one reference on the topic of cyberbullying.

Finally, although there have been concerns about the use of citation analysis, the current study illustrates that examining research trends in the literature can be a functional tool to obtain a systematic view of the major topical areas of research emphasis in the field of education. The findings present an overview of the scope of research on an urgent contemporary topic of concern to parents, educators, and counselors.



**Table 1.** Rank order of the most frequently researched topics in cyberbullying research (N=157)

Topical focus	Frequency/Percent	
Interventions/treatment	22	(14%)
Abuser profile	11	(7%)
Traditional bullying issues	10	(6%)
Legal implications	9	(6%)
Impact of school personnel	9	(6%)
Social dynamics	5	(3%)
Risk factors	5	(3%)
Measurement issues	5	(3%)
Prevalence statistics	5	(3%)
Social networking factors	4	(2.5%)
Family issues	4	(2.5%)
Special education students	3	(2%)
Peer influence	3	(2%)
Suicide	3	(2%)
Other general or idiosyncratic topics (e.g., rural schools and book reviews)	62	(40%)

**Table 2.** In rank order, the “Top 10” publication outlets for research on cyberbullying

Journal	Number of Articles
Journal of Psychology	14
Australian Journal of Guidance & Counseling	8
CyberPsychology & Behavior	7
Journal of Adolescent Health	7
Computers in Human Behavior	5
PsycCRITIQUES	4
Journal of School Violence	3
Psychology in the Schools	3
School Psychology International	3
Behavioral Psychology	2

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## Professional Counselors' Experiences Pursuing State Licensure

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### Abstract

A phenomenological study was conducted to gather the essence of professional counselors' experiences regarding their pursuit of professional licensure in a Southeastern state. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six females via the telephone. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Findings indicate that these individuals experienced financial difficulties, felt inadequately prepared, and had to deal with unexpected circumstances.

### Professional Counselors' Experiences Pursuing State Licensure

Currently all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have laws in place that establish a minimum set of standards necessary to practice as a professional counselor (American Counseling Association[ACA], 2010). California completed the list by licensing professional counselors beginning in October 2009 (ACA, 2010). As graduates of counseling programs enter into the professional community, they will find that they have a new set of challenges to address as they begin to pursue state licensure. Licensure requirements are in place to protect the public from unethical, incompetent, and unlawful practice. Each state establishes its own licensing board that oversees licensing laws, which are intended to establish a minimum set of standards expected of a licensed professional counselor (ACA, 2010). The licensing board exists to protect the public consumer by issuing professional licenses, handling ethical complaints, and enforcing state regulations (ACA, 2010; Robiner, DeWolfe, & Yozwiak, 2010).

Because no national licensure exists, each state legislates and governs the practices and procedures of the professionals residing in that particular state. This process is in accord with the 10th amendment as counseling is considered a form of healthcare that is seen as intrastate commerce; thus allowing the state to have jurisdiction over the licensing process (Jost, 1997). Since each state maintains its own licensing laws, heterogeneity of processes quickly develops (ACA, 2010). These differences have created a great deal of disparity within the process of licensing counselors. The American Counseling Association recently published a review of each state's licensing requirements (ACA, 2010). There is much disagreement between states in the number of clinical and supervisory hours required, the educational

requirements, the examination, and the title of the credential. In fact, there are at least six different titles currently being used to identify professional counselors (ACA, 2010). The heterogeneity of counseling licensing boards requirements creates confusion for students in counseling training programs and professionals pursuing licensure (Robiner, DeWolfe, & Yozwiak, 2010). Most counseling programs develop their course work and practicum experiences to meet the licensing requirements for the state in which the program is located; however, this may create unforeseen difficulties for the counselors as they begins to pursue licensure in a state other than the one in which they graduated or in which they are currently licensed.

The disparity between state licensing requirements has not gone unnoticed by most professional counseling organizations (Rollins, 2006). In 1985, the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB) was created to encourage communication among state licensing boards (AASCB, n.d.). A few years later in 1988, Walz, Gazda, and Shertzer presented a series of lectures at the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision conference (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011) addressing the future of counseling. These lectures were later published (Walz, Gazda, & Shertzer, 1991) and were influential in the development of the more recent *20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling* initiative (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). This initiative, which is cosponsored by the ACA and the AASCB, is comprised of representatives from 30 “major organizational stakeholders in the profession of counseling” (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011, p. 369) that exist to reach consensus on key principles that are critical to advancing the counseling profession. One of these principles is the desire to create a portable system of licensure, which would require more agreement among licensing requirements in each state (ACA, 2010).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of professional counselors as they pursue state licensure in a state in the southeastern United States. The researchers wished to capture the common experiences that are shared among professionals pursuing similar licensing requirements in a single state. The results of this study hope to provide students with realistic, accurate expectations regarding the process of pursuing professional licensure. The results will also provide organizations like AASCB and the delegates of the *20/20: A vision of the future of counseling* initiative with an understanding of the experiences of some counselors as they have pursued state licensure, which will inform the work of these two groups. Also, it is anticipated that the results will inform counselor educators so they can thoughtfully prepare their students for the professional world in which they will soon embark.

## Methods

### *Research Tradition*

Social constructivism is the paradigm that was adopted by the researchers. According to social constructivism meanings are varied and multiple, co-created in the intersubjective exchange between individuals (Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). From this philosophical paradigm, the study was conducted from a phenomenological framework using the methods influenced by Moustakas (1994) and Miles and Huberman (1994). A phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry is appropriate when describing a group of participants’ common experience of a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the researchers have various levels of lived experience with the studied phenomenon; as such, Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology was chosen so that by bracketing out the researcher’s experiences they can approach this study with a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007).

*Bracket of author's experience*

Researchers must address and bracket their prior experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The first researcher moved to his current state of residency to pursue a doctoral degree. Prior to this move, he was working at a private practice as a Licensed Associate Professional Counselor in another state. Once he moved, the researcher decided to pursue licensure in the state in which he currently resides. His choice to pursue licensure was based upon his understanding of the licensing laws, which led him to believe that he would be able to open a private practice while being under supervision from a state approved supervisor. The lead researcher found the experience pursuing licensure to be discouraging. Multiple attempts to get the board to approve his educational background, which at the time of his graduation was not CACREP-accredited but met the educational requirements, led to frustration and confusion. Additionally, he found the process of finding a supervisor to be quite difficult. He obtained a list of Approved Supervisors from the state Board of Examiners in Counseling. He began to call supervisors on the list within a 20-mile radius. Of the supervisors that he was able to contact, many stated that they were no longer acting as supervisors or they only supervise employees at their place of employment. Moreover, he was frustrated by the amount of supervisors who were unavailable or who never returned his phone calls. Eventually, the researcher found an available supervisor; however, this individual was over an hour away. By this point the lead researcher was involved with his doctoral studies and teaching assignments, and thus he decided to forego pursuing licensure in the state of residency. Curiosity led him to wonder if other counselors were having similar experiences. After speaking with colleagues in various states who were at similar stages of their professional development and hearing similar experiences regarding their licensure pursuits, he decided to conduct a formal study. The researcher understands that the licensing requirements in his state of residency are stringent and he believes he initially misunderstood some of these requirements. The researcher anticipated that potential participants would also express similar difficulties with pursuing licensure. The researcher noted and acknowledged his potential biases at the outset of this study.

Different from the first author of this study, the second author has never pursued licensure during her 11 years as counselor educator. She considered pursuing licensure from time to time, but never transferred the thoughts into action because of the amount of time it takes and the expenses associated with supervision. As such, the second author entered into the study with much interest in learning about the experiences that other professional counselors experience as they pursue licensure.

**Participants**

Six total individuals residing in a state in the Southeastern United States participated in this study. The licensure requirements of this state included: 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience from a board approved supervisor, supervision that includes 100 hours of annual supervision, of which 50 of the hours must be one-to-one, face-to-face, individual supervision, and successfully passing the NCE. Five of the participants were at various stages of pursuing licensure, while one individual recently completed licensure three months prior to the interview. Purposive sampling was conducted by sending an email through a counseling email listserv. All of the participants were female and they lived in various locations throughout the state. Two of the participants completed their graduate counselor training outside of their current state of residency, while the other participants graduated from programs within the state. Currently, all of the programs from which the participants graduated are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009); however, one of the in-state programs was not accredited at the time when one of the participants completed her

degree. Each participant received an information letter prior to the interviews, which was attached to the recruitment email.

### Data Collection

All participants consented to participate prior to the beginning of the interview. A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was utilized to discover the essence of the participants' experiences (Kvale, 2009). The first researcher conducted the interviews with each of the participants. Five of the interviews were conducted via the telephone and one of the interviews was conducted via a video chat service called Skype. All interviews were audio recorded for analysis. The semi-structured format was utilized only to provide a starting point for the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The scope of the study was to arrive at the essence of the participants' lived experience of pursuing professional counseling licensure. As the researcher conducted the interviews, he summarized and reflected on the participants' statements. This allowed for the interpretation and descriptions of the experiences to be discovered and to emerge (Kvale, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sequence and the structure of the questions were influenced by the responses of each individual participant. The process of data collection continued until saturation occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Data analyses*

All interviews were transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2007) and uploaded into Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Software. Each interview was read through completely to gain a sense of the overall essence of the participants' experiences. Inductive coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were utilized that were both descriptive and interpretive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were used to identify non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements in the interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Codes were used to assist in summarizing descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Textural and structural descriptions, the *what* and the *how* of the phenomenon, were developed of the participants' experiences that provide the essence of the experienced phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

### *Trustworthiness*

In keeping with our philosophical paradigm of the study, the researchers hoped to leave the ultimate decision of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to the reader by providing an interpretative space between the reader and the presented text (Angen, 2000). Interpretive indeterminacy resulting from ambiguity (Atkinson & Mitchell, 2010) was addressed by bracketing research biases, collecting data until saturation, providing thick descriptions, triangulation, and conducting member checks (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Both researchers reviewed and analyzed the data separately to allow for multiple interpretation sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation of sources provides corroborating evidence to support the emergent themes (Creswell, 2007). After separately reviewing and analyzing the transcriptions, the researchers discussed the emerging themes and the language as to which best describe these themes. Consensus was collaboratively reached in describing the essence of the participants' experiences.

Member checking was conducted by providing the participants with the researchers' interpretations of the experiences of pursuing licensure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were emailed a summary, including quotations, of the textural and structural descriptions of the findings. Five of the participants



responded with affirmation regarding the interpretation of the findings. The other participant never responded to the invitation to provide feedback of the themes.

### Findings

The participants in this study had experiences in their pursuit of licensure that lead to the emergence of common themes. Findings indicated that these individuals experienced financial difficulties, had to face unwanted decisions, and struggled with feelings of helplessness as they pursued state licensure.

#### *Financial Predicament*

Entering into the process of licensure, most professional counselors were optimistic about their professional development. The pursuit of professional licensure was initially seen as an opportunity to establish or develop one's professional identity and to create career opportunities. One participant stated her rationale for pursuing licensure by saying, "I wanted to have some different opportunities afforded to me...I wanted something to, you know identify me as a proficient professional in this vocation." Another participant identified the license's relationship to her professional identity as follows:

To me, [licensure] was the second step after obtaining my Master's degree, it was the next step. I couldn't imagine why someone would not pursue licensure. Because to me it was a professional credential; without it, it was almost a two-pronged process. Without it, how worthwhile, how valuable would the degree be? Part of it was being told, you know, you will make more money with licensure.

Such optimism seemed to turn into pessimism when professional counselors began to pursue licensing procedures. Focusing on the financial strain of pursuing licensure was the pervading theme for all but one of the participants. A sense of being exploited and neglected saturated the interviews of these participants as these counselors faced financial strain even after earning their master's degree. As a single, female participant stated, "I am going to cry right now. It's frustrating and overwhelming. You work so much and don't get compensated for what you do. It's hard, it's difficult, it's humbling too". Obtaining professional licensure as a counselor was an opportunity that seemed to be reserved for the privileged. The pursuit of licensure was a draining, frustrating process if one was not "fortunate enough to work at a facility that provides licensure". Those who did have this "perk" of free supervision stated that this helped alleviate any "financial concerns" during their pursuit of licensure. However, it did not appear that this simplistic solution to a more complex situation worked for everyone as indicated by the reports of individuals working in jobs that they "hate". One stated that "There are agencies in [our town] that will pay for supervision. Places will pay for the supervision. I know people who went to work there just to get their supervision paid but I know they hate working where they are".

Participants reported salaries around \$36,000/year, which is a little less than the National median for mental health counselors at \$38,100 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). When the cost of supervision is factored in, which was reported between \$50-\$80 per week, the pursuit of licensure became an expensive endeavor for most individuals, as was stated by one participant:

The fee weekly was \$50, which was the most affordable I could find but I just didn't have the extra couple hundred of dollars a month especially having to pay student loans. You know, student loans and paying for licensure is like paying rent. So when you don't make a whole lot of

money and you are already paying mortgage or rent and you have to pay another payment like that, I just couldn't afford it.

According to one participant she spent approximately \$5,000 in supervision costs over the last two years. These "unfortunate" counselors were placed into difficult, crippling situation that had forced them either to stop pursuing licensure, consider a career change, or rely on external support, which will be described in other emergent themes.

### *Unwanted Decisions*

**Stopped pursuing licensure.** As the financial stress built, one response for participants was to stop pursuing licensure completely: "It was becoming very expensive to continue to pay for supervision, to continue to seek hours but I wasn't getting any individual hours so I ...that's when I turned in my license". The financial costs of pursuing licensure potentially placed an individual in the difficult position of having to decide if they could realistically continue in the licensure process because of their financial wherewithal. The individual decided that she needed to save money before pursuing the licensure process. Another had reached a point where they stopped pursuing licensure while contemplating leaving the profession: "I haven't seen anything in the process that is facilitative to make you feel encouraged to continue through with the process". Another participant specified her intentions to pursue another profession: "Put it this way, um, I am to the point that I am actually looking to pursue an RN degree, not a degree, but RN education so that I can get licensed or registered as nurse and look to make 50 or 60,000 dollars per year, um, and having credentials that are portable from state to state". One participant is even telling others to pursue a different profession:

I usually tell other people they should go get a Master's in Social Work...You don't have to get licensed to find more jobs and their process seems easier...Compared to paying a couple of years \$3,000 a year for supervision...I don't want to have to work two jobs. I don't want to have to teach, supervise, and have a private practice. I don't want to have to do all those things.

**Recruiting external support.** For the participants who were unable to receive supervision from their place of employment, they found it difficult to support themselves and to pay for supervision on their starting salaries. Continuing with supervision required some form of external support. Trying to establish this external support was a humbling experience that elicited embarrassment from the counselor. Having to find additional employment to supplement the participants' income was a reoccurring theme. One participant discussed the number of hours in addition to her full-time job that she had to work to support herself and supervision: "I still do contract, not much, but I still do some. That is another 5-10 hours in the work week because I do need the extra income." Some were fortunate to find additional work within the counseling field: "So I have had to ... make sure I get the second job. I am going to be an interviewer at [a local hospital's] emergency department for a study that is going on through the department of psychiatry". However, another participant had to find work outside of counseling all together: "I would do seasonal employment. I would work at malls." Moreover, reflecting on this experience during the interview led one participant to tears: "I mean I am 32 and I didn't want to ask family. I have talked to my family (starts to cry), it's frustrating". She continued to describe the humility of moving in with a roommate and having to get another job to pay for licensure. Other participants were able to receive external support from a partner or a loved one: "My partner was paying all the bills. So I was kind of fortunate in that aspect as well". Another participant stated that she used the inheritance from her father's recent death to support the expense of supervision.

I inherited money from him that I was able to use to put towards that without having to sweat it and I knew I could use it as a tax write off on my income taxes...Otherwise it would probably require a part-time job just to, just with these extra fees. Because the meager amount of earnings I was making at my last job in community mental health, I was bringing home \$2100/month net. So I literally in paying my bills and basic monthly expenses I literally had \$10/month left over so.

For many of the participants who had to pay out of pocket for supervision, they had to establish some form of external support to assist with the process.

### *Sense of Helplessness*

Another prominent theme that emerged during this study was that participants' were getting stuck in the process. Counselors experienced confusion and lack of support from the licensing board and the profession as a whole, which led to strong feelings of helplessness. The pursuit of licensure created a sense of alienation that leaved the counselor searching for support. "It seemed like it wasn't a supportive process at all...it makes you feel helpless", a participant noted as she discussed her experience of trying to have some of her questions answered by the board regarding licensure. This sense of helplessness and having to go through this frustrating experience seemed to emerge during the initial phases of the process when participants were trying to have questions answered by the board or when the participants were in the situation of finding a job.

Multiple experiences emerged as it relates to interacting with the licensing board. One participant shared her positive experience with the board. However, there was a consensus to expect the board to have a question or to lose a document and that future licensees should keep a detailed paper trail. One participant reported an expected difficulty with the licensing board: "Now, I did have a problem with the board, they lost some of my recommendation forms...But honestly, I was warned by a lot of other counselors in the field that they lose paperwork..."; The general consensus among the participants was that they all frequently had questions that they wanted answered. One participant reported "getting the run around" when trying to have questions answered. Another participant provided a recommendation to "utilize the website to greater capabilities [with] FAQs, emails, etc.", to provide greater accessibility. When individuals pursuing licensure felt unable to access the board during the time of needs and they found the website to be unclear, they seemed to develop feelings of being unsupported, helpless, discouraged, and frustrated.

These feelings also emerged for participants who have a difficult time finding employment after graduation. One participant described the "Catch-22 of needing experience". This participant moved from another state and once she arrived to the current state she described a felt lack of support from the professional community and felt helplessness to find a way to establish herself in a professional counseling role:

Yea, most of the places I applied to stated either I needed a license to be there to work or more experience to be there to work. I had a year experience at least ... But I guess that wasn't enough experience for most places and then not being able to get the job...And so that made it difficult for me, because I was in a Catch-22 type situation... It's like, bam! Slam the door in your face.

One participant decided to pursue licensure 11 years after graduation. The program from which she graduated was not CACREP-accredited at the time of her graduation. When asked to produce all of her

syllabi from that time period, she was able to elicit the help of a former professor that attempted to help her move forward in the licensure process when she felt stuck. Though the professor was able to produce these syllabi, it seemed that this process became just as confusing for the professor when the licensing board asked for additional information. This participant and this professor were still working with the licensing board to get the appropriate information at the time of the interview. She stated she was mindful of the time she continued to ask of this particular, willing professor:

Even the professor was like well you turned in your transcripts, those are the dates you attended...you do feel a level of "Oh my goodness" I have to keep bothering them now because you know they have a lot of things going on too. I was just very appreciative of what the one professor did. We literally sat for three hours going through all of her paperwork finding old syllabi that she just so happened to keep.

When the counselors got stuck they did not seem to have anywhere to go to find clear answers to their questions. Participants described the licensing board as understaffed and not adequately prepared to field questions efficiently. Additionally, these participants were no longer formally affiliated with an academic institution. This left them feeling unsupported with no clear source of support from the professional community.

#### *Insufficient Preparation*

Another theme that emerged from the participants was the experience of being insufficiently prepared for the licensure process. It seemed that some counseling programs were making their students aware of the existence of licensure and, for some other programs, even creating a rationale for the importance of obtaining a license. As one participant who attended a counseling program that was taught mostly by adjunct clinicians stated, "...licensure was something that was always discussed from the beginning, from the get go in my course work. Because many of the professors I had were in private practice". At this specific school the professors even tried to address the financial concerns by emphasizing the importance of working at a clinic that provides licensure or to think about saving for the cost of supervision. However that type of emphasis on the importance of professional licensure and how to prepare for licensure was not an experience shared by many of the participants. Another participant described her counseling program by saying, "They mentioned it, um. I don't remember them at all stressing the importance of getting the license and, you know, the benefits of getting licensed would offer". Counseling programs seem to be insufficiently preparing graduates regarding how to actually pursue licensure and what to realistically expect when beginning the process. One participant stated:

In school, I wasn't given a whole lot of information, regarding what I need to do to start the process. I wasn't told...it would have been a great idea for me to go ahead and take the NCE directly upon graduation as opposed to waiting. Here I am six years post graduation and I still haven't taken the NCE, yet.

#### **Discussion**

In this study, the authors were seeking to obtain the essence of individual's experiences of pursuing licensure as a professional counselor. There was an overall essence of frustration, discouragement, self-doubt, and helplessness experienced by the individuals in this study. These emotions varied in intensity as the participants encountered various situations within this process. Counselors began this process with aspirations of solidifying their professional identity. Much of these individuals' identities were wrapped up in their profession and pursuing licensure has as much to say about their sense of self-

worth as it does about their competency as a counselor. In the beginning finding a job and understanding the idiosyncratic requirements of the licensure application began a trajectory of emotional experiences that created a lot of self-doubt. Couple this initial experience with the financial stresses of working in a fiscally prohibitive career and having to pay for supervision, the aspiring professional began to question their desire to be in this profession and their ability to do without the support of another. The expression of so much angst over being financially stable and the confession of some of these professionals to pursue a different career were unexpected. Financial strain is to be expected; however, the degree to which this strain pushed individuals to stop the process of pursuing licensure or contemplating a career change was surprising.

### Implications

The findings from this study have implications for counselor educators, counselors considering pursuing licensure, licensing boards, and those who advocate and legislate for laws that address counseling licensure. One of the comments expressed by some of the participants is that they did not feel that they were adequately prepared to pursue licensure by their academic program. The significant impact of pursuing licensure was not adequately explained to them. It seems that counselor educators could do a better job informing future counselors as to the benefits and the costs of professional licensure. An ethical protocol emerges that future counselors should be properly informed as to the potential costs associated with pursuing a career in counseling. It is unethical to not make students and future counselors aware of the costs associated with the process of pursuing licensure during their tenure in a counselor-training program.

These findings should help direct the ongoing efforts by state legislation and licensing boards to create a set of laws and standards that allow for competency to be demonstrated so as to protect the public but aren't preventing future competent counselors from reaching their goals. Initiatives, like the *20/20: A vision for the future of counseling* and organization like the AASCB, intend to address issues related to licensure and transferability. The results of this study should encourage the establishment of a rationale for the requirements of professional licensure. As a profession, we need to understand the effects licensing requirements have on those who are pursuing licensure, especially as it relates to the future of the profession. These requirements exist to protect the public from unethical, harmful practice; however, further research is needed to direct efforts like the *20/20* initiative and to support a rationale for a minimum set of standards that professional counselors must meet that protects the public but yet is reasonably attainable for emerging professionals. The financial struggles that emerged in this study forced the researchers to consider the ethical dilemma of self-care. The counselors highlighted their need to work additional jobs and hours to support the licensure pursuit. However, more research is needed to understand the impact this additional strain on the counselor has on the work with the client. Do counselors' attempts to meet these licensing requirements impact the quality of work being done with clients? If the state licensing board exists to protect the welfare of the client, one should wonder if some of the requirements that are in place actually having the opposite effect than the intended purpose.

### Limitations

The data collected in this study conveyed the essence of the experiences of 6 emerging counselors. Larger studies are needed to explore the prevalence of these themes among other groups of individuals. Another limitation of this study was that some interviews were conducted via the telephone and the depth of observation was limited to the individuals' tone of voice, which may have impacted the way in

which data was interpreted (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Kwong Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Additionally, the use of the telephone created an interpersonal barrier that impacted the flow of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). At various points the conversation would cut out due to static creating an interruption in the conversation or a misunderstanding in what was said. However, the use of the telephone did enhance anonymity which may have led to more transparent disclosure of the participants' experience (Suzuki et. al, 2007). This method of interviewing was used out of convenience and accessibility to participants located over large distances. Another limitation of the study was the participants were all female and urban areas of practice were heavily represented. It is anticipated that those practicing in rural areas would experience the same essence of experiences but the difficulties may manifest itself in other ways.

### Conclusion

With professional organizations and state laws requiring counselors to obtain a professional license, the rationale and requirements should be evaluated for their pragmatic utility. None of the participants wanted to extinguish counseling licensure and they all understood its purpose of protecting the public; however, the experience from these participants was that some of the requirements asked of them were unrealistic and unmanageable. This led to feelings of frustration, discouragement, and helplessness, which led some to stop pursuing licensure and others to consider a career change. Counselor educators should not only prepare their graduates for clinical practice but also properly inform them of the professional environment they are about to enter. Current professional counselors should be aware of the potential difficulties of their junior colleagues and work to support and advocate for their future development. Legislative bodies and state licensing boards should consider the impact licensing requirements have not only on the counselor but also on the client. Longitudinal studies of counselors' experiences of pursuing licensure are needed; additionally, studies exploring the rationale of state licensing requirements that explores what is a minimal set of competent standards should be developed.

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# Do Teacher Advisement Programs Affect Student Achievement?

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## ABSTRACT

Although education has been a part of all cultures since the beginning of existence, it is constantly evolving. As educators seek to instill in their students the significance of lifelong learning, they also seek opportunities to learn and improve. Greater pressures and demands than ever before are being placed on educators. When Handley High School failed to meet state expectations, educators sought solutions. After much time and research, a Teacher Advisement Program (TAP) and a Get on Track (GOT) program were implemented. This study examines the effectiveness on academic achievement of these programs by reviewing Alabama High School Graduation Exam passage rates, reviewing graduation rates, and conducting student and faculty surveys. After reviewing data, a direct correlation between the programs implemented at Handley High School and student achievement cannot be established. The study does suggest some positive outcomes of the TAP/GOT efforts that merit future exploration. The research from this study will aid in future developments of the two programs. This study is a continuation of previous studies regarding implementation of teacher advisement programs in other school districts and will serve as a guide to schools seeking to implement such programs. As schools continue to seek opportunities to enhance academic achievement and student success, advisement programs might increase in popularity.

## An Introduction

Since the beginning of human existence, education has been a part of all cultures. However, studies differ about the beginnings of formal education and literacy. Some parts of the world still have a literacy rate below 60 percent (The world fact book, n.d.). Over many decades, education evolved into the systematic structure we know today. Education stakeholders constantly seek opportunities to improve education and student achievement.

One of the most recent and widely known initiatives to improve student achievement was passed in 2001 under the George W. Bush administration. The act, known as No Child Left Behind ([NCLB, 2008]), requires many new provisions that make schools more accountable for the progress of their students. Under the act, schools across the nation are required to meet many criteria in order to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Some of the criteria includes increased standardized test scores and improved graduation rates. Schools who do not meet AYP are subject to decreased federal funding and other reprimands. Schools have implemented many new programs and curriculum requirements to ensure students perform at acceptable levels.

In order for public Alabama high schools to achieve AYP, they must demonstrate an acceptable pass rate on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) as well as maintain an acceptable graduation rate. Standards are increased each year. In 2006, Handley High School fell below the acceptable



graduation rate due to failed AHSGE and drop-out numbers. This brought awareness that some of the students were slipping through the cracks and innovative thinking was necessary to promote achievement.

Handley High School is considered a city school although it is located in rural Randolph County. The city has a population of approximately 6,500. The high school currently houses 467 students in grades 9-12. Handley High School operates as a Title I school, because 61% of its student population qualifies for free or reduced lunches. Many of the students come from single-parent or multi-dwelling homes and live in poverty. Many students have no access to technology outside of school. The school curriculum is set-up on a trimester system. This system serves students well in that they are easily able to obtain the required credits necessary for graduation. One of the greatest disadvantages to the trimester system is that it is almost impossible for the guidance counselor to conduct guidance units and advisement sessions with all students. Some of the counselor's responsibilities include one-on-one counseling, test coordination, and development of class schedules for all 467 students.

In order to help Handley High School meet AYP criteria, leadership team members including the counselor, assistant principal, principal, and department chairmen brainstormed ideas. Thus, the idea of a teacher advisement program evolved. Team members visited other schools with similar programs in place and reviewed current research. The program implemented at Handley High School is a small-scale program due to limited personnel to assist with planning and limited funds to cover costs. The program, implemented nearly four years ago, was met with some opposition by faculty members. Some faculty members have since embraced the program while others need to approach it with more enthusiasm. The researcher will evaluate the program to see if student achievement has improved, remained the same, or declined. When referring to student achievement, the researcher includes AHSGE passage rates, promotion/retention, and graduation rates.

Teacher advisement programs were first introduced in middle schools. One of the first programs was introduced in South Carolina during the 1996-1997 school year. The program was implemented after a grant was received from the South Carolina State Department of Education. Many schools have implemented similar programs.

After briefly reviewing literature focused on teacher advisement programs, it appears that that these programs do greatly impact students (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). One might be interested to see what components these programs include and to what extent they impact student achievement.

The teacher advisement programs currently in place at Handley High School include a summer transition program for incoming freshmen (GOT: Get On Track) as well as an advisement program (TAP: Teacher Advisement Program) for all students dependent upon grade level. Each advisor is assigned 18-25 students. The programs include mentoring, guidance lessons, graduation requirements, grade and transcript reviews. More importantly, advisor programs provide every student with a resource and offer an opportunity for students and advisors to build relationships. These relationships provide nurture and support as students work throughout high school. The researcher will analyze the impact of the current advisement programs by reviewing literature, including previous studies, on the topic. Research includes a review of data including passage rates on the AHSGE, promotion/retention, and graduation/drop-out rates collected from the school system over the past four years as well as interviews from students and teachers who have participated in the program. One of the main concerns with the current program is

lack of designated time for students and advisors to meet. Students and advisors meet monthly for 30 minutes, but advisors are available at other times to meet with students.

Research will determine whether teacher advisement programs affect academic achievement in a high school setting. To determine the effectiveness of teacher advisement programs, the researcher will carefully analyze data from graduation/drop-out rates, promotion/retention numbers, and grades from the 2006-2011 school years. If graduation and promotion rates have increased and drop-out and retention rates have decreased since the implementation of teacher advisement programs, one will determine that teacher advisement programs do significantly impact student achievement. Research findings will be used to refine the current teacher advisory program at Handley High School to ensure they have optimal impact on student achievement.

Do teacher advisement programs affect student achievement? If so, teacher advisement programs might be the greatest missing factor in student achievement. Student achievement is the ultimate priority for American school systems, and all schools look for ways to continuously improve achievement. If research concludes that teacher advisory programs are effective, more schools should seek to implement such programs.

Because of terminology used in the Review of the Literature, a list of defined terms is given below.

### **Review of the Literature**

Teacher Advisory Program, Adviser-Advisee Program, Personal Enrichment Program, and Academic Advising are all different titles to one simple concept: A student development program which helps students mature from young adolescents to curious, confident young adults (Jones & Tittle, 2004). Programs may vary from one school to another to accommodate school specific challenges; however, they all focus on major developmental tasks such as academic success, career exploration, decision-making, and interpersonal efficacy (Jervis & Rapp, 2007).

Academic advising has been part of the American educational system since the beginning of higher education; only in the past four decades of American collegiate history has academic advising begun to have a more defined role in the students' educational journey. Until recently, academic advising has largely been an amenity only available to students seeking a college degree. With the enactment of NCLB came a plethora of changes to educational programs in order to facilitate the advancement of all students. It was at this time educators considered, on a national scale, academic advising in lower level education to all students; not just those who are college bound. Some schools had already implemented pilot advisory programs in their middle and high schools such as Pasco County, Florida, in the 1984-85 school year, after which four additional schools in the county have implemented and/or received a grant for implementation of student advisory programs. (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). In fact, most case studies available today were implemented in the early 1980's and have developed over time into indispensable programs for the educational institutions into which they were implemented. Looking in on these schools that have taken the advisory program step decades ago has spurred national attention to its effectiveness and is beginning to be studied on a much larger scope than ever before. Teachers are inherently advisors. Students need at least one adult in the school who knows their stories, appreciates their achievements, and will answer their questions about everything from what to expect on a driver's test to what to wear on a first job interview (Jones & Tittle, 2004). Jervis and Rapp (2007) describe the advisor as an information disseminator, a friendly listener, and a student advocate.

Advisory programs must involve the entirety of educators and administrators in a school due to the student teacher ratio in many schools. When teachers participate with counselors in guiding and advising students, the system gives students a greater sense of belonging to something that has meaning in their lives and to their future (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Teachers, counselors, principals, and students can jointly plan and conduct an advisory program that is simple and effective (Jones & Tittle, 2004). The teacher advisory program implemented in Pasco County, Florida is led by a 5-10 member steering committee which is comprised of teachers, counselors, administrators and at least one student representative (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). "The human touch in guidance and advisement is important...students need attention, acknowledgement and praise as they prepare for the future" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009, p. 8).

The challenges for teachers are to find the right combination of strategies to reinforce teaching methods and support personal and professional development (Jones & Tittle, 2004). Teachers teach according to lessons planned to achieve defined learning outcomes and students are expected to perform and demonstrate competency in a variety of subjects. The frustrations are apparent, because in this system, teachers have the most contact with either the bright students or the problem kids who demand attention. "Generally, we hope the rest of the students can take care of themselves, and we move through the school years wishing for some simple change that gives us the time to appreciate each child and assure no student falls through the cracks" (Jones & Tittle, 2004, p. 1). In case studies throughout the country, advisory programs have many common elements. In Missouri, advisory coordinator Gaye Sharp said, "Baseline data revealed that student and teacher perceptions varied greatly on several issues, including students' sense of belonging and the preparation of students for post-high school pursuits." (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009, p. 1).

Despite the good intentions of Advisory Programs, the implementation efforts have been met with many challenges. Pasco County, Florida reported 25% of teachers had serious concerns about the program; expressing concerns over inadequate qualifications to be a counselor or advisor, the amount of time that would be required for advisement and record keeping, as well as the compensation for extra preparation (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). Teachers eventually understood that advising is different than counseling and softened to the idea of advisory programs.

"It is important to appreciate the difference between the two roles. Counseling is a therapeutic approach to assisting people in dealing with their concerns. Individuals practicing counseling must have specialized training in counseling and should be licensed by their state and/or national boards. In contrast, advice is a recommended opinion. Giving advice is a way of offering suggestions, usually from a wiser or more highly trained person to one considered to need guidance. Advice may be given in a structured program or in a casual friend-to-friend manner. It is important to recognize that advice can be offered by anyone, regardless of age. The most effective suggestions often come from our peers whether we are 12 or 50 years old." (Jones & Tittle, 2004, p. 12)

Student resistance, specifically seniors, dampened enthusiasm for the program along with the infrequency of advisory meetings (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). When Swansea High School was laying out the road map for their advisory program, they did not underestimate the role that parents played in their children's education. As a result, they scheduled an annual advising night for parents of eighth-graders. During this time, parents and their children met with school representatives to develop a four-year program of study to extend learning beyond high school (Hostetler, 2008). Parents received Career

Paths, a booklet that describes the three pathways: college preparatory, tech preparatory and dual prep, as well as a publication that outlined required classes (Hostetler, 2008).

Advisory programs for at-risk students were the start of a greater movement in education. In high-minority schools like West Point High School in Mississippi, where school dropout percentages were above normal, great strides were made to give students better opportunities for success in further education and careers by revitalized guidance programs, more Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and emphasis on graduation and student recognition programs (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Henry County High School, Tennessee, adapted the Legend of the Starfish. The message is: Although millions of starfish wash up on beaches around the world, saving just one by tossing it back into the ocean “makes a difference to that one” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009, p. 9). At-risk students’ names were written on cards and taped to a wall where teachers and administrators would initial if they knew the student personally or had previous connections with the student outside of a normal classroom setting. Students with no initials by their names entered the Starfish program. The student is assigned a mentor of the same gender that keeps up with the student’s attendance, behavior, and academic progress and checks with him or her at least once a week to see if help was needed to stay afloat (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). This program is different because it is discrete. It is important for the student to not feel singled out.

An innovative advisory program created in Horry County Schools in South Carolina makes it possible for over-age, at-risk students to graduate from high school in three years with the marketable skill employers are seeking (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). The connect program creates a nurturing environment for students who have struggled in the past and are in danger of dropping out of school (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009).

The implementation of advisory programs has advanced through the decades to include and affect a wider number of students than the original concept accounted for. Originally, the programs were used for under-achieving, disabled, and delinquent students in need of extra help or intervention. In some of these cases, it was realized the problem could be prevented by widening the scope of advisement to all students before any specific problem arose. “School leaders realized it was time to create a new climate that teachers and students owned. The key to acceptance of the changes was recognizing that students had to be ready to face the future – ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century” (Phillips, 2009, p. 2).

Schools that have enacted these programs have done so in different ways, but they all aim to place a larger ownership in the students’ hands concerning their own education and future as well as that of their peers. In Lee’s Summit High School in Missouri they have a freshman transition day in which recruited and trained student mentors host an orientation breakfast for new students twice a year. Freshmen and sophomores meet in advisory groups each week; juniors and seniors have additional opportunities known as privileges and interventions that are linked to their academic achievement (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Increasing a sense of belongingness to newly arriving students is believed to prevent behavioral and academic delinquencies by assigning the new students a trained upper classman mentor. To further strengthen the advisory program’s success, and in turn the students’, meeting times with teacher advisors are highly regular. While some schools schedule teachers and students to meet in groups daily, others schedule advisory groups only twice a semester. Jones & Tittle, 2004, propose the ideal amount is 30 minute sessions twice a week, which is a level of frequency that supports the group to build familiar relationships and frames the group as a refreshing

break during the week. Though schools have varying times and conditions in which advisory groups are held, Pasco County found that their initial bi-weekly meetings lacked continuity and were too infrequent for bonding between the advisor and advisee to grow strong (Jervis & Rapp, 2007).

There are programs introduced for each grade level that appropriately coincide with educational and vocational strides in the students' educational maturation. Career Preparation in grades 9 through 12 involves students matching their interests to their plans for postsecondary education and careers. Students participate in work-based learning transition programs as they prepare to enter the work force (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Simply showing up, passing a test, and going home is no longer the minimum requirement for passing in some schools. In Kentucky, students are expected to declare a career major at the end of the eighth grade and review and revise their majors each year. Along with required and recommended courses, the career paths include clubs and organizations, work-based learning experiences, and weekly advisory meetings to discuss progress, goals, and which clubs would best enhance a particular students career goals; every teacher leads a club or organization, and student participation is 100% (Phillips, 2009). Students are expected to maintain a passing grade in advanced curricula while learning more basic and common functions that will be required of them after graduation. For example, at Lees Summit High, students fill out job applications in the ninth grade and participate in job shadowing experiences in the tenth grade. They use persuasive writing in a letter to the business or industry where they did job shadowing to ask for work-based learning opportunities in the eleventh grade and complete resumes in the twelfth grade (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Hedgesville High School in West Virginia gives students a clear picture of their qualities, skills, values, and personality traits via testing to aid students in choosing productive and satisfying careers. Three separate tests are used: one for ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades.

Western Area Career and Technology Center in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, has shown success with a process developed by High Schools That Work (HSTW) and is considered a key practice on guidance and advisement called Portfolio Development. Similar to signing a contract, starting in tenth grade, students sign a portfolio agreement and develop career objectives with related short and long-term goals, including plans for further education and careers after high school. At this level, students write reflective pieces on selected career-related assignments and accomplishments to include in the portfolio (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Once in eleventh grade, students add a completed job application, a resume, a cover letter, and a thank-you letter to the portfolio. They complete and reflect on a mock interview and add more examples of career-related assignments and assessments with accompanying reflective entries. (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). In completion to their portfolio, twelfth graders refine their career objectives and their short and long term goals, update their resumes, and identify awards and/or career certifications they have earned and then they describe their post-graduation plans (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). The portfolio is reviewed by advisors and suggestions are made for improvements. They are used in parent-teacher conferences, career days, job interviews, work-based learning experiences, and college applications and interviews. Director of Vocational Education Joseph Iannetti (pg. 5) said, "Although many students are hesitant when they are assigned the portfolio project, they express their gratitude and feel a sense of accomplishment when it is done" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009. P.5).

Real life experiences and scenarios that students have never considered are being presented in order to enhance the student's perception of the importance of these advisory programs. Swansea High School in South Carolina requires 9th graders participate in a 90 minute class called Freshman Focus, in which they are graded as they would be in any other class. Here they play "The Real Game" and exercise on

calculating the cost of raising a family and the level of income needed in a variety of career paths (Rabon, 2001). A change in societal norms also must usher a change in education. Many vocational programs such as home economics and industrial sewing programs were eliminated and replaced with health occupations and industrial technology (Rabon, 2001) in order to ensure the educational system is current and consistent with preparing its vocational students appropriately for real life. Remaining current on education is equally important for teachers which is why the school district at Lee Summit High School offers professional development throughout the year to equip administrators, teachers, and counselors to assist students in making wise choices related to further education and careers. All certified personnel also have access to graduate courses to build guidance and advisory knowledge and skills (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). Corbin High School leaders and teachers believe that student performance is tied to teacher performance and view professional development as an essential component of school improvement and the key to improving teacher performance (Phillips, 2009). Teachers and leaders agree that becoming and remaining highly organized in their approach to professional learning and development has been essential in improving teaching practices (Phillips, 2009).

Change can improve a situation if it is needed and if those involved recognize it as a necessity. There is no one size fits all program, and simply implementing a new practice does not guarantee immediate success (Phillips, 2009). Building willingness and bringing about improvements can be done by shared leadership through departments, committees, and planning teams, a commitment to improved literacy, and the decision of teachers to accept no less than the best from themselves and their students (Phillips, 2009). For years, many educational institutions have been run in an authoritarian manor: I say; you do, from administrator to teacher and from teacher to student. Corbin High School leaders and teachers summarized before and after principles and much of what changed was the dismissal of the authoritarian environment. They went from Teacher-Centered instruction, decisions made by one, top-down instruction, structure to meet school requirements to student-centered instruction, all stakeholders providing a voice in decisions, shared leadership with teacher and staff, and school structured to address student learning needs and interests (Phillips, 2009). Schools cannot implement advisory programs without help. The integral parts of advisory programs are district support, funds for professional development, and raising graduation requirements beyond state requirements among other things (Phillips, 2009).

Success is building upon success, and each new advisory program seems to be more comprehensive than those which preceded it (Jervis & Rapp, 2007). By consistently raising the expectations and guiding each individual student appropriately based on that students' specific goal, Corbin High School has managed to graduate 99% of its student body with 32 credits, containing college preparatory classes, and surpassing the state requirement of 27 credits (Phillips, 2009). Students are making better career choices as a result of advisory programs. Many students are choosing to attend technical colleges for two years where they are more likely to be successful rather than enter a four-year college where a larger percentage of students drop out (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009).

There is still progress to be made as some schools see problem areas in writing and literacy. Some of the challenges include maintaining momentum by helping students and parents see the benefits of high-level educational and career studies, strengthening connections with the community by student job shadowing programs, aligning the curriculum from high school through four years of postsecondary education, offering staff development programs that support changes at the school, and developing a single high-caliber program of study leading to any postsecondary option (Hostetler, 2008).

As students adapt to the program as a structured opportunity to discuss their concerns about school and their lives, there should be fewer discipline problems occurring during the school year (Jones & Tittle, 2004). Throughout all of these schools, the overall success of advisory programs is evident, but this is still a relatively new concept for secondary education and has limited research.

Here are some key findings from the literature (Hostetler, 2008; Jervis & Rapp, 2007; Jones & Tittle, 2004; Phillips, 2009; Rabon, 2001; Southern Regional Education Board, 2009-2010).

- Teacher advisement programs vary among schools.
- Teacher advisement programs usually focus on developmental tasks such as academic success or career exploration.
- Academic advising has previously been available only to students seeking college degrees.
- The implementation of teacher advisement programs usually provides many challenges.
- Schools have varying times and conditions for advisement programs.
- Schools need help and support to implement affective advisory programs.

### Methodology

The educational effectiveness of teacher advisement programs is a widely debated issue among education professionals. To find what is best for our students, we must study the effects of teacher advisory programs and determine the best interest of all students involved.

The current student population of Handley High School is approximately 467 students. Of the total 54% are Caucasian, 43% are African American, 2% are Hispanic and 1% is Asian.

The Teacher Advisement Program (TAP) was first implemented during the 2008-2009 school year. There are 24 homeroom student advisors. The program was structured so that each homeroom adviser is assigned students based on their last name. The first teacher is given all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students whose last names begin with the letters A-F. The next advisor is given all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students whose last names begin with the letters F-M. Students in each grade level are divided equally among 6 homeroom advisers. Each adviser is assigned a group of 18 to 25 students. The advisor remains with his/her group of advisees until the group graduates. Advisers meet with their students for 10 minutes each morning.

In addition to the morning meetings, advisors meet with their students once a month for 30 minutes. Teacher Advisement Program meetings are scheduled during the summer, and advisers are given a meeting schedule for the entire year. This reduces the number of interferences and canceled meetings.

All advisers are given a tabbed notebook that contains demographical information on each student. Other tabs include: purpose of TAP/training information, monthly meetings, and announcements. Each month, the lesson, handouts, announcements, and all other materials necessary for the implementation of the lesson are placed in the advisers' school mailboxes. Holes are carefully punched in each lesson and handout so the adviser can place the copy in the notebook for future reference. The school counselor does all preparation for the meetings including the development of lessons

During the meetings, the students are given an introspective lesson or task prepared by the guidance counselor: The freshmen are taught about their grade point average and learn about transcripts; sophomores focus on good study skills; juniors begin thinking about their career options, and seniors

focus on graduation and immediate future prospects. Lessons are designed to meet the age-group and needs of the students.

At the end of each school year, the guidance counselors from Handley High School and Handley Middle School, the principals from both schools, and the Get On Track adviser meet to select students for the summer advisement program. Students are selected based on signs of emotional, social, and academic weakness. Students must be students who are at-risk for failure or drop-out due to emotional, social, and academic weakness. However, they must possess the potential for success. The group will include no more than 12 students. The advisor will plan and implement a four-week summer program with the students. The advisor will provide academic and social support. Students work on academics through web-based programs. The advisor provides lessons on confidence, social skills, and other relevant issues to the particular group. The students participate in fun activities that provide learning experiences. The summer program advisor designs and implements lessons in conjunction with the middle and high school counselors.

In order to discern the effectiveness of teacher advisory programs, there will be use of standardized testing as well as board and state approved teaching methods and tools. It is important not to compromise the educational development of any child in an effort to learn how to educate them more effectively. Data including GPA's, percentage of students that pass the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, and dropout rates will be analyzed against pre TAP and post TAP.

Data will be collected from the annual Superintendent's Report as well as student data collections. Graduation, drop-out, and AHSGE passage rates will be considered for each senior class from the past 5 years (2006-2011). This data will be compared from the years prior to TAP to the years after the implementation of the program. The program was implemented in during the 2009-2010 school year. Any significant positive changes, higher graduation rates, decreased drop-out rates, and increased passage rates on AHSGE will indicate a positive effect on student achievement.

For the at-risk students in the summer advisement program, grades from Handley Middle School, grades from Handley High School, graduation rates, drop-out rates, and AHSGE rates will be analyzed to determine if the program produced higher success rates. This information will come from the annual Superintendent's Report and school data collections. Any positive change, including higher grades, lower drop-out rates, and increased passage rates on the AHSGE will indicate the program has been effective and produced positive results on student achievement. The program was implemented in the 2007 school year.

The qualitative research will include questionnaires given to both the teachers and students upon beginning and ending each group year. They will be asked direct questions but will also be asked to provide a description of their perceived education enhancement by the TAP program.

### **Results**

The data shows that at least 23% of the students surveyed believe their grades have improved as a result of the TAP program. Thirteen percent of the teachers surveyed believe their advisement students are more successful academically because of the TAP program. In addition, 20% of the teachers believe the TAP program has played a role in the increased graduation rate. Teachers claim they now have an opportunity to play a more active role in students' academic success.



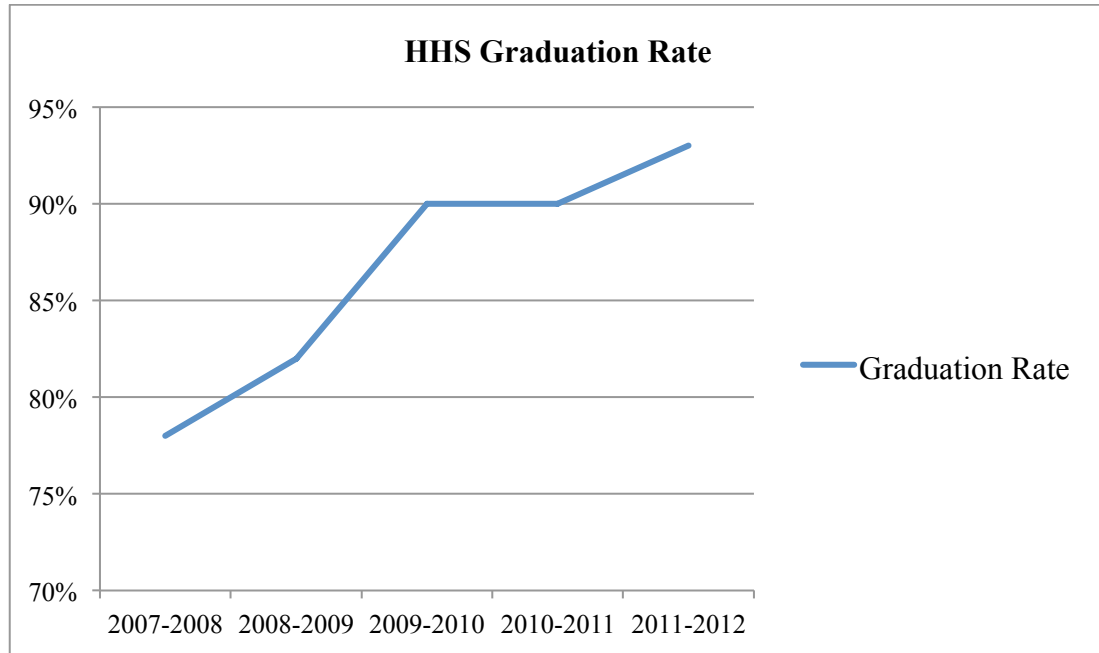
Overall graduation rate is calculated using the total number of eligible graduates. To be eligible for graduation, students must pass all five parts (Reading, Math, Language, Social Studies, Biology) of the AHSGE as well as complete 26 Carnegie units of coursework. The required units are determined by the state. The only exceptions to passing all parts of the AHSGE are determined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Graduation rates and exam passage rates include IDEA students and all members of the student population (See Appendix A).

Students who participated in the summer transition advisory program (GOT) showed evidence of high school success by being on track to graduate on their expected graduation date. To date, thirty-seven students have participated in the GOT program. Four students have since moved out of state. Of the remaining thirty-four students who were considered at risk upon entry to high school during their 9<sup>th</sup> grade school year, all are currently enrolled at Handley High School, thus evidencing a 0% drop-out rate. Approximately 65% of the students who have participated in the program showed signs of academic achievement through grades and AHSGE passage rates. During the first year of the GOT program, eight students participated. All eight students are eligible for graduation this year. According to one student, the program, "Definitely prepared me for high school. The support was invaluable, and I believe the program did help me to be successful in high school."

#### Conclusion/Discussion

Because the TAP program at HHS is relatively new, it does still need some work. One of the goals of the research is to determine whether students and teachers believe this program has merit and worth. Since its implementation, graduation rates have increased and drop-out rates have decreased. Handley High School is no longer in school improvement. Although the response to the surveys was not as great as desired, they did provide valuable feedback. According to the results, it is inconclusive as to whether the advisement programs have a significant direct impact on academic achievement. However, most teachers and students concur that the program is beneficial. The impact of the TAP and GOT programs on academic achievement is possibly indirect; meaning the students and teachers do not see the impact their relationships have on academic achievement. When students feel supported and cared for, they tend to work harder. Because of the relationships built with the TAP and GOT programs, students work harder to please those who have a vested interest in them. The lessons provided through the monthly TAP meetings include career and future goals. Students do not realize that while they are working on the monthly TAP activities and planning for the future, they are inadvertently increasing their motivation to achieve more academically.

Appendix A



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