

Defining Systemic Change in School Counseling: A Delphi Study

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Dedication

This one is for my dad. I hope to always make you proud and to never take life too seriously.

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Abstract

Systemic change, leadership, and advocacy are core components of professional school counseling practice. Over the last two decades, there has been a rise in research focused on school counseling leadership and advocacy, yet the same cannot be said about systemic change. Understanding the nuances of systemic change in school counseling could have promising implications for school counseling practice that creates more equitable outcomes for PreK-12 students. In this dissertation, I reviewed the existing literature around the three constructs and identified themes within systemic change that differentiate it from leadership and advocacy. Although there are clear areas where the three parallel, there are differences in terms of how they are applied and how they intend to impact students. Using this information, an expert panel of school counseling professionals, educators, and supervisors participated in a Delphi study to compile a list of 130 consensus items that define the core components of systemic change in school counseling. The list of consensus items included beliefs, knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary for school counselors to conduct systemic change. Although many of the items relate to existing research on leadership and advocacy, the resulting items in this study have more emphasis on action, outcome, and social justice commitment. These findings provide direction for school counselors hoping to integrate systemic change into their school counseling practice and counselor educators preparing school counselors in graduate counseling programs. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

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Introduction

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) calls for school counselors to serve as leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents within their schools (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors use these skills to implement high-quality counseling programs, support students' academic, social-emotional, and career needs, and promote the efficacy of the school counselor's role. ASCA's Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2022) assert that school counselors must advocate for students' rights, increase access to equitable education, and foster change within a complex school system. Accreditation organizations have outlined requirements for counselor preparation programs to provide training in leadership, advocacy, and systemic change for all PK-12 school counselors (ASCA, 2019b, Standard 6; CACREP, 2016, 5.G.2.a). Given that school counselors work with students representing a wide variety of social and cultural identities, these skills are necessary for promoting more equitable, inclusive experiences for all.

The call for systemic change, advocacy, and leadership is clear, yet research on the three constructs has not been equally distributed. Scholars have produced quantitative analyses (e.g., Gibson et al., 2018; Haskins & Singh, 2016; Mullen et al., 2019), qualitative analyses (e.g., Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022; Singh et al., 2010), and conceptual applications (e.g., Ratts et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2018) of school counseling leadership and advocacy practices. However, few researchers have explored the components of systemic change empirically or in isolation from leadership and advocacy.

Although systemic change may be similar to leadership and advocacy, they are discussed throughout the profession as requiring distinct knowledge, skills, and intended outcomes. Understanding the nuances of each can help the profession explain how leadership, advocacy,

and systemic change impact student outcomes and guide counselor educators in preparing future school counselors. The purpose of this dissertation is to review existing literature on systemic change, advocacy, and leadership, differentiate systemic change as a unique construct, and develop empirical foundations for the definition of systemic change in school counseling.

**Chapter I: Differentiating Systemic Change from Leadership and Advocacy in School
Counseling**

Abstract

The American School Counselor Association calls for professional school counselors to be leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents. While leadership and advocacy have been thoughtfully explored in school counseling literature, systemic change has not received the same attention. For school counselors to be effective systemic change agents in their schools, there must be an understanding of how systemic change differentiates from leadership and advocacy. In this manuscript, we examine the parallels and differences between the three constructs. Through a thorough literature review, five themes were identified as foundational to leadership, advocacy, and systemic change: 1) build relationships, 2) utilize data, 3) innovate, 4) empower others, and 5) transform the culture. Although intersecting, school counselors demonstrate each theme uniquely depending on their intended outcomes of leadership, advocacy, or systemic change. These findings create implications for school counseling research, training, and practice.

In the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2019a), leadership, advocacy, and systemic change are woven throughout the framework to instill the importance of these concepts within a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors utilize these skills to promote the academic, social-emotional, and career success of all students (ASCA, 2019a; 2019c). Both ASCA and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) outline requirements for counselor preparation programs to provide training in leadership, advocacy, and systemic change for all PK-12 school counselors (ASCA, 2019b, Standard 6; CACREP, 2016, 5.G.2.a). The counseling profession is clear regarding the importance of these roles in school counseling practice and preparation.

Although researchers have thoughtfully explored leadership and advocacy behaviors both conceptually and empirically (e.g., Gibson et al., 2018; Haskins & Singh, 2016; Shields et al., 2018), the same cannot be said about systemic change. In a search in *Professional School Counseling*, 161 articles were returned containing the term “systemic change” from 2005-2022. However, these articles rarely explored the components of systemic change empirically or in isolation from leadership and advocacy. The professional call to be a systemic change agent is evident, but there is a lack of information about how systemic change practices are implemented and developed in school counseling literature. Although systemic change may be similar to leadership and advocacy, they are discussed throughout the profession as requiring distinct knowledge, skills, and intended outcomes. Understanding the nuances of each can help the profession explain how leadership, advocacy, and systemic change impact student outcomes and guide counselor educators in preparing future school counselors. The purpose of this manuscript is to define leadership, advocacy, and systemic change in school counseling, highlight the unique

and overlapping components of each construct, and discuss implications for systemic change within school counseling.

Leadership, Advocacy, and Systemic Change Overview

During the late 1990s, the Education Trust announced the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI), which introduced significant changes to the traditional role of the school counselor (Martin, 2002). After identifying major disconnects in training and delivery, the goals of the TSCI were to shift the focus of school counselor preparation towards leadership, collaboration, and assessment. Ultimately, this “new vision” for the school counseling profession aimed to situate school counselors as key personnel in closing achievement gaps for students holding marginalized identities (Martin, 2002, p. 151; Sears, 1999). The TSCI called for school counselor educators to take a more active, assertive role in preparing school counselors to utilize leadership skills for promoting social justice advocacy, increasing access to equitable education, and reducing systemic barriers for all students (Martin, 2002; McMahon et al., 2009; Sears, 1999).

Following the TSCI reform, the school counseling profession saw an increased focus on leadership, advocacy, and systemic change in both literature and practice (Gibson et al., 2018). Currently, school counseling researchers have a robust understanding of the components and contributing factors of leadership and advocacy identity in school counselors, such as age, years of school counseling experience, and prior leadership experiences (Crook et al., 2015; Lowe et al., 2018; Mullen et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2018). Researchers have also investigated how school counselor characteristics impact the implementation of school counseling programs, a potential indicator of systemic change (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010).

Additionally, the *Professional School Counseling* journal has published special issues dedicated specifically to school counseling leadership practices (Curry & DeVoss, 2009; Young & Dollarhide, 2017). Further, since the adoption of the *Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies* (MSJCCs; Ratts et al., 2016), scholars have asserted the need for social justice and advocacy competence to be implemented within the school context (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017; Shell, 2021). However, if school counselors are meant to prioritize systemic change equally to leadership and advocacy, there is a need for clarity around the specific definition of each construct.

Definitions

ASCA (2019a) describes leadership as the “ability to guide others” and states that “school counselors use leadership skills to design, implement, and assess a school counseling program” (p. 148). Within school counseling literature, many leadership theories exist to conceptually describe how school counselors collaborate with stakeholders to promote a shared vision for overall student and school success (e.g., Gibson et al., 2018; Shields et al., 2018). School counselors play an integral role in their schools due to their unique leadership qualities.

In comparison to leadership, advocacy focuses on increasing access to opportunities and resources to promote academic, career, and social-emotional success for students (Ratts et al., 2007). Advocacy can range from the individual student level to a group or community level to a larger public arena (Toporek & Daniels, 2018). Further, school counselors can advocate both alongside and on behalf of students (Ratts et al., 2007; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). Additionally, advocacy encompasses the work that school counselors do to promote and define their professional roles (Havlik et al., 2018). Professional advocacy by school counselors helps to reduce barriers to students accessing and receiving optimal school counseling services.

School counseling systemic change includes identifying problematic school and community practices and working intentionally to enact direct and indirect student services to address these issues (ASCA, 2019a; Dahir & Stone, 2009). ASCA defines systemic change as “change affecting the entire system; transformational; change affecting more than an individual or series of individuals; focused upon the dynamic of the environment, not the individual” (ASCA, 2019c, p. 150). It is ambiguous whether a systemic change agent describes someone who utilizes specialized leadership and advocacy skills to promote systemic change or whether systemic change has its own unique set of knowledge and skills (Dahir & Stone, 2009). Some researchers describe “political actions to change the system” and “social justice advocacy to promote change” as core components of school counselors’ work behaviors (Haskins & Singh, 2016, p. 155; Singh et al., 2010, p. 136). Although this terminology seems conceptually related to school counseling systemic change due to the emphasis on transforming the environment (ASCA, 2019c), it is not clearly stated if and how social justice advocacy is unique from systemic change. For the purpose of this paper, systemic change will be defined as implementing direct and indirect services aimed at changing systemic issues.

Skills

School counselors exhibit leadership skills by developing comprehensive school counseling programs and interventions to meet student needs as identified by school counseling data (e.g., needs assessments, stakeholder evaluations) and student outcome data (e.g., achievement, attendance, behavioral, graduation rates; ASCA, 2019a; 2019c). They establish program foundations through the development of mission and vision statements that align with school and district goals (ASCA 2019a). School counselors collaborate with school leadership teams, such as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a;

2017b) and crisis response teams (Fein et al., 2008), to create innovative initiatives that promote student development (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022). Lastly, school counselors exercise leadership skills by critically reflecting on and examining their school counseling programs to ensure they are providing optimal services that promote student success (Gibson et al., 2018).

To be student advocates, school counselors examine their own multicultural self-awareness and consider how their social and cultural identities may influence their school counseling practices (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). They remain cognizant of how privilege and bias impact various students and student groups, so they develop counseling program goals with an understanding of students who may be marginalized within their schools (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). School counselors help students identify strengths and develop resources within themselves to overcome challenges (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Ratts et al., 2007). They use advocacy skills to determine when to involve other stakeholders, such as caregivers or teachers, in individual student care and connect students with opportunities and resources in the community (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). Additionally, school counselors increase opportunities for students by advocating for their roles as school counseling professionals (Gibson et al., 2018). They demonstrate professional advocacy by utilizing data to support their school counseling initiatives, gaining buy-in from decision-makers, and persevering despite resistance from school personnel (Havlik et al., 2018).

Although the call for systemic change is clear, the components and preparation that contribute to an effective school counseling systemic change agent are exceptionally vague in published literature. Conceptually, systemic change skills help school counselors advocate for students' rights, increase access to equitable education, and foster change within a complex

school system (Shell, 2021). School counselors use systemic change skills to reduce student inequities such as achievement, access, or information gaps (ASCA, 2019a; 2019c). School counselors carefully analyze data to determine how policies and practices either enhance or inhibit student success for specific students or student groups (ASCA, 2019a; Harper & Singh, 2013). When analyzing data, school counselors apply an understanding of cultural and contextual factors influencing student outcomes (McMahon et al., 2009). Then, they use these findings to facilitate challenging discussions with school decision-makers to promote change (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Singh et al., 2010). Systemic change skills may also include educating others about the preparation and expertise of school counselors and addressing misconceptions about their roles (Singh et al., 2010).

Previous scholars reviewed principles for school counselors enacting systemic change. Harper and Singh (2013) described six directions for school counselors to create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students, highlighting collaboration with stakeholders, resourceful problem-solving, and utilizing a systemic lens. Dahir and Stone (2009) situated the need for school counselors to conduct action research to collect data to support systemic change initiatives. McMahon's team (2009) called for counselor educators to transform how they prepare school counseling students to be more focused on systemic change. More recently, Shields and colleagues (2018) considered how the tenets of transformative leadership can promote equity and systemic change. Warren and Mauk (2019) applied an implementation science framework to the ASCA National Model emphasizing aspects like coaching, consultation, data support systems, and leadership. Many of these reviews cite similar themes regarding systemic change, but they do not readily distinguish the construct of systemic change from leadership or advocacy in school counseling.

It is evident that each of these constructs is related and consists of overlapping knowledge and skill sets. However, it is essential to understand the distinct and common aspects of leadership, advocacy, and systemic change to be able to effectively prepare school counselors. By doing this, counselor educators can develop intentional teaching strategies and activities to target specific skills needed for each. Further, examination of the intersecting themes can guide professional school counselors aiming to conduct leadership, advocacy, and systemic change in their schools.

Intersecting Themes

A review of the published articles on this topic resulted in the identification of several common themes. Although common in their underlying foundation, each theme was understood or applied differently whether the researcher was discussing leadership, advocacy, or systemic change. In their schools, professional school counselors 1) build relationships, 2) utilize data, 3) innovate, 4) empower others, and 5) transform the culture. In the next section, I discuss each theme with attention to how they parallel and differ across leadership, advocacy, and systemic change. However, because systemic change has yet to be empirically defined, it may be discussed less than others and only conceptually in nature. See Table 1 for an overview.

Build Relationships

Foundational to leadership, advocacy, and systemic change, school counselors must develop strong relationships with school decision-makers to promote school counseling programs, increase access for students, and enact system change initiatives (Beck & Lane, 2019; Gibson et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). Although relationships with students, caregivers, and staff are important, the most critical relationship is with the school principal or administrator (Beck & Lane, 2019). Administrators serve as essential collaborators in advocating for and

Table 1

Intersecting Themes in Leadership, Advocacy, and Systemic Change

Themes	Definitions	Leadership	Advocacy	Systemic Change
Build Relationships	<i>Collaborating and communicating with school stakeholders to determine best practices for students.</i>	Seek input from school stakeholders for developing program goals.	Increase stakeholders' awareness of student needs and professional expertise.	Align with school decision-makers to enact systems change initiatives.
Utilize Data	<i>Using various sources of data to provide guidance and justification on services that school counselors implement in their schools.</i>	Inform the development and evaluation of a comprehensive school counseling program.	Highlight educational and opportunity inequities for students/student groups.	Inform action plans and initiate conversations for systemic change initiatives.
Innovate	<i>Introducing new or creative ways of thinking, planning, and implementing school counseling services.</i>	Use creative modalities and resourceful problem-solving.	Secure resources from school leaders and promote the role of school counselor through creative avenues.	Intervene and dismantle systemic issues using modern, innovative approaches.
Empower Others	<i>Increasing individuals' perceived ability to advocate for their needs and address their situations.</i>	Inspire, encourage, and motivate students, colleagues, and school stakeholders.	Build intrapersonal strengths and serve as an ally during difficult conversations with both students and other school counseling professionals.	Inform and support stakeholders to take an active role in dismantling systems.
Transform the Culture	<i>Shaping the school climate and system through integrated school counseling services.</i>	Integrate counseling program with school mission and other school initiatives.	Increase access to resources and opportunities for all students.	Challenge the status quo to dismantle and replace systems of oppression.

defining the role of the school counselor (Havlik et al., 2018). Thus, school counselors report it is most important to gain buy-in from their administrator first (Havlik et al., 2018). School counselors who have supportive, trusting relationships with their administrators feel more equipped to lead others, advocate for their roles with other school personnel, and create systemic change initiatives in their schools (Beck & Lane, 2019).

School counselors demonstrate collaborative leadership with stakeholders by determining best practices for students, implementing program goals and initiatives, and increasing others' understanding of the role of school counselors (Berger et al., 2022; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017b; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022; Young & Bryan, 2015). Additionally, school counselors seek support and valuable input from multiple stakeholder groups (e.g., students, caregivers, staff, community members; Berger et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2018; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022). This can occur through advisory councils, needs assessments, and annual administrator meetings (ASCA, 2019a; 2019c).

Leadership and advocacy skills overlap when school counselors utilize effective communication skills to promote their school counseling program vision to stakeholders (Gibson et al., 2018). Often, they use persuasive skills to achieve their school counseling goals and convince others that their planned programming is necessary (Gibson et al., 2018). However, both student and professional advocacy is best facilitated through organic, interpersonal relationships built by routine, informal conversations in the school building (Singh et al., 2010; Young & Bryan, 2015).

School counselors demonstrate professional advocacy by communicating their roles and expertise with others (Beck & Lane, 2019; Singh et al., 2010). In some instances, doing so has

earned them space on school leadership teams where they can continue advocating for themselves and students alongside their school colleagues (Beck & Lane, 2019; Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020). Additionally, they use other methods of public relations to help “spread the word” about school counselors’ expertise and empirically supported practices (Singh et al., 2010, p.139). They report using public information outlets to advocate such as the internet, social media, and printed publications (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Ratts et al., 2007).

To create systemic change, school counselors need to develop intentional relationships with a breadth of school stakeholders to serve as allies (Singh et al., 2010). Outside of school counseling literature, school leaders have described strong communication skills as necessary for enacting systemic change initiatives (Scaletta & Tejero Hughes, 2021). Because systemic change affects groups of individuals (ASCA, 2019c), school leaders report the need for a “culture of trust, collaboration, and commitment” to have difficult conversations and facilitate change processes (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020, p. 507). Overall, relationships are foundational across all aspects of school counseling, but they may be demonstrated differently based on the desired outcomes or role being enacted.

Utilize Data

Leadership, advocacy, and systemic change all require the use of various sources of data to guide activities and services that school counselors implement in their schools. School counselors demonstrate leadership skills by administering needs assessments, analyzing student outcome data, and determining services be best suited for their students’ needs (Gibson et al., 2018; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a). Based on collected data, school counselors develop program goals that align with school and district goals, plan specific programming aimed to

achieve established goals, and utilize student outcome data to determine the effectiveness of specific activities (Gibson et al., 2018; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a).

To demonstrate advocacy, school counselors use data to initiate conversations regarding educational and professional inequities with administrators and school district leaders (Havlik et al., 2018). School counselors can provide process and outcome data to demonstrate how they are providing services and advocating for students' specific needs (ASCA, 2019c). Professional data such as use of time trackers or program action plans can support school counselors' arguments regarding appropriate roles and responsibilities (Berger et al., 2022). School counselors can compare their time-tracking data with planned interventions and current student data to highlight duties that may be reassigned to other staff members (Berger et al., 2022).

When analyzing data, school counselors act as systemic change agents by isolating specific student groups and determining areas of disparity (Gay & Swank, 2021; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a). Data that highlight educational inequities can be used to raise awareness of marginalized groups, inform plans of action for confronting barriers, and initiate change to oppressive systems within the school and community (Gay & Swank, 2021; Haskins & Singh, 2016; Singh et al., 2010). Dahir and Stone (2009) suggested the MEASURE model of systemic change which emphasizes analyzing critical data points and collaborating with stakeholders to develop school-improvement initiatives. Because administrators, legislators, and decision-makers tend to value data related to change initiatives (Berger et al., 2022), both student outcome data and professional data can serve as justification for systemic change. Across leadership, advocacy, and systemic change, it is critical for school counselors to use data to create and implement initiatives aimed at increasing student success.

Innovate

School counselors utilize innovation across leadership, advocacy, and systemic change to provide optimal services and programming designed to meet students' needs. School counselors demonstrate leadership by consistently aiming to improve their counseling program and trying innovative approaches (Dahir & Stone, 2009). School counselors continuously evaluate the services they provide for students (Beck & Lane, 2019). This intentional evaluation allows school counselors to self-reflect and determine what practices work best and how to improve (Beck & Lane, 2019). Further, school counselors engage in professional development to remain current on research-informed best practices they can implement into their counseling programs (Havlik et al., 2018).

School counselors consistently seek creative ways to improve their school counseling programs to best meet student needs through resourceful problem-solving, self-reflection, and innovation (Gibson et al., 2018; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022; Havlik et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). Financial resources can be used to purchase curriculum materials, activity supplies, and professional development initiatives. When school counseling funds are limited, school counselors use their leadership skills to creatively utilize provided resources.

When resources are not available, school counselors advocate for their school counseling programs by locating and securing necessary resources (Gibson et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). School counselors often seek out school administrators, community organizations, school board members, legislators, and other decision-makers who are involved in budgeting and resource allocation (Berger et al., 2022; Havlik et al., 2018; Ratts et al., 2007). School counselors go above and beyond to secure resources for specific student needs such as basic needs or educational access (Gibson et al., 2018; Ratts et al., 2007). School counselors advocate for

students by “making sure that everybody has the resources” they need and making opportunities more accessible (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017b, p. 135; Haskins & Singh, 2016).

Although not specifically described in school counseling literature, innovation and creativity are essential to implementing school-wide change initiatives (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020). Because systemic issues (e.g., racism, homophobia, ableism) tend to be multi-faceted and rigid, systemic change agents will need to utilize nontraditional ways of thinking and doing to intervene and dismantle them (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020). Traditional ways of engaging these issues have not been successful, so school counselors must consider creative, modern ways of addressing them. In all areas, school counselors use divergent thinking and innovation to address a wide variety of issues students face.

Empower Others

School counselors aim to empower students, educators, and other school counselors as they model behaviors that lead to positive outcomes. They demonstrate leadership when they serve as encouragers and “cheerleaders” to other school counselors and school personnel (Beck & Lane, 2019; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022, p. 272). School counselors who identify as leaders and advocates mentor other school counselors to increase their leadership and advocacy behaviors (Beck & Lane, 2019). They provide inspiration and motivation to others within their schools (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010) and create a positive environment despite challenges (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022).

School counselors demonstrate advocacy by increasing students’ perceived ability to advocate for their needs and address their situations (Ratts et al., 2007). School counselors empower students by providing information that reduces barriers, building intrapersonal strengths, and serving as allies during difficult conversations (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Ratts &

Greenleaf, 2017). They empower students on individual levels by helping them to identify their strengths and recognize external factors that may be influencing their well-being and success (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Haskins & Singh, 2016).

To engage in systemic change, school counselors can empower their colleagues as allies for change by increasing their awareness of systemic issues and empowering them to take an active role in dismantling systems (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). For example, school counselors have demonstrated their allyship by creating and facilitating programs to promote the well-being of marginalized students, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Harper & Singh, 2013) and mentorship programs for students experiencing racial trauma (Edwin & Daniels, 2022). School counselors can also create professional development workshops for teachers and school staff to increase awareness of the impact of microaggressions and oppression on students' well-being (Edwin & Daniels, 2022). By increasing their colleagues' multicultural competence, school counselors can develop student allies and empower school staff to create systemic change. As leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents, school counselors consistently empower, motivate, encourage, and celebrate those around them.

Transform the Culture

School counselors use leadership, advocacy, and systemic change to actively create school cultures that support the academic, career, and emotional well-being of all students (ASCA, 2019a). As leaders, school counselors are involved in transforming the school climate by generating a shared, collective mission for school counseling programs that align with schools' mission statements (Beck & Lane, 2019; Gibson et al., 2018). The counseling services they provide are interconnected and integrated within the larger school systems (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022).

As advocates, school counselors frequently expect resistance from stakeholders as these skills require them to challenge the status quo. Yet, school counselors must be determined to confront outdated ways of thinking and behaving to promote equity for students (Young & Bryan, 2015). School counseling advocates state they must cultivate a willingness to take risks (Beck & Lane, 2019). However, professional advocacy often brings about fear or anxiety in school counselors because of how difficult it is to change school stakeholders' perceptions of school counselors' roles (Havlik et al., 2018). School counselors report they fear if they challenge too much, then they risk losing their jobs (Havlik et al., 2018). Although risk-taking behaviors may be necessary for successful program service delivery, school counselors typically value satisfying others and preserving the status quo (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010).

Much of the published literature on systemic change is situated within the need to transform the school culture or environment (e.g., Dahir & Stone, 2009; McMahon et al., 2009; Shields et al., 2018). Because school counselors work with diverse student populations who have complex and dynamic needs, they must use intentional strategies to promote more equitable, inclusive experiences for all (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). Similar to advocacy, implementing systems change requires school counselors to be willing to "rock the boat" in terms of disrupting historical ways of thinking (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017b, p. 136). By starting to create systemic change at the individual or micro level, school counselors can promote change at the macro level (Beck & Lane, 2019). They work alongside allies to address and change oppressive structures in schools and provide data and justifications for the need for systemic change (Haskins & Singh, 2016). Overall, school counselors are influential in developing school cultures where all students of diverse backgrounds can thrive.

Implications

The counseling profession has made tremendous strides in understanding the importance of leadership and advocacy behaviors for school counselors. However, given that systemic change initiatives focused on dismantling inequities may require different skills from comprehensive program implementation, factors contributing to the development of systemic change skills are still underdeveloped. Although the call for school counselors to engage in systemic change is clear, professional school counselors need guidance on what these behaviors look like in practice. Additional research is needed to determine how to prepare emerging school counselors to engage in systemic change.

Research

Currently, researchers use the term “systemic change” tenuously to describe both the potential actions of school counselors as well as desired outcomes of leadership and advocacy practices. Moving forward, researchers must continue to discuss and explore how systemic change relates to leadership and advocacy. However, if systemic change is of equal importance as leadership and advocacy, then future research is needed to operationalize the definition of systemic change, particularly related to school counseling. Counselor educators need a defined list of components (e.g., skills, knowledge, characteristics) in addition to, and separate from, desired outcomes for systemic change in order to move forward with improvements in preparation and practice.

Given an operationalized definition, researchers can then develop instruments that more accurately measure the role of school counselors as systemic change agents. Mullen and team’s findings (2019) situated leadership and advocacy as distinct constructs but concluded that these findings could be due to measurement issues. The authors suggested a further investigation into

validated instruments designed to measure specifically school counseling advocacy and systemic change. Similar to how researchers have investigated school counselor leadership self-efficacy (Mullen et al., 2019) and advocacy competence (Crook et al., 2015), a validated measure can provide an understanding of the components of systemic change in school counselors. Lastly, construct validity studies between multiple assessments could provide further evidence regarding whether and how systemic change is a unique construct from leadership and advocacy.

With clarity in definition and tools for assessment, researchers can begin to understand how school counselors' systemic change skills promote the academic, social-emotional, and career success of PK-12 students. Rather than continuing to discuss what systemic change looks like conceptually, researchers must empirically investigate the effectiveness of such skills. Researchers might utilize partnerships with school districts to collect longitudinal student data and school stakeholder perception data to explore the impacts of school counselors creating systemic change. School-based intervention research could be critical to understanding how systemic change looks in practice.

Counselor Preparation

Previous researchers have called for increased emphasis on leadership and advocacy training in counselor education programs (Berger et al., 2022; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017b). More recently, scholars have begun to investigate how specific leadership training activities lead to positive outcomes for school counseling students (LeBlanc & Borders, 2021; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). Dedicated advocacy coursework and integrated multicultural and social justice training can lead to increased competence in collaborative action advocacy, client empowerment, and community advocacy (Crook et al., 2015).

Given that the counseling profession equally asserts the need for systemic change, it seems necessary to infuse these concepts into counseling coursework. The previously mentioned preparation activities could be adapted to include systemic change skills. However, a lack of clarity around the definition of systemic change and what it looks like in practice makes it difficult to teach the skills to emerging school counselors. The calls from McMahon and colleagues (2009) for counselor educators to serve as educational leaders promoting systemic change are even greater in today's sociopolitical climate. An example of this need relates to the importance of integrating anti-racism content into school counselor preparation (Mason et al., 2021). Although knowledge and skills related to promoting anti-racism may be related to systemic change, more research is needed to determine how preparation activities contribute to counselor competence.

Practice

If school counselors are called to be systemic change agents based on the ASCA National Model (2019c) or other comprehensive school counseling frameworks, understanding the components of systemic change is critical for professional identity. Leadership and advocacy skills have helped to create intentional school counseling programs, promote the role of school counselors, and advocate for student needs. However, systemic change skills may allow for even more impact given that systemic change involves impacting student equity and access on a broader, environmental level.

To be systemic change agents, professional school counselors must consult the relevant literature to determine how they can engage it at their schools. This is especially important when consulting with other school stakeholders. For example, when meeting with administrators about appropriate roles and responsibilities, school counselors can outline components of systemic

change and provide evidence regarding how they are meeting these expectations. Additionally, with a defined scope of systemic change behaviors, practicing school counselors may evaluate their own work behaviors to determine how they are meeting the needs of students on a systemic level. Through self-assessment, they can reflect on their practices and seek appropriate professional development and consultation.

Conclusion

Professional school counselors are called to be leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents in their schools and communities as these skills are necessary to promote positive academic, social-emotional, and career outcomes for diverse students. Although leadership, advocacy, and systemic change are related constructs, the application of such skills looks different depending on desired outcomes. The themes of relationship-building, data utilization, innovation, empowerment, and transformation seem to cut across all three roles. To date, counselor educators appear to have focused on leadership and advocacy training and research; future research must include attention to defining systemic change as a unique construct.

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Chapter II: Defining Systemic Change in School Counseling: A Delphi Study

Abstract

Systemic change is regarded as a key component of professional school counseling practice for increasing positive, equitable outcomes for PreK-12 students. To date, there has been a lack of clarity around how systemic change is unique from leadership and advocacy and how systemic change looks in practice. The purpose of this study was to provide empirical foundations for systemic change agency in school counseling. Using Delphi methodology, an expert panel of 22 participants consisting of professional school counselors, counselor educators, and school counseling supervisors developed a consensus list of 130 items describing the core beliefs, knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary for school counselors to conduct systemic change. The findings suggest future implications for school counseling preparation, research, and practice.

Introduction

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), professional school counselors must be leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents (ASCA, 2019a). These constructs are woven throughout the ASCA National Model (2019a) as key components for developing school counseling programs that meet the unique needs of diverse student populations. ASCA's Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2022) assert that school counselors must advocate for students' rights, increase access to equitable education, and foster change within complex school systems. Given that school counselors work with students representing a wide variety of social and cultural identities, these skills are necessary for promoting more equitable, inclusive experiences for all.

Leadership and advocacy have been discussed thoroughly within school counseling literature. Through both quantitative and qualitative analyses, researchers have investigated the skills and practices that contribute to leadership and advocacy identity in school counselors (e.g., Gibson et al., 2018; Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022; Mullen et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2010). Comparatively, systemic change has not been well defined. Some scholars conceptually discussed how school counselors might utilize systemic change by increasing inclusion for LGBTQ+ students (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Harper & Singh, 2013), conducting action research (Dahir & Stone, 2009), and implementing a comprehensive school counseling programs (Warren & Mauk, 2019). However, it is unclear how systemic change is empirically defined and distinguishable from leadership and advocacy.

Literature Review

School counselors are master's level professionals who support the academic, career, and social emotional needs of PreK-12 students within complex educational systems (ASCA, 2019a).

They develop and implement comprehensive school counseling programs that include individual and small group counseling, classroom curricula, and schoolwide initiatives aimed at supporting diverse student needs (ASCA, 2019b). They collaborate with families, teachers, administrators, and other community partners to establish goals and services that support overall student success (ASCA, 2019b). As one of few mental health professionals within schools, school counselors meet student needs with an in-depth understanding of lifespan development, cultural context, and systemic issues facing students (ASCA, 2019b).

Within the roles of leadership, advocacy, and systemic change, school counselors must utilize several core attributes to implement a comprehensive school counseling program effectively (ASCA, 2019a). In all roles, school counselors must build strong relationships with students, families, teachers, and administrators (Beck & Lane, 2019; Gibson et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). These collaborative relationships help to ensure counseling programs are meeting students' developmental and cultural needs. Additionally, school counselors develop programs that are data-driven and informed by best practices (Gibson et al., 2018; Havlik et al., 2018). When challenges arise, they utilize innovation to identify creative solutions to problems and connect with students in unique ways (Beck & Lane, 2019; Havlik et al., 2018). They aim to empower, motivate, and encourage both students and colleagues to increase positive outcomes for all (Beck & Lane, 2019). As leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents, school counselors actively strive to transform school culture to promote overall student outcomes (Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022). Although leadership, advocacy, and systemic change have some overlapping knowledge and skills, school counselors enact these roles in different ways depending on needs and desired outcomes.

Leadership

Following the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) in the late 1990s, the counseling profession shifted towards school counselors taking a more active role in identifying and closing achievement gaps (Sears, 1999). This role transformation required school counselors to develop leadership skills to work strategically with community and educational partners.

Although many leadership models can be applied to school counseling practice (Young & Dollarhide, 2017), leadership skills are necessary for the effective implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2019a).

School counselors are leaders who develop school counseling programs and establish goals that align with the overall school mission and vision (ASCA, 2019b). They collect data through needs assessments and evaluations from students, families, and school staff to determine how their services can best align with student needs (ASCA, 2019a). They collaborate with other educators on school leadership teams to implement and evaluate school-wide initiatives aimed at increasing attendance, achievement, and behavioral data (Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022). Throughout their leadership roles, they continuously evaluate their practices to ensure they effectively meet student needs (Gibson et al., 2018).

Advocacy

In addition to leadership, ASCA asserts the importance of advocacy for students to ensure equitable learning experiences for all students (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors advocate both with students (e.g., leading an inclusive LGBTQ+ student group) and on behalf of students (e.g., conducting a workshop for staff about handling harassment; Asplund & Ordway, 2018) through a continuum of systemic interventions ranging from helping individual students develop self-advocacy skills (microlevel) to taking action on legislative policies (macrolevel; Ratts et al.,

2007). School counselors must use advocacy skills to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that meet the diverse needs of all students (ASCA, 2019a).

Specifically, school counselors utilize advocacy skills to develop counseling program goals with specific attention to students with marginalized identities (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). They actively seek resources and opportunities for students to increase educational equity (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). Individually, they work with students to develop a sense of empowerment and skills for self-advocacy (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Ratts et al., 2007). Also, they advocate for their roles as professional school counselors by analyzing program data, gaining buy-in from interested parties, and increasing program supports for all students (Gibson et al., 2018; Havlik et al., 2018). As advocates, school counselors work intentionally to ensure optimal outcomes for students inclusive of all their social and cultural backgrounds.

Systemic Change

As a core behavior of school counselors, ASCA (2019a) defines systemic change as “change affecting the entire system; transformational; change affecting more than an individual or series of individuals; focused upon the dynamic of the environment, not the individual” (p. 150). Although this definition is inspiring, it lacks the concrete knowledge and skills that school counselors must possess to create systemic change. Conceptually, systemic change might include increasing access to equitable education, reducing systemic barriers, and transforming complex school systems (ASCA, 2019a; Shell, 2021). As systemic change agents, school counselors evaluate how school policies create gaps in achievement, access, or achievement (ASCA, 2019a; 2019b). Similar to advocacy, school counselors apply their knowledge of multicultural systems when analyzing student data. Additionally, they use this knowledge to dialogue with educational decision-makers to initiate changes in policy or practice (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Singh et al.,

2010). Lastly, school counselors utilize systemic change skills to provide information and reduce misconceptions about the role of school counselors (Singh et al., 2010).

Some scholars have considered what systemic change might look like in practice. Asplund and Ordway (2018) proposed a four-tier model of systemic change for creating LGBTQ+ inclusive schools that focused on educating school members (e.g., faculty, staff, students, families), cultivating affirming adults, developing responsive programming (e.g., school policy, staff interventions, school culture), and fostering individual student empowerment. Warren and Mauk (2019) recommended that school counselors apply an implementation science framework to initiate practices that create optimal outcomes for students. This framework includes collaborating with multiple leaders and decision-makers, utilizing data to support the need for change, and assessing the effectiveness of interventions. Research is needed to understand the efficacy of both proposed models.

Several researchers explored social justice advocacy of school counselors who addressed systemic change (e.g., Beck & Lane, 2019; Singh et al., 2010). In these qualitative studies, school counselors discussed the need to create equitable individual and systemic change by being a voice for students who are marginalized, citing specific student equity issues including diversity in gender, race, and ability (Beck & Lane, 2019). They reported creating social justice change by raising critical awareness of others and utilizing their knowledge of political systems (Singh et al., 2010). Similarly, researchers discussed integrating micropolitical theory (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021), antiracism (Mason et al., 2021; Stickl Haugen et al., 2022), and transformative leadership (Shields et al., 2018) within school counseling practice. Although each of these theories and practices are likely related to systemic change, there is a need for more clarity around the aspects that make systemic change unique.

Purpose of the Study

Developing a deeper understanding of systemic change has the potential to reduce educational inequality and create more inclusive schools. It is imperative for school counselors to have a clearly established definition that includes required knowledge, skills, and practices to promote systemic change. In turn, a clear definition and operationalization of systemic change may help counselor educators prepare future school counselors to be systemic change agents and assess the impacts of their systemic change practices.

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical foundation regarding the underlying components within school counselor systemic change as a distinct construct from leadership and advocacy. The results of this study may help researchers better understand what systemic change in school counseling is, in turn informing implications for school counselor preparation and development of instrumentation necessary for measuring systemic change. This information will help researchers understand how school counselors enacting systemic change impacts PreK-12 individual and school-level student achievement outcomes. The guiding research question for this study was “What are the necessary components of an effective school counseling systemic change agent?”

Method

Delphi methodology is a systematic process for generating expert consensus on an under-researched topic (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Through multiple rounds of questioning, panelists qualified as experts provide anonymous input regarding a phenomenon or issue. The researcher conducts both qualitative and quantitative analyses to formulate consensus about the topic. Since its development, Delphi methodology has been utilized to explore a multitude of constructs across a variety of disciplines. Within school counseling research, Delphi methodology helped to

develop anti-racist counseling competencies (Stickl Haugen et al., 2022), strategies for deconstructing educational heteronormativity (Strear, 2017), and standards for college readiness for students with autism spectrum disorders (Krell & Pérusse, 2012).

Delphi Overview

History and Development

Researchers from diverse disciplines apply Delphi methodology for understanding various constructs. Originally, the technique was utilized by researchers in the United States Air Force who wanted to gain a consensus opinion from a group of experts in hopes of predicting trends in security planning and military technology that would inform decisions regarding military plans (Dalkey & Helmer, 1962). The use of Delphi technique has broadened beyond military researchers to meet multiple purposes, the primary concept of utilizing expert panelists to generate knowledge remains the same (Davidson, 2013).

Linstone and Turoff (1975) further developed the Delphi process and described it as a structured procedure for facilitating group communication that allows for individuals to effectively deal with complex problems. A Delphi study can be used for brainstorming potential solutions to a problem (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), forecasting predictions of an unknown topic (Rowe & Wright, 1999), generating an expert opinion on an unclear phenomenon (Herlihy & Dufrene, 2011), or establishing optimal consensus from a group of defined experts (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Generally, the method is used to develop a consensus understanding of multifaceted constructs that may be nebulous or not clearly understood (Davidson, 2013). Delphi is best utilized in an exploratory or theoretical stage of research (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Given that systemic change in school counseling is not well-defined in empirical literature, Delphi is an appropriate method for exploring this construct.

Although researchers can apply modifications to their Delphi methodology, the classical Delphi approach includes several common aspects (Davidson, 2013). Anonymous experts are utilized to minimize social pressures to conform and reduce any power differences between participants (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). For each round of questioning, participants are provided the same set of questions, and the questions are adapted for each round. The study begins with broad exploratory questioning and continues through an iterative process until a necessary level of group consensus is achieved (Davidson, 2013). Items are reduced through qualitative and quantitative analyses detailed below.

Delphi Analysis

The first round consists of open-ended exploration of the topic under investigation. The focus of this round is exploratory in nature to allow panelists to contribute their expertise to a defined set of questions (Wester & Borders, 2014). After the first round, researchers analyze participant responses to inform the development of the second-round instrument. Content analysis, a structured process for organizing and generating meaning from complex qualitative data (Bengtsson, 2016), is the most common technique used for analyzing participants' original responses (Powell, 2013; Wester & Borders, 2014). Resulting themes from the content analysis are used in the round two instrument.

In round two, participants are provided the generated items from round one and asked to rate their level of agreement that these items should remain in the list. Researchers commonly utilize a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Jenkins & Smith, 1994). Additionally, participants are invited to comment on items, revise the existing items, and add new items that may be missing from the list. Although quantitative analysis strategies for subsequent rounds vary in Delphi methodology (Powell, 2013), measures of central tendency and

variance are most common (Jenkins & Smith, 1994; Wester & Borders, 2014). For small samples, the median is an appropriate measure of central tendency because it denotes the center of a frequency distribution with minimal skew due to outliers. In addition to the median, the interquartile range (IQR) is frequently used to ensure low variability in responses and higher levels of consensus (Jenkins & Smith, 1994; Wester & Borders, 2014). Items that meet consensus criteria for median and IQR are retained for the final list. Statistical standards for consensus should be determined a priori or before quantitative data collection (Davidson, 2013).

For the final rounds, participants can review any items that met consensus, reevaluate any items that did not meet consensus, and rate their level of agreement for new or revised items from the previous rounds. The same median and IQR standards are utilized for establishing consensus. This process can continue for three to five rounds depending on the researcher's predetermined study procedures. After the final round, all items that reached consensus across the study are retained for the final list of items. Items that do not meet consensus are excluded.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

There are several advantages to using the Delphi methodology for theoretical exploration (Dalkey & Helmer, 1962). The anonymous process encourages input from multiple individuals without the threats of group coercion and seeks to reduce power differentials that may occur when inviting “experts” to share (Jenkins & Smith, 1994). Using an asynchronous format with online questionnaires, participants can thoughtfully consider how they would like to respond without social pressures (Clayton, 1997). Logistically, Delphi is advantageous for bringing together many individual perspectives that may not be able to occur in an interview or focus group approach.

In contrast, Delphi methodology has received critical feedback due to the lack of direction regarding procedures and standards for rigor (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020; Strear et al., 2018). In previous Delphi research, factors such as “expert” qualifications, sample size, number of rounds for consensus, and data analytic strategies have varied tremendously (Strear et al., 2018). Thus, researchers have provided recommendations for Delphi best practices, and this guidance was used to develop the current study (Jenkins & Smith, 1994; Strear et al., 2018).

First, researchers must define the meaning of an expert panelist. An expert panelist is someone who meets criteria for holding valuable knowledge, experience, or policy influence to contribute to the consensus building process (Baker et al., 2006). Although standards for identifying experts are vague, it is important to intentionally include diverse perspectives from a variety of individuals to ensure a comprehensive view of the complex issue (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

Additional decisions must be made regarding sample size as there are no clear guidelines around ideal sample size for Delphi studies. In a review of 883 Delphi studies in health sciences, researchers found that panelist sample size varied drastically from three to 731 participants with a median of 17 (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Within counseling, researchers have utilized sample sizes between $N = 16$ (Wester & Borders, 2014) and $N = 29$ (Villares & Dimmitt, 2017). Powell (2003) asserted that the quality of the experts is more critical to obtaining consensus than sample size. Drawing experts representing a wide scope of professional and personal backgrounds increases quality and reliability of the findings (Powell, 2003). Ultimately, researchers must demonstrate they conducted a comprehensive review that supports the final selection of panel experts (Strear et al., 2018).

One common aspect of the Delphi technique is the iterative rounds of survey questioning. However, there is no required set of rounds to meet sufficient consensus. In the original Delphi study (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963), researchers conducted five rounds of interview questioning to address the complexities of their topic, yet many modern studies stop after the third round of surveys (Jenkins & Smith, 1994). To address issues with participant retention, Strear et al. (2018) recommend using incentives to increase response rates across multiple rounds.

Current Study

Participants

To recruit a diverse representation of school counselor educators, supervisors, and professionals, the participants for this study needed to meet at least two out of three predetermined inclusion criteria. The first criterion was contributing to professional materials related to systemic change, social justice, leadership, or advocacy in school counseling (e.g., professional presentations, peer-reviewed articles). The second required holding current or past leadership positions in school counseling such as professional counseling organizations, school counseling advisory teams, or other multidisciplinary committees focused on implementing systems or policy change. The third criterion required having at least four years of experience in school counseling. This threshold allows participants to have a depth of experience that cannot be shared by early career counselors and resembles similar Delphi studies in counseling research (e.g., Cox, 2018; Stickl Haugen et al., 2022).

Prior to recruitment, I developed a list of 130 potential participants based on published authors on systemic change and advocacy, presidents and directors of national and state school counseling associations, and various ASCA leadership roles (e.g., School Counselor of the Year finalists, committee representatives). I developed the list with the intentional goal to recruit

panelists that represented diverse education, work settings, professional experiences, and cultural identities (Appendix A). I emailed all 130 participants an introduction to my study and a link to provide electronic informed consent via a Qualtrics survey link. I sent one additional follow-up email to participants who had not yet responded. Participants who consented to the study were immediately directed to a screener containing questions regarding their professional qualifications and cultural demographics. This information was used to ensure an expert review panel that represented a range of experience (e.g., practicing school counselor, district/state counseling supervisor, counselor education faculty). Initially, 23 participants consented to participate. In an attempt to increase diversity in racial and gender identity, I utilized targeted snowball sampling by seeking the contact information of colleagues from consenting participants (Creswell, 2013). This resulted in an additional three participants and an overall recruitment response rate of 19.5%.

Twenty-six individuals consented to the study and answered the demographic screener. All 26 individuals were selected to participate, but only 22 (85%) completed one round of data collection. The expert panel consisted of primarily white ($N = 13$, 59%) cisgender women ($N = 17$, 77%) which is a comparable sample to the demographic representation of counselor educators and ASCA members (ASCA, 2020; CACREP, 2023). The panelists reported an average age of 46 years ($SD = 10.28$; range = 30-70) and an average of 14 years ($SD = 9.43$, range = 2-36) of post-graduation school counseling experience. See Table 2 for a full description of participant characteristics.

Table 2***Participant Demographics***

Variable	N	%
Role*		
Counselor education faculty member	9	
Professional school counselor	10	
School counseling supervisor	3	
Counselor education doctoral student	3	
School counseling researcher	3	
School counseling consultant	1	
Gender Identity		
Cisgender female/woman	17	77.3%
Cisgender male/man	5	22.7%
Racial/Ethnic Identity		
Asian or Asian Indian	1	4.5%
Black/African American and White/Caucasian	1	4.5%
Black or African American	4	18.2%
Hispanic or Latinx	3	13.6%
White or Caucasian	13	59.1%
Sexual Identity		
Bisexual	2	9.1%
Heterosexual/Straight	19	86.4%
Heterosexual/Straight and Queer	1	4.5%
Geographic Location (by ACES Regions)		
North Atlantic	3	13.6%
North Central	7	31.8%
Rocky Mountain	1	4.5%
Southern	6	27.3%
West	4	18.2%
Other	1	4.5%

**Some participants indicated 1+ professional role.*

Most participants described holding a leadership role within their immediate work environment (e.g., department lead, district/state school counseling supervisor). Additionally, many held leadership positions within their state school counseling association including as president, committee chair, and board member. The participants reported involvement through the American School Counselor Association through the School Counselor of the Year program, the Board of Directors, or affinity groups and interest networks. Lastly, several participants held leadership roles in school counseling-related areas such as postsecondary development and community advocacy.

Procedures

This study used a slightly modified classical Delphi procedure with questionnaires delivered electronically through email and online survey software rather than face-to-face interviews (Davidson, 2013). After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, potential participants were contacted by email to solicit participation in the study. Each of the 130 potential participants were emailed no more than two times to request their participation in the study. In the initial email, participants were provided an informed consent with planned study procedures including anticipated time commitment and expectations for participation. To ensure confidentiality, only the primary researcher had access to identifying information.

This Delphi study utilized three rounds of questioning and consensus building through Qualtrics survey software which allowed for individual responses and anonymous participation. Links to each survey round were emailed to participants. All panelists who provided consent were sent the questionnaire for each round regardless of participation in the previous round. Participants who completed both the first and second rounds of surveys received a \$20 Amazon

e-gift card. Participants who completed all three rounds of surveys received an additional \$10 Amazon e-gift card for a maximum of \$30.

Instrumentation

Screening and Demographic Survey. Upon providing consent to participate, panelists completed a demographic questionnaire regarding cultural identities and professional experiences (Appendix D). Cultural demographic information included age, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and geographic location (Table 2). Participants also provided information relating to their expert criteria such as school counseling experience, current and past leadership roles, scholarly works, and formal or informal training in systemic change.

Round One Open-Ended Questionnaire. For the first round of data collection, participants were prompted to answer five open-response questions regarding the key components of school counseling systemic change. The questions explored knowledge, skills, practices, and unique qualities of school counseling systemic change. The questions included the following: “What characteristics (i.e., beliefs, dispositions, attributes) make a school counselor a systemic change agent?” “What knowledge is essential for school counselors to ensure effective systemic change?” “What skills and/or practices are essential for school counselors to ensure effective systemic change?” “How does systemic change differ from school counseling leadership?” “How does systemic change differ from school counseling advocacy?”

Round Two Questionnaire. For the second questionnaire, panelists were provided all 151 items generated from the content analysis of round one (Appendix F, Table F.2). Items were organized by domain in the survey to create a more streamlined experience for participants. Participants rated their level of agreement that each item is a necessary component of school

counseling systemic change using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Panelists were also given the option to provide open-ended feedback including a rationale for scoring an item as they did or provide suggested revisions to individual items. Participants were invited to identify any new items they believed might be missing from the list and indicate a preference for items that had similar conceptual meaning but used different language.

Round Three Questionnaire. In the round three questionnaire, panelists reviewed 25 items that did not meet consensus in the second round. When applicable, participant feedback from round two was used to revise the statements. Participants also rated their level of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) on 11 items added by participants in round two. See Table F.3 for a list of revised and newly added items. Lastly, participants were provided a binary choice on 22 pairs of items, or 44 independent items, that were similar in meaning but had slightly different wording (Table F.4). One example of this is “Rewrite the rules of the system to end the marginalization of students” and “Create policies and practices that provide equitable opportunity and access for marginalized students.” Participants indicated their preference for one item within each pair and had the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback regarding their rationale or justification. For each pair, the individual items met consensus criteria in round two, but open-ended feedback either suggested the need for significant wording changes or contradicted the quantitative responses. Lastly, participants were presented with one question regarding preferred language. There was no option to add new items in round three. Following data analysis of the round three responses, participants received the resulting list of items for review with no additional opportunities for comment.

Data Analysis

Prior to the full analysis of round one, the researchers believed the responses to two of the open-ended questions warranted further investigation. The questions, “How does systemic change differ from leadership in school counseling?” and “How does systemic change differ from advocacy in school counseling?” could provide insight into how the participants conceptualized systemic change in relation to leadership and advocacy. Rather than conducting an in-depth content analysis as planned for the full round one findings, I utilized a thematic analysis approach to capture broad themes from these two questions. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step procedure: 1) familiarize yourself with the data, 2) generate initial codes, 3) search for themes, 4) review themes, 5) define and name themes, and 6) produce the report. The same second coder used in the full content analysis of round one assisted the primary researcher with the thematic analysis. We first began by reading through this isolated portion of the data to gain a general sense of participants’ responses. Then, the two coders independently coded each response by identifying all relevant and novel ideas and describing them with a succinct description. We met to review our independent codes, discuss any discrepancies, and meet a collective consensus. Then, we grouped codes based on similar ideas to develop themes.

To understand the core components of systemic change in school counseling, all responses from the five open-ended questions in the round one questionnaire were analyzed using content analysis procedures (Schreier, 2014). Content analysis is a systematic coding process aimed at reducing material to answer a specific research question (Schreier, 2014). Researchers use content analysis to categorize and make meaning of qualitative data while remaining true to the integrity of the original text (Bengtsson, 2016).

This study followed content analysis procedures consisting of eight sequential steps outlined by Schreier (2014). Following data collection, the primary researcher developed an initial coding frame with three domains aligning with the open-ended questions from the first questionnaire (i.e., characteristics, knowledge, skills). Schreier (2014) supported a concept-driven approach to building a coding frame based on prior knowledge, theory, or an interview protocol. However, a concept-driven frame alone may not fully capture the meaningful pieces of data, so categories and subcategories are further developed in a data-driven manner based on what emerges from participants' responses. Initially using one participant's responses, the primary coder segmented the data into smaller, more meaningful chunks. Each segment of data was reviewed to determine which domain it best corresponded to and whether it was a novel concept (Schreier, 2014). Each time a substantial concept was mentioned, the coder compared the concept to the existing categories and subcategories. If it was not already captured in an existing category, a new category was created. This iterative process continued by introducing additional participant responses into the selected data, ensuring all units of data within a category or subcategory shared a similar meaning, and confirming the data did not fall into more than one category (Bengtsson, 2016; Krippendorff, 2019).

Once the initial coding frame was developed, I completed pilot coding. Based on Schreier's (2014) method, pilot coding should include all types of material from all data sources. In this study, pilot coding consisted of four participant responses representing the different expert roles: one school counselor, one school counseling doctoral student, one counselor education faculty, and one school counseling researcher. To increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the coding frame, a graduate research assistant with master's level training in school counseling assisted in coding. Prior to beginning the coding process, both coders met to review Schreier's

(2014) steps for content analysis and clarify steps for pilot coding. The coders discussed the importance of using participants' direct language when possible and the intentionality of separating pieces of data that may be double-barreled (i.e., encompassing more than one meaning).

Then, the two coders independently coded the selected material using the established coding frame. After both coders individually coded four participant responses selected for pilot coding, the intercoder agreement was 87%. The two coders met a second time to discuss differences in coding and consider how the coding frame needed to be revised or more clearly defined. The coders examined each discrepancy to discuss how the data should be categorized within the coding frame and continued discourse until a consensus was reached. Once the coding frame was defined from the pilot phase, it was no longer changed when analyzing remaining data.

Once the main analysis phase is complete, results must be communicated in a manner that adequately answers the research question (Schreier, 2014). For this study, the categories and subcategories of the coding frame informed the development of the second-round questionnaire. When items were similar but not exactly the same, both options were provided to participants in round two to solicit suggestions on the best language to use.

Following round two, participants' responses to the Likert scale were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the development of the round three questionnaire. For this study, consensus criteria were determined based on recommendations from similar counseling Delphi studies (Wester & Borders, 2014). A median of six or higher indicated that the panelists agreed the item was a required component of systemic change. Additionally, an IQR of 1.00 or

less indicated a low distribution and high level of agreement among panelists. Items were retained only if they met both consensus criteria.

Following round three, participants' responses were analyzed using the same criteria as round two. Participants were given the opportunity to rerate items that did not reach consensus and rate any new items added in round two. Items that met consensus criteria (i.e., median > 6, IQR < 1) were retained, added to the items that met consensus in round two, and presented to participants as the final list of items. Any remaining items that did not reach consensus were not removed from the final list. The results represent a comprehensive list of necessary components of a school counseling systemic change agent.

Results

Preliminary Thematic Analysis

Twenty-one participants (95.5%) provided responses to the first questionnaire. Prior to the full analysis, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the two open-ended questions, "How does systemic change differ from leadership in school counseling?" and "How does systemic change differ from advocacy in school counseling?" provided additional context regarding how the participants conceptualize systemic change in relation to leadership and advocacy. Through independent coding of the 21 responses, we developed an initial list of 130 codes. After discussing divergent ideas and comparing codes to the raw data, we reduced this list to 96 unique codes. Through our analysis, five primary themes emerged: 1) essential, interconnected, and different, 2) social justice-oriented, 3) global, transformational outcomes, 4) complex change process, and 5) community of shared collaboration.

The first theme was **essential, interconnected, and different**. Participants agreed that systemic change, advocacy, and leadership are essential responsibilities of professional school

counselors. Although the panelists seemed to agree that the three constructs were related to one another, they disagreed about how they differed. For some participants, systemic change is a specific type of leadership or advocacy that is more focused on the global, social justice outcomes of the students and school. One stated, “Systemic change and advocacy are very similar constructs. I differentiate the two in that advocacy can lead to awareness where systemic change more typically leads to action.” In other cases, participants described leadership and advocacy skills as being necessary to bring about systemic change. For example, a participant shared, “Leadership is the mentality, the behaviors, the motivation needed for systemic change. Leadership can occur without resulting systemic change, but change cannot occur without leadership.” However, for most participants, it seemed clear that constructs are interconnected, yet ultimately different.

The next theme was **social justice-oriented**. Participants in this study described systemic change agents as having an intentional focus on identifying discriminatory practices and developing solutions that reduce oppressive systems. While leaders have the potential to change systems, systemic change agents focus on core issues and systems that may be disempowering specific students and families. As one participant stated, “Leadership is being on different committees, systemic change is calling out those committees for discrimination practices and recommending other solutions.” Similarly, advocacy for students often involves a social-justice focus, but it is not required. School counselors frequently advocate for students' needs or for their professional roles, but school counselors who are systemic change agents use their understanding of oppressive systems to understand what systems need to be changed. It was noted, “If we deeply understand the oppressive systems where we work, we are able to strongly advocate for students who are underserved by these systems.”

While advocacy can occur on individual, group, or systemic levels, participants frequently noted that systemic change is a practice that focuses on **global, transformational outcomes**. Some leaders bring transformation to their systems; however, many leaders continue to preserve the status quo or maintain the current system. Advocacy involves recognizing and responding to student needs, but advocacy efforts may need to be repeated over time before the system changes. Systemic change efforts create outcomes that reduce oppressive systems for the long-term rather than on a situational basis. Described by one participant, “It is possible to advocate for a student and it not lead to a change [beyond the single student.] My interpretation of systemic change implies a more macro-level advocacy that successfully brings about change.” Systemic change creates equitable, positive outcomes that are in the best interests of students and families.

Next, the participants noted that systemic change is a **complex change process** that is difficult to navigate. It involves active conversations with decision-makers, bringing awareness of important issues, and supporting change with data. One participant described that “Systemic change requires advocacy but goes beyond into organizing, tapping key relationships, or getting into rooms with decision-makers.” The complexity of educational systems requires systemic change agents to be cognizant of the power held by leaders and use advocacy skills to facilitate change efforts among formal leaders. One panelist stated, “Leadership often focuses on a few key things rather than more global change. I think that broader systemic change is what is needed these days, but that's complicated in the complex institutions that schools are.” Systemic change agents stay focused on actions and progress to ensure change occurs despite challenges.

The last identified theme was **community of shared** collaboration. According to participants, systemic change is a collaborative, unified effort in which multiple educational and

community partners come together to make progress on a shared vision for change. Leadership often focuses on the goals and vision of one formal leader or small group of leaders, as in distributed leadership, yet systemic change agents often work behind the scenes without immediate recognition. For example, a participant stated,

Leadership involves tapping into the energy and commitment of followers, while systemic change can be accomplished as a partner in the change process. They are not mutually exclusive but leadership has more of an implication of formality and a recognizable role as a leader. Systemic change can be accomplished through leadership but may be more collaborative

Advocacy could be more effective with the collaboration of others but often stems from the efforts of one individual. For systemic change to occur, all relevant partners within the system should be involved and have their voice heard. This includes students, families, school counselors, teachers, administrators, other helping professionals, and community members. One participant reported that for systemic change to occur, “there needs to be more of a united effort across multiple disciplines within the school system.”

Round One

Using the 21 responses to the first-round questionnaire, a content analysis resulted in a list of 151 unique items categorized into four large domains, 1) beliefs, 2) dispositions, 3) knowledge, and 4) skills. In the beliefs domain, 18 items corresponded to four categories; in the dispositions domain, 37 items corresponded to six categories. In the knowledge domain, 34 items corresponded to three categories and 10 subcategories. Lastly, in the skills domain, 62 items corresponded to five categories and 15 subcategories. See Appendix F, Table F.1 for a full list of domains, categories, and subcategories.

Systemic change beliefs encompass foundational mindsets that school counselors must embrace to promote systemic change. Some example items include, “Systemic change is interdisciplinary,” “Ideas and systems are capable of evolution,” and “All students deserve an equitable education.” *Dispositions* are personal qualities or character traits that school counselors must embody to promote systemic change. For example, participants suggested, “perseverance through challenges with deeply-rooted power systems,” “resourceful problem solving,” and “respect for all involved within the system.” *Knowledge* includes broader concepts or theories that school counselors must understand to promote systemic change. Some examples include, “current and historical understanding of race and racism,” “critical theories within education,” and “understand micropolitical theory.” The last domain, *skills*, includes specific practices or tasks that school counselors must be able to do to promote systemic change. These include, “Disaggregate data to assess for gaps among different populations of students,” “Encourage others who hold power to work toward change,” and “Facilitate opportunities for discussion with decision-makers.”

Round Two

Twenty-one participants (95.5%) completed the questionnaire for round two. Of the 151 independent items, 88 items across all four domains met consensus criteria and were retained for the final list. Per Delphi procedures (Davidson, 2013), these items were not sent to participants for further review. Of these, 55 items were accepted as originally written and 33 items were accepted with minor wording revisions based on feedback from participants. For example, one item stated, “Involve *all* partners in the systemic change process (e.g., students, families, community members, school staff, administrators, other helping professionals).” Although this item met consensus criteria (Median = 7, IQR = 1), feedback suggested that it may not be

necessary or possible to involve every possible person in systemic change practices. However, it can be important to include the voices of educational and community partners who are most impacted or who have the most influence. Therefore, this item was retained for the final list with the slight change to “Involve *relevant* partners in the systemic change process (e.g., students, families, community members, school staff, administrators, other helping professionals).” These 88 items were not reviewed by participants again.

Thirty-three additional items met consensus criteria; however, feedback from participants indicated these items warranted a second review. In these cases, the open-ended feedback either suggested significant revisions to the item or conflicting responses that seemed to indicate a lack of consensus among the group. The feedback was applied to these 33 items, and participants rated them again in round three.

There were 30 remaining items that did not meet consensus criteria. Participants’ open-ended feedback was used to revise the wording and collapse similar items before moving on to round three. See Appendix F, Table F.2 for a full list of items presented in round two with corresponding median and IQR. Within the open-ended responses in round two, many participants highlighted the oppressive connotations of the term “stakeholder.” This finding prompted an additional question in the round three questionnaire where participants could indicate their preference for alternative terms and suggest alternative language to use.

Round Three

Nineteen participants (86.4%) completed the final round questionnaire. Of the 36 items reviewed in the final round, 21 met consensus criteria to be retained for the final list (Appendix F, Table F.3). The remaining 15 items were removed. Through analysis of the 44 comparison items, 22 items were retained for the final list (Appendix F, Table F.4). In many cases, the most

preferred item was retained based on frequency counts and statistical means. In one case where there was no clear agreement about the group's preference, open-ended feedback was used to integrate the two items. For example, participants rated "Advocate against practices or policies that promote inequity within the school" and "Advocate against school policies, committees, or practices that are systemically oppressive" nearly the same. Some participants emphasized the importance of the word "systemically" while others preferred "inequity" over "oppressive." These items were combined for the final list as "Advocate against school practices, committees, or policies that promote systemic inequities within the school."

After completing all three rounds of the Delphi study, participants met consensus on 130 unique items with 15 Belief items, 36 Disposition items, 30 Knowledge items, and 49 Skills items (see Table 3). With the reduction of items, one category in the Beliefs domain and one subcategory in each of the Knowledge and Skills domains were removed for the final list. In response to the question about preferred language for groups of people who share an interest in the students and school community, the quantitative and qualitative responses from participants were mixed. Instead of using one singular term, various terms were used throughout the findings to describe this group (e.g., interested parties, educational and community partners, systemic change partners, specific group labels).

Discussion

The goal of this study was to take steps towards a consensus understanding of the core components of a school counseling systemic change agent. Although the term has frequently been used as a call to action for school counselors (Harper & Singh, 2013; McMahon et al., 2009; Ratts et al, 2007), the way school counselors should meet this call has been exceptionally unclear. The results identified in the final list of 130 items take the first steps towards a

Table 3

Medians and Interquartile Ranges (IQR) for Final Retained Items

Domain	Category/Subcategory and Items Retained for Final List	Median	IQR
Beliefs	<i>Change is complex</i>		
	Individual change includes many complex variables (e.g., student characteristics, contextual factors, school environment)	6	1
	Systemic change includes many complex variables (e.g., student characteristics, contextual factors, school environment)	7	1
	Educational systems involve many complex variables	7	1
	Systemic change within schools requires multiple interdisciplinary partners	7	1
	All things are interconnected (i.e., behaviors, experiences, ideas, etc.)	7	1
	Ideas and systems are capable of evolution	6	1
	<i>Systemic change is an ethical school counseling responsibility</i>		
	School counselors share responsibility for identifying and addressing unjust situations	7	1
	All students should have access to a rigorous academic offering	7	1
	All students deserve a high quality, equitable education	7	0
	School counselors play a role in ensuring that students and families are served equitably	7	0
	All students should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program	7	0
	School counselors have the capacity to bring about change	7	1
	School counselors have the skills and knowledge to be a systemic change agent	6	1
	<i>Everyone can achieve their optimal potential</i>		
	All children are capable of their own definition of success	7	0
	All students can become productive, contributing members of society	7	0.5
Dispositions	<i>Altruism</i>		
	Compassion for self	7	1
	Compassion for others	7	1
	Emotional empathy for students	7	1
	Ability to distinguish between one's own interests and the interests of students	7	1
	Ability to distinguish between one's own interests and the interests of others	6	1
	Demonstrate unconditional positive regard and a nonjudgmental stance	7	1
	<i>Resilience</i>		
	Ability to engage in confrontation	6	1
	Courage to do what is right rather than what is easy	7	1
	Willingness to take risks	7	1

Table 3 Continued

Dispositions (cont.)	Able to withstand hardships and setbacks	6	1
	Perseverance through challenges with deeply-rooted power systems	7	1
	Persistence through long-term change processes	7	1
	Bravery to speak truth to power	7	1
<i>Innovation</i>			
	Curiosity	6	1
	Creative, "out-of-the-box," thinking	6	1
	Resourceful problem solving	6	1
	Flexibility to try new approaches	7	1
<i>Determination</i>			
	Action-oriented	6	1
	Strive to work proactively to address challenges	6	1
	Demonstrate confidence	6	1
<i>Social justice commitment</i>			
	Antiracist	7	1
	Desire for equity and justice	7	1
	Demonstrate a desire to understand identities that are different from their own	7	1
	Respect for all involved within the system	7	1
	Intentionality and a sense of purpose in their actions	7	1
	Considerate of multiple perspectives	7	1
	Willingness to listen to the needs of marginalized communities	7	0.5
	Demonstrate a commitment to creating equitable change	7	1
	Recognition of how an individual's circumstances have been impacted by systemic oppression	7	1
<i>Self-awareness</i>			
	Sense of groundedness and equanimity	6	1
	Reflective of their own growth and development	7	1
	Discerning of what issues to prioritize	6	1
	Ethical	7	0
	Openness to learning new ideas	7	1
	Pursuit of lifelong learning	6	1
	Intellectual humility	6	1
Knowledge	<i>Counseling and Human Development</i>		
	Change processes.		
	Understand potential steps for initiating change	6	1
	Understand the complex nature of change	6	1

Table 3 Continued

Knowledge (cont.)	<i>Counseling and Human Development</i>		
	Human growth and development.		
	Practices for promoting students' academic development from a culturally informed and affirming standpoint	6	1
	Practices for promoting students' career development from a culturally informed and affirming standpoint	7	1
	Practices for promoting students' social-emotional development from a culturally informed and affirming standpoint	6	1
	Understanding of how various cultural identities intersect and create unique experiences of privilege and oppression	6	1
	Multicultural considerations.		
	Knowledge of how different cultural groups are advantaged or disadvantaged	7	1
	Knowledge of social justice movements	6	0
	Current and historical understanding of race and racism	7	1
	<i>Education</i>		
	Educational law and policy.		
	Knowledge of school-level laws, policies, and mandates	6	1
	Knowledge of system-level (i.e., district, state, federal) laws, policies, and mandates	6	1
	Knowledge of legislative issues impacting local school districts	6	0
	Education theories.		
	Culturally sustaining pedagogy	7	1
	Critical race theory	6	1
	Critical theories within education	6	1
	Educational systems.		
	Conceptualize educational systems using systems theories	6	1
	Understand the function of educational systems	7	1
	Knowledge of oppressive dynamics in school systems	7	1
	Knowledge of key decision-makers in schools	6	1
	School culture	7	1
	Understand micropolitical theory within the school context	6	1
	Understand historical perspectives of educational systems	7	1
	Accessing resources and opportunities.		
	Awareness of school, district, and community resources	7	1
	Awareness of support systems within education	7	1
	<i>Systems Processes</i>		
	Systemic advocacy.		
	Understand how power is given within the system	6	1
	Understand the unique role of individuals within a larger movement for change	6	1
	Systemic impacts on individuals.		
	Explain the impact of social and organizational systems on individuals	6	0

Table 3 Continued

Knowledge (cont.)	Understand how the systemic context creates unique demands for various parties	6	1
	Understand the impact of systems on disenfranchised, disempowered, or invisible groups	7	1
	Understand family systems theories	6	1
Skills	<i>Assess and Evaluate</i>		
	Set goals and create progress.		
	Develop solutions that promote more equitable practices	7	0
	Identify strategic short-term objectives that contribute to the long-term goal	7	0
	Evaluate their practices.		
	Apply different practices to see what works best for the given setting	6	1
	Present data to interested educational and community partners	7	1
	Use school and student data to identify and support the need for change		
	Analyze systems.	7	0
	Analyze the system from multiple perspectives		
	Disaggregate data to assess for gaps among different populations of students	7	1
	Use data to evaluate how policies and programs create opportunity gaps	7	1
	Examine the impact of systems on disenfranchised, disempowered, or invisible groups	7	1
		7	1
	<i>Collaborate</i>		
	Build relationships with systemic change partners.		
	Build trusting relationships with people across groups	7	1
	Build trusting relationships with marginalized individuals and communities	7	1
	Build social capital (i.e., utilize relationships as a resource for creating change)	6	1
	Involve all partners in the systemic change process (e.g., students, families, community members, school staff, administrators, other helping professionals)	7	1
	Create buy-in from interested parties	6	1
	Mutually engage with as many people in the system as possible	6	1
	Collaborate with colleagues who have similar goals for systemic change	7	1
	Listen to the needs of others.		
	Commit to removing one's ego from decision-making	7	1
	Listen to the needs of students	7	0
	Mediate conflicts	6	1
	Consider the values, perspectives, and needs of multiple educational and community partners	6	1
	Seek consultation from others.		
	Seek coaching or consultation from outside the system	6	1

Table 3 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Seek help from others to support and maintain systemic change work	7	1
	<i>Empower</i>		
	Encourage others.		
	Help others find the courage to try hard things	6	1
	Encourage others who hold power to work toward change	6	1
	Ability to identify other people's strengths	6	1
	Organize people into action.		
	Demonstrate strong leadership skills	7	1
	Demonstrate group facilitation skills	6	1
	Speak to large groups	6	1
	Organize people into action	6	1
	Recognize the needs of others.		
	Identify and respond to the needs of all students	7	0
	Invite students to share their expertise on how the system needs to change	7	.5
	<i>Advocate</i>		
	Challenge the status quo.		
	Analyze school policies, committees, or systems that reinforce oppressive or racist practices	7	1
	Challenge the foundations of the system that marginalize students and families	7	1
	Advocate against school practices, committees, or policies that promote systemic inequities within the school	7	0
	Collaborate to implement innovative solutions	6	1
	Create space for those who have been intentionally excluded to have a voice in decision-making	7	1
	Create policies and practices that provide equitable opportunity and access for marginalized students	6	1
	Engage in challenging conversations.		
	Communicate effectively	7	0
	Use negotiation skills to promote positive outcomes for students	7	1
	Identify key decision-makers in schools	6	1
	Facilitate opportunities for discussion with decision-makers	7	0
	Facilitate conversations about how to more equitably distribute power and privilege within the system	7	1
	Demonstrate how the role of school counselors impact all students	7	0
	<i>Reflect</i>		
	Regulate themselves.		
	Practice self-care to prevent burnout	6	1
	Regulate self in highly emotional situations	6	1

Table 3 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Reflect on growth areas.		
	Recognize their own areas for growth	7	0
	Demonstrate multicultural competence	7	1
	Recognize their own privileged and marginalized identities	7	0
	Reflect on how the school counselor's own bias impacts their perspective	7	0

differentiated definition of systemic change that is unique from leadership and advocacy. Throughout the study, panelists regarded systemic change, leadership, and advocacy as being interconnected constructs; however, systemic change is more centered on action, outcome, and a dedicated focus on social justice.

Within the Beliefs and Knowledge domains, many items identified by participants are consistent with existing professional standards guiding the counseling profession (e.g., ASCA, CACREP). For instance, the beliefs that all students are capable of success and should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program are foundational mindsets for professional school counselors (ASCA, 2019b). However, the results of this study extend these standards to call on school counselors' responsibility and capability to identify and address unjust school practices. Similarly, participants identified important concepts and theories within the Knowledge domain that align with existing counselor preparation (e.g., counseling and human development theories, multicultural considerations). However, these findings suggest further training is needed on additional concepts such as educational policy, systems theories, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. The results support existing counselor preparation strategies yet provide direction for how the field can reach further to train systemic change agents.

In the Dispositions and Skills domains, there continues to be a theme of systemic change requiring an intentional focus on social justice. While these findings support fundamental school counseling competencies (ASCA, 2019b) like promoting ethical behavior, building trusting relationships, and demonstrating acceptance and compassion to all, the results also point towards the need for a stronger social justice commitment. Participants recognized a need for school counselors to be able to identify how school policies, committees, or systems may reinforce oppressive or racist practices and actively engage in conversations with decision-makers who

may be resistant to change. Within the most recent revision of the ASCA Code of Ethics (2022), there has been more specific language addressing aspects of anti-racism, marginalization, and systems of oppression which provides evidence that the findings in this study are consistent with the counseling profession's shifts to be more active in social justice and systemic change.

Differentiating Systemic Change

Although panelists in this study described systemic change agents as using skills necessary for leadership and advocacy, the findings suggested that there are differences in how these skills are enacted. Traditionally, leadership in school counseling has focused on implementing school counseling programs and services (ASCA, 2019a), serving on school-wide or district-level leadership teams (Young & Bryan, 2015), and collaborating with educational and community partners to make progress on goals (Gibson et al., 2018). However, participants in this study discussed how systemic change agents do not necessarily require a formal leadership role. They noted that systemic change agents often work behind the scenes to create change from the bottom up supporting a non-hierarchical approach like transformative leadership theory (Shields et al., 2018). Further, while they noted systemic change agents are also leaders, they lead by highlighting systemic practices that are oppressive to student groups and implementing high-quality counseling programs to address inequities. While there is clear overlap between leadership and systemic change, the intentional focus on social justice and willingness to work without formal recognition are two ways where they differ.

The expert panelists noted many similarities between advocacy and systemic change and suggested that advocacy is a necessary component of systemic change. Ratts and colleagues (2007) described advocacy broadly as school counselors "intervening in the social context that affects students" (p. 90). Advocacy interventions can occur both with and on behalf of students

across multiple domains (i.e., individual student, school or community level, public arena; Ratts et al., 2007; Toporek et al., 2009). However, participants believed systemic change centers on the broader, macro-level type of advocacy that ideally would create school environments that reduce marginalization of individuals. For example, panelists described advocacy as identifying and responding to a student's needs (microlevel; Toporek et al., 2009). This may include bringing about awareness of the issue to other educational partners or identifying school or community resources that meet the student's specific needs (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Ratts et al., 2007). However, systemic change agents take a more active social justice approach by seeking out the perspectives of marginalized students and advocating against systemically oppressive policies and practices (macrolevel; Toporek et al., 2009). In order for systems to change, participants argued that multiple individuals must be involved (e.g., students, families, educators, community members) whereas school counselors can be advocates without the involvement of others. In all, advocacy is a critical responsibility for school counselors (Haskins & Singh, 2016; Ratts et al., 2007), but the results of this study suggest advocacy alone does not fully capture the transformation of practices that promote equity for marginalized communities.

Building a Foundation for Systemic Change

Findings in this study are consistent with previous scholars' proposed conceptualizations of school counseling systemic change. Similar to Asplund and Ordway's (2018) model, participants in this study identified the need to raise awareness of oppressive practices that create inequitable opportunities for students and create school policies and interventions that increase successful outcomes of marginalized students. As Warren and Mauk (2019) suggested, multiple leaders, collaborators, and decision-makers are needed for systemic initiatives to be implemented. More specifically, a key aspect of collaborating for systemic change involves

understanding how many individuals can play a role in contributing to change and the importance of tapping into the unique strengths of each systemic change partner. The similarities in the results of this study combined with previously proposed models of systemic change are promising, yet there is still a clear need for empirical research that demonstrates the effectiveness of systemic change models.

Another theme that emerged from the study was the complexity of systemic change. Every system is unique, and it is impossible to have a “one size fits all” definition of a systemic change agent. The panelists noted how several components identified in the study potentially lead to systemic change, but a key aspect of being a systemic change agent is captured in the school counselor’s knowledge of complex educational systems and dispositional characteristics such as perseverance through resistance and hope that change is possible despite adversity. These findings are supported by Oehrtman and Dollarhide’s (2021) suggestion to integrate micropolitical theory and literacy into school counselor education. The participants recognized that the work necessary to be an effective change agent is challenging and can vary drastically across educational settings. There is a clear need for intentional knowledge and skills to address these complexities.

Lastly, the importance of language and voice within systemic change emerged as a theme throughout the study. A critical piece of systemic change agency is listening to and elevating the voices of marginalized groups or individuals who have historically been excluded from the conversation. Although the panel has some limitations in terms of diverse representation, the researchers maintained a priority to highlight the perspectives of panelists who held marginalized identities. In terms of language, many participants brought up the oppressive connotation of the word “stakeholder.” Within school counseling literature, this term has frequently been used to

describe a "person or group sharing an investment or interest in the students and/or school community (e.g., parents/guardians, school staff, administrators, business and community interest groups, school board members, etc.)" (ASCA, 2022, p. 12). However, this term has negative connotations towards indigenous and native groups due to being deeply rooted in colonialism and the stealing of land. This prompted adding a question in round three asking the group for a more appropriate term. As Asplund and Ordway (2018) proposed, a key piece of systemic change is educating ourselves and others to bring awareness to oppressive practices, and the need for education was evident even through the investigation of this study.

Limitations

Although findings from this study begin to fill a gap in the school counseling literature, there are a few limitations to note. The first is the variability in Delphi methodology standards. Because there is no single agreed-upon way of conducting a Delphi study, another researcher could conduct a similar study and get different results. Although careful consideration was taken to identify a diverse panel of experts, it is impossible to include every expert perspective. Another expert panel could vary in sample size and demographics and produce a distinct list of core components. Additionally, panelists in this study may have a unique interest in the topic of systemic change divergent from those who met expert criteria but opted out of the study. Although systemic change is discussed frequently in counseling literature, the term is often politicized within the current sociocultural context which may have influenced how panelists decided to contribute. Lastly, Delphi methodology is an empirical study of expert opinions which is appropriate for this stage of research. However, these findings alone are insufficient, and additional validity studies are needed to provide additional evidence before moving to intervention or outcome research.

Implications

The results of this study provide a promising foundation for further exploration of systemic change in school counseling. This operationalized list of core components provides guidance to school counselors, counselor educators, and researchers hoping to promote systemic change within their practice.

Future Research

To date, there is not a validated measure for assessing skills, knowledge, beliefs, or dispositions of school counseling systemic change agents. Future researchers could develop a school counseling systemic change scale using consensus items from this study. Scale development would include exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses as well as exploration of convergent and discriminant validity with related scales (e.g., leadership, advocacy, multiculturalism). This newly developed systemic change scale could begin a vast area of potential research. For instance, with a validated measure, researchers can investigate factors that contribute to systemic change in school counselors. Like previous research on leadership and advocacy, researchers might consider how cultural identities (e.g., age, racial/ethnic identity), systemic factors (e.g., school type, caseload), or experience (e.g., school counseling, leadership) influence a school counselor's ability to be a systemic change agent. These findings could potentially inform how counselor educators train and support emerging school counselors.

With this more defined understanding of systemic change, researchers can conduct intervention or outcome research to better understand how these components impact the academic, social emotional, and career outcomes of PreK-12 students. For example, school counselors would identify a specific student group who was experiencing barriers to opportunities or services within their school. Following training focused on the core components

of systemic change, school counselors could implement systemic change strategies in their schools. Counseling researchers could support school counselors in conducting action research to investigate how their dedicated systemic change practices impact access and opportunity gaps for students. Further, this type of research could provide evidence to the most salient aspects of systemic change by demonstrating which components are most effective in practice.

When researching systemic change practice in school counseling, researchers must consider the complexities of school settings. As these participants reported, systemic change is a complex process that involves many individual and contextual factors, such as school climate, sociopolitical dynamics, and district support. Future studies could investigate how systemic change components assist school counselors in navigating these contextual factors or how these contextual factors impact school counselors' abilities to integrate systemic change practice into their work.

School Counselor Preparation

Additionally, findings can inform school counselor preparation by providing a foundation for supplementary concepts to be taught in school counseling graduate programs. The specific knowledge and skills components can be integrated into student learning outcomes, content delivery, and class assessment activities. For example, when orienting students to the counseling profession, counselor educators could include content that integrates the sociopolitical landscape of the counseling profession, historical and modern perspectives of the educational system, and the role systems of oppression play in providing equitable school counseling services. Given this information, students could analyze a local school system where they identify individuals who hold power in decision-making, disaggregate school data to assess for gaps among students, and examine how structures and policies may be contributing to educational or opportunity gaps.

Future research could investigate how these intentional teaching practices influence school counseling students' competency or self-efficacy with implementing systemic change practices.

Although these are important concepts for school counseling students to learn, it may be difficult to ask counselor educators to incorporate them within courses that are already packed full of meaningful counseling content. McMahon and colleagues (2009) called school counseling faculty to think creatively about how they can integrate systemic change concepts into the program culture beyond basic classroom instruction, potentially through professional dispositions. Dispositions are character traits or personal qualities associated with counseling competency and effectiveness. They are regarded as a key component of counselor education programs and counselor development. If the counseling profession agrees that school counselors should be systemic change agents, dispositions identified in this study could be integrated into program policies, standards, and evaluation procedures. Although dispositions vary in their ability to be taught or adapted (Freeman et al, 2019), program faculty members can be intentional about reinforcing and highlighting the necessary dispositions of a systemic change agent.

Lastly, these findings can provide a framework of strategies for school counselors hoping to implement systemic change in their schools. Similar to how ASCA provides school counselors with assessment tools for evaluating school counselor competencies or school counseling programs, this list of items can serve as a self-assessment tool for school counselors to better understand their strengths and growth areas related to systemic change. For example, a school counselor may identify needing support with evaluating their counseling services with a critical lens for oppressive systems. This could prompt them to seek additional professional development, consult with a colleague from outside the system, or invite marginalized voices to

collaborate in their critical analysis. Although the findings of this study show promise for the future of school counseling practice, researchers must simultaneously prioritize research that demonstrates that these components are impactful for the development and success of PreK-12 students.

Conclusion

There is a clear call from the counseling profession for school counselors to act as systemic change agents to promote more equitable educational and counseling experiences for all students. Still, how school counselors conduct systemic change has been abundantly vague in previous literature. This study begins to bridge this gap by providing a list of the beliefs, dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for school counselors to be systemic change agents. These findings are the first step in researching systemic change as a unique construct, preparing school counseling students to be systemic change agents, and integrating systemic change practices into the core responsibilities of school counselors.

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Conclusion

Professional school counselors must be systemic change agents in their schools and communities to support students' diverse needs in their academic, social-emotional, and career development. Previous literature has explored leadership and advocacy thoroughly, but to date, few studies have explored the nuances of systemic change in school counseling. Since educational systems are complex systems with political dynamics and various interested parties, it is essential that school counselors work intentionally as systemic change agents to ensure students have access to high-quality educational and counseling experiences. This study sought to build empirical foundations by developing a consensus understanding of what it means for school counselors to be a systemic change agent.

The results of the literature review identified that leadership, advocacy, and systemic change parallel in terms of relationship-building, data utilization, innovation, empowerment, and transformation, but differ in application and intended outcomes. The results of this study begin to situate the nuances of systemic change by providing a list of the beliefs, dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for school counselors to be systemic change agents. Although there is overlap with existing school counseling competencies and research on leadership and advocacy, the participants in this study identified that systemic change intentionally focuses on systems of oppression, inequitable practices, and identify students or student groups who may be marginalized in order to promote more equitable outcomes for all. These findings provide implications for future research on systemic change in school counseling, strategies to prepare school counseling students to be systemic change agents, and ways school counselors can implement systemic change practices in their schools.

Appendix

Appendix A

Panelist Recruitment Criteria

To be eligible for study participation, panelists must meet two out of three inclusion criteria:

1. Contributions to professional materials related to systemic change, social justice, leadership, or advocacy in school counseling. Contributions may include professional presentations, peer-reviewed articles, books, or other forms of scholarly works.
2. Current or past leadership positions in school counseling such as professional counseling organizations, school counseling advisory teams, or other multidisciplinary committees focused on implementing systems or policy change.
3. At least four years of experience in the school counseling field.

Prior to recruitment, I will develop a list of potential participants based on published authors from my literature review, presidents and directors of national and state school counseling associations, and ASCA School Counselor of the Year finalists from the last five years. I will seek to recruit panelists that represent diverse education/training, work settings, professional experiences, and cultural identities.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

My name is Haley Ault, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education program at the University of Tennessee. You are invited to participate in a study (UTK IRB-22-07308-XM) “Defining Systemic Change in School Counselors: A Delphi Study.” I am completing this study as part of my doctoral dissertation. This study will explore the underlying components of a school counseling systemic change agent.

During this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic screener and three rounds of Delphi questioning. Questionnaires will be sent to you via email, and you will have up to two weeks to respond. Each questionnaire will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the first two Delphi rounds, you will be awarded a \$20 Amazon electronic gift card. Upon completion of the third Delphi round, you will be awarded a \$10 Amazon electronic gift card for a maximum total of \$30.

Participation in this study is limited to individuals who meet two of three following inclusion criteria: 1) contributions to professional materials related to systemic change, social justice, leadership, or advocacy in school counseling. Contributions may include professional presentations, peer-reviewed articles, books, or other forms of scholarly works, 2) current or past leadership positions in school counseling such as professional counseling organizations, school counseling advisory teams, or other multidisciplinary committees focused on implementing systems or policy change, and 3) at least four years of experience in the school counseling field.

Your participation in this study will help researchers better understand what systemic change in school counseling is, how to prepare school counselors to be systemic change agents, and ways specific systemic change can be measured.

To be considered for participation, please follow this link to read the informed consent and complete the initial demographic questionnaire: _____

All collected responses are kept confidential and anonymous. Participants will be notified on (XXdateXX) if selected for the study.

If you have any questions and/or concerns, you may also contact my Committee Chair, Dr. Melinda Gibbons at mgibbon2@utk.edu. If you are not able to participate in this study at this time but would like to suggest a colleague who meets the above criteria, please send their name and email address to me at hault1@vols.utk.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Haley Ault, MS, NCC
Doctoral Candidate of Counselor Education
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
hault1@vols.utk.edu

Appendix C

Consent for Research Participation

Study Title: Defining Systemic Change in School Counselors: A Delphi Study

Researchers: Haley Ault, MS, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melinda Gibbons, PhD, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this research study because you meet expert panel criteria for a Delphi study investigating the key components of school counseling systemic change.
What is this research study about?
The purpose of this study is to better understand the underlying components of school counselor systemic change. Specifically, participants will generate a list of items that represents what it means to be a systemic change agent via a consensus gathering process. The guiding research question for this study is “What are the necessary characteristics of an effective school counseling systemic change agent?”
Who is conducting this research study?
This study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The research team and/or the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is receiving funding from a sponsored-student grant from the Association of Assessment and Research in Counseling.
How long will I be in the research study?
If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last approximately three months and will involve completing a demographic questionnaire and three online surveys. Each survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The total time commitment will be about one hour.
What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?
If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to complete three rounds of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be sent to an email address you provide, and you will have up to two weeks to complete the requested information. All participant information and responses will be kept in a password protected online folder to which only the primary researcher has access.
What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can contact the research investigators, and they will remove your data from all analyses.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is unlikely that participating in this study will pose any risks to you. It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit directly from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about the key components of school counseling systemic change. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

Informed consent and all other documentation collected during this study will be kept in a password protected online folder to which only the primary researcher has access. The key code that identifies participants will be kept separate from the other research collected. Only the primary researcher will have access to this material during and after the study.

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by assigning your survey responses to a unique research identification code. The identification code will be kept separate from the other research collected. Only the primary researcher will have access to this material during and after the study.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.

- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.
- Business offices at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville may be given your name, address, Social Security Number, payment amount and related information to issue your payment and report tax information.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the study. After three years, all research materials will be destroyed.

We will not share your research data with other researchers.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

All participants who participate in this research study will receive up to a \$30 electronic Amazon gift card. Participants will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card for completing both round one and round two of the study. If they complete all three rounds, they will receive an additional \$10 Amazon gift card for a maximum total of \$30. Gift cards will be issued via email after the data collection process has been completed. Participants will be required to provide information including name, social security number, and email address, so that the gift card may be purchased and delivered.

What else do I need to know?

About 20-25 people will take part in this study. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. The procedures described above will help reduce this risk.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the primary researcher, Haley Ault, hault1@vols.utk.edu, 865-748-1946, or faculty advisor, Melinda M. Gibbons, mgibbon2@utk.edu, 865-974-4477.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697

Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

Professional Expertise

1. How many years of post-graduation school counseling experience do you have?
Short answer response.
2. Which of the following best describes your current position?
Select all that apply.
 - a. Counselor education faculty member
 - b. Counselor education doctoral student
 - c. Professional school counselor
 - d. School counseling researcher
 - e. School counseling supervisor
 - f. Prefer to self-describe: _____ (*short open response*)
3. If you are a counselor educator, how many years have you been in this role?
Short answer response.
4. If you are a school counseling researcher, how many years have you been in this role?
Short answer response.
5. If you are a school counseling supervisor, how many years have you been in this role?
Short answer response.
6. Please specify any current or previous school counseling leadership roles (e.g., department lead, supervisor, program coordinator):
Short answer response.
7. How many scholarly publications or professional conference presentations have you contributed related to systemic change, social justice, leadership, or advocacy in school counseling?
Select the best option.
 - a. 0-3
 - b. 4-7
 - c. 8-11
 - d. 12-15

- e. 16+
- 8. How many formal or informal trainings have you completed with a dedicated focus on **systemic change**?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4+

Participant Demographics

- 9. What is your age in years?
Short answer response.
- 10. Which of these best describes your racial or ethnic identity?
Check all that apply.
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian or Asian Indian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic or Latinx
 - e. Middle Eastern or North African
 - f. White or Caucasian
 - g. Prefer not to answer
 - h. Prefer to self-describe: _____ (*short open response*)
- 11. Which of these best describes your current gender identity?
Check all that apply.
 - a. Cisgender female/woman
 - b. Cisgender male/man
 - c. Gender queer, gender non-binary, or gender fluid
 - d. Transgender female/woman
 - e. Transgender male/man
 - f. Prefer not to answer
 - g. Prefer to self-describe: _____ (*short open response*)
- 12. Which of these best describes your current sexual orientation?
Check all that apply.
 - a. Asexual
 - b. Bisexual
 - c. Gay/Lesbian
 - d. Heterosexual/Straight
 - e. Pansexual
 - f. Queer

- g. Prefer not to answer
 - h. Prefer to self-describe: _____ (*short open response*)
13. Please specify your geographic location based on ACES Regions:
Select the best option.
- a. North Atlantic (Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont)
 - b. North Central (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin)
 - c. Rocky Mountain (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming)
 - d. Southern (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia)
 - e. West (Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington)
 - f. Other (Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Guam, International)

Appendix E

Survey Protocol

Round One Questionnaire

The American School Counselor Association (2019) defines systemic change as “change affecting the entire system; transformational; change affecting more than an individual or series of individuals; focused upon the dynamic of the environment, not the individual” (p. 150). For the following, please provide information, thoughts, and opinions that best answer the questions.

1. What characteristics (i.e., beliefs, dispositions, attributes) make a school counselor a systemic change agent?
Open response question.
2. What knowledge is essential for school counselors to ensure effective systemic change?
Open response question.
3. What skills and/or practices are essential for school counselors to ensure effective systemic change?
Open response question.
4. How does systemic change differ from school counseling leadership?
Open response question.
5. How does systemic change differ from school counseling advocacy?
Open response question.

Round Two Questionnaire

Section One

The items in the first section of the round two questionnaire will be informed by the content analysis of the round one questionnaire. The resulting items will be listed with an opportunity for participants to rate their level of agreement that the item should remain in the final list as a key component of school counseling systemic change. Additionally, they will be invited to provide rationale and suggestions for revision or rewording. An example is below.

Item <i>Select one option.</i>	1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = some what disagree	4 = neutral	5 = some what agree	6 = agree	7 = strongly agree
Example item: “Understand the role of power and privilege within education systems”							
Please include any suggestions for rewording or clarification to this item. You may also provide rationale for your level of agreement. <i>Open response option.</i>							

Section Two

In the second round, participants will be provided an open response item to add any additional items they feel may be missing from the items in round one.

Round Three Questionnaire

The third round questionnaire will be similar to the second round questionnaire. Participants will be able to view items that met consensus in the second round. Participants will be able to rate items that did not meet consensus in the second round in addition to any new items added from the second round. Format will be the same as above. No new items will be added in the third round.

Appendix F

Supplementary Tables

Table F.1

Round One Domains, Categories, and Subcategories

Domain	Category	Subcategory
Beliefs	Change is complex ($N = 5$) Change is possible ($N = 2$) Systemic change is an ethical school counseling responsibility ($N = 6$) Everyone can achieve their optimal potential ($N = 5$)	<i>N/A</i>
Dispositions	Altruism ($N = 7$) Resilience ($N = 7$) Innovation ($N = 4$) Determination ($N = 4$) Social justice commitment ($N = 10$) Self-awareness ($N = 5$)	<i>N/A</i>
Knowledge	Counseling and human development	Change processes ($N = 2$) Human growth and development ($N = 5$) Multicultural consideration ($N = 3$)
	Education	Educational law and policy ($N = 3$) Education theories ($N = 3$) Educational systems ($N = 7$) Accessing resources and opportunities ($N = 3$)
	Systems processes	Systemic advocacy ($N = 3$) Systemic impacts on individuals ($N = 3$) Systems theories ($N = 2$)
Skills	Assess and evaluate	Set goals and create progress ($N = 2$) Evaluate their practices ($N = 4$) Analyze systems ($N = 4$)
	Collaborate	Build relationships with systemic change partners ($N = 8$) Listen to the needs of others ($N = 6$) Seek consultation from others ($N = 3$)
	Empower others	Encourage others ($N = 3$)

Table F.1 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Empower others (cont.)	Organize people into action ($N = 6$) Recognize needs of others ($N = 3$)
	Advocate	Challenge the status quo ($N = 8$) Engage in challenging conversations ($N = 4$) Promote equity, diversity, and inclusion ($N = 3$) Advocate for the school counselors ($N = 2$)
	Reflect	Regulate themselves ($N = 2$) Reflect on growth areas ($N = 4$)

**N = number of individual items within category or subcategory*

Table F.2

Round Two Medians and Interquartile Ranges (IQR) of Items

Domain	Category/Subcategory and Items Presented in Round Two	Median	IQR
Beliefs	<i>Change is complex</i>		
	Individual change includes many complex variables (e.g., student characteristics, contextual factors, school environment)	6	1
	Systemic change includes many complex variables (e.g., student characteristics, contextual factors, school environment)	7	1
	Educational systems involve many complex variables	7	1
	Systemic change is interdisciplinary	7	1
	All things are interconnected (i.e., behaviors, experiences, ideas, etc.)	7	1
	<i>Change is possible</i>		
	There is hope for change	7	0+
	Ideas and systems are capable of evolution	6	1+
	<i>Systemic change is an ethical school counseling responsibility</i>		
	School counselors hold responsibility for rectifying unjust situations	6	2*
	All students should have access to a rigorous academic offering	7	1
	All students deserve an equitable education	7	0+
	Opportunity or achievement gaps for students are unacceptable	7	1+
	School counselors play a role in ensuring that students and families are served equitably	7	0
	All students should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program	7	0+
	<i>Everyone can achieve their optimal potential</i>		
	All students are capable of success	7	0+
	All children can be successful on their own terms	7	1+
	All students hope to become productive, contributing members of society	6	2
	All students want to learn and achieve their dreams	6	2*
	Individuals are all doing their best based on what they know and believe	6	2*

Table F.2 Continued

Dispositions		
<i>Altruism</i>		
Compassion for self	7	1
Compassion for others	7	1
Emotional empathy for students	7	1
Willingness to work without recognition	7	2*
Ability to distinguish between one's own interests and the interests of students	7	1
Ability to distinguish between one's own interests and the interests of other stakeholders	6	1
Demonstrate unconditional positive regard and a nonjudgmental stance	7	1
<i>Resilience</i>		
Ability to engage in confrontation	6	1
Courage to do what is right rather than what is easy	7	1
Willingness to take risks	7	1
Able to withstand hardships and setbacks	6	1
Perseverance through challenges with deeply-rooted power systems	7	1
Persistence through long-term change processes	7	1
Bravery to speak truth to power	7	1
<i>Innovation</i>		
Curiosity	6	1
Creative, "out-of-the-box," thinking	6	1
Resourceful problem solving	6	1
Flexibility to try new approaches	7	1
<i>Determination</i>		
Action-oriented	6	1
Takes initiative to be proactive in addressing challenges	6	1
Efficiency	6	2*
Bold and confident	5	2*
<i>Social justice commitment</i>		
Antiracist	7	1
Desire for equity and justice	7	1
Cultural humility	7	1+
Respect for all involved within the system	7	1
Intentionality and a sense of purpose in their actions	7	1
Considerate of multiple perspectives	7	1
Willingness to listen to marginalized voices	7	0+
Commitment to change	7	1+

Table F.2 Continued

Dispositions (cont.)	Desire to understand identities that are different from their own	7	1+
	Avoidance of blame, shame, and judgment	7	1+
	Self-awareness		
	Sense of groundedness and equanimity	6	1
	Reflective of their own growth and development	7	1
	Discerning of what issues to prioritize	6	1
	Ethical	7	0
	Openness to learning new ideas	7	1
Knowledge	<i>Counseling and Human Development</i>		
	Change processes.		
	Understand procedures for initiating change	6	1+
	Understand the complex nature of change	6	1
	Human growth and development.		
	Best practices for promoting students' academic development	6	1
	Best practices for promoting students' career development	6	2*
	Best practices for promoting students' social-emotional development	6	1
	Knowledge of intersecting identities and intersectionality	6	1+
	Understand concepts of human behavior, both individually and in groups	6	2*
	Multicultural considerations.		
	Knowledge of how different cultural groups are advantaged or disadvantaged	7	1
	Knowledge of social justice movements	6	0
	Current and historical understanding of race and racism	7	1
	Education		
	Educational law and policy.		
	Knowledge of school-level laws, policies, and mandates	6	1
	Knowledge of system-level (i.e., district, state, federal) laws, policies, and mandates	6	1
	Knowledge of election agendas taking place within school districts	6	0+
	Education theories.		
	Culturally sustaining pedagogy	7	1
	Critical race theory	6	1
	Critical theories within education	6	1
	Educational systems.		
	Conceptualize educational systems using systems theories	6	2*
	Understand the function of educational systems	7	1

Table F.2 Continued

Knowledge (cont.)	Knowledge of oppressive dynamics in school systems	7	1
	Knowledge of key decision-makers in schools	6	1
	School culture	7	1
	Conceptualize school systems using micropolitical theory	6	2*
	Understand historical perspectives of educational systems	7	1
	Accessing resources and opportunities.		
	Awareness of school resources	7	1
	Awareness of support systems within education	7	1
	Awareness of community referral resources	7	1
	Systems Processes		
	Systemic advocacy.		
	Understand how power is given within the system	6	1
	Understand the role of individuals within a larger movement for change	6	1+
	Awareness of who within the group leads others to change	6	1+
	Systemic impacts on individuals.		
	Explain the impact of social and organizational systems on individuals	6	0
	How the systemic context creates unique demands for stakeholders	6	2*
	Understand the impact of systems on disenfranchised, disempowered, or invisible groups	7	1
	Systems theories.		
	Understand philosophical and scientific perspectives on social and organizational systems	5	1*
	Understand family systems theories	6	1
Skills	Assess and Evaluate		
	Set goals and create progress.		
	Develop solutions that promote more equitable practices	7	0
	Identify strategic short-term objectives that contribute to the long-term goal	7	0
	Evaluate their practices.		
	Experiment with various practices to see what works best for the given setting	6	2*
	Present data to stakeholders	7	1
	Collect formal and informal forms of data	7	0
	Use school and student data to identify and support the need for change	7	0

Table F.2 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Analyze systems.		
	Analyze the system from multiple perspectives	7	1
	Disaggregate data to assess for gaps among different populations of students	7	1
	Examine structures and policies through data	7	1+
	Examine the impact of systems on disenfranchised, disempowered, or invisible groups	7	1+
	Collaborate		
	Build relationships with systemic change partners.		
	Build mutual trust with stakeholders in the system	7	1+
	Build trusting relationships with people across groups	7	1+
	Build social capital	6	1+
	Involve all stakeholders in the systemic change process (e.g., students, families, community members, school staff, administrators, other helping professionals)	7	1
	Create buy-in from interested parties	6	1
	Mutually engage with as many people in the system as possible	6	1
	Collaborate with colleagues who have dissimilar interests	6	2*
	Collaborate with colleagues who have similar goals for systemic change	7	1
	Listen to the needs of others.		
	Commit to removing one's ego from decision-making	7	1
	Listen to the needs of students	7	0
	Mediate conflicts	6	1
	Identify stakeholders' values within education	6	1
	Take into consideration the perspectives of all stakeholders	6	1+
	Listen to the needs of stakeholders	7	0+
	Seek consultation from others.		
	Seek coaching or consultation from outside the system	6	1
	Seek coaching or consultation from within the system	6	2*
	Seek help from others to support and maintain systemic change work	7	1
	Empower		
	Encourage others.		
	Help others find the courage to try hard things	6	1
	Encourage others who hold power to work toward change	6	1
	Ability to identify other people's strengths	6	1

Table F.2 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Organize people into action.		
	Work proactively rather than reactively or in response to an issue	7	1+
	Engage relevant stakeholders in the change process	6	1
	Demonstrate strong leadership skills	7	1
	Demonstrate team management skills	6	1+
	Speak to large groups	6	1
	Organize people into action	6	1
	Recognize the needs of others.		
	Reflect on the needs of students	7	0+
	Reflect on the needs of stakeholders	6	2*
	Demonstrate servant leadership skills	6	1+
	Advocate		
	Challenge the status quo.		
	Denounce school policies, committees, or systems that reinforce discriminatory practices	7	2*
	Challenge the foundations of the system that marginalize students and families	7	1
	Advocate against practices or policies that are systemically racist	7	0+
	Advocate against practices or policies that promote inequity within the school	7	0+
	Develop solutions that are new and different	6	2*
	Create a different way for people who have been excluded from power	6	3*
	Deconstruct privilege of powerful people in the system	5	1*
	Rewrite the rules of the system to end the marginalization of students	6	1+
	Engage in challenging conversations.		
	Communicate effectively	7	0
	Engage in political and legislative advocacy	6	2*
	Negotiate for optimal outcomes	7	1+
	Facilitate opportunities for discussion with decision-makers	7	0
	Promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.		
	Practice antiracism throughout school counseling roles	7	1
	Create change that improves equity for all within the system	7	0
	Advocate on a systemic level	7	1
	Advocate for school counselors.		
	Demonstrate how the role of school counselors impact all students	7	0
	Engage in professional organizations (e.g., ASCA, ACA, NACAC, state orgs)	7	2*

Table F.2 Continued

Skills (cont.)	<i>Reflect</i>		
	Regulate themselves.		
	Practice mindfulness	6	1+
	Regulate self in highly emotional situations	6	1
	Reflect on growth areas.		
	Recognize their own areas for growth	7	0
	Demonstrate multicultural competence	7	1
	Recognize their own privileged and marginalized identities	7	0
	Reflect on how their own bias impacts their perspective	7	2*

* *Item did not meet consensus criteria and was revisited in round three.*

+ *Item met consensus criteria, but participant feedback suggested significant revisions or contradictory information. Item was revisited in round three.*

Note: This table represents items as they were presented to participants which was prior to changing the term “stakeholder.”

Table F.3

Round Three Medians and Interquartile Ranges (IQR) of Items

Domain	Category/Subcategory and Items Presented in Round Three	Median	IQR
Beliefs	<i>Systemic change is an ethical school counseling responsibility</i>		
	School counselors share responsibility for identifying and addressing unjust situations	7	1
	School counselors have the capacity to bring about change	7	1
	School counselors have the skills and knowledge to be a systemic change agent	6	1
	<i>Everyone can achieve their optimal potential</i>		
	All students can become productive, contributing members of society	7	0.5
	All students want to achieve their dreams	6	1.5*
	Most people are doing their best based on their unique lived experience	7	2*
	Students have the power to determine their pathways to success	6	2*
Dispositions	<i>Altruism</i>		
	Willingness to work without immediate recognition	6	2.5*
	Thoughtfulness	6	2*
	<i>Determination</i>		
	Efficiency in their advocacy response	6	1.5*
	Demonstrate confidence	6	1
	<i>Self-Awareness</i>		
	Pursuit of lifelong learning	6	1
	Intellectual humility	6	1
Knowledge	Humor	5	2*
	<i>Social justice commitment</i>		
	Willingness to listen to the needs of marginalized communities	7	0.5
	<i>Counseling and Human Development</i>		
	<i>Human growth and development.</i>		
	Practices for promoting students' career development from a culturally informed and affirming standpoint	7	1
	Understand concepts of human behavior from a culturally informed and affirming standpoint	7	1.5*

Table F.3 Continued

Knowledge (cont.)	Education		
	Educational systems.		
	Conceptualize educational systems using systems theories	6	1
	Understand micropolitical theory within the school context	6	1
	Systems Processes		
	Systemic impacts on individuals.		
	Understand how the systemic context creates unique demands for various parties	6	1
	Systems theories.		
	Understand philosophical and scientific perspectives on social and organizational systems	6	1.5*
Skills	Assess and Evaluate		
	Evaluate their practices.		
	Apply different practices to see what works best for the given setting	6	1
	Collaborate		
	Build relationships with others.		
	Collaborate with colleagues who have dissimilar interests in changing the system	6	2.5*
	Build trusting relationships with marginalized individuals and communities	7	1
	Seek consultation from others.		
	Seek coaching or consultation from within the system	5	2.5*
	Empower		
	Organize people into action.		
	Practice leadership skills centered on serving the needs of the group	6	2*
	Recognize the needs of others.		
	Identify and respond to the needs of all educational partners	5	1.5*
	Invite students to share their expertise on how the system needs to change	7	0.5
	Advocate		
	Challenge the status quo.		
	Analyze school policies, committees, or systems that reinforce oppressive or racist practices	7	1
	Collaborate to implement innovative solutions	6	1
	Create space for those who have been intentionally excluded to have a voice in decision-making	7	1

Table F.3 Continued

Skills (cont.)	Engage in challenging conversations.		
	Facilitate conversations about how to more equitably distribute power and privilege within the system	7	1
	Engage in political and legislative advocacy	6	2*
	Identify key decision-makers in schools	6	1
	Advocate for school counselors.		
	Engage in professional organizations (e.g., ASCA, ACA, state organizations)	6	1.5*
	Reflect on how the school counselor's own bias impacts their perspective	7	0

**Item did not meet consensus criteria (Median ≥ 6 , IQR ≤ 1).*

Table F.4

Round Three Comparison Items

Domain	Similar Items Presented for Comparison in Round Three*	N	%
Beliefs	Opportunity gaps for students are unacceptable	2	10.53%
	All students deserve a high quality, equitable education	17	89.47%
	All students should have access to high quality school counseling services	6	31.58%
	All students should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program	13	68.42%
	Ideas and systems are capable of evolution	16	84.21%
	There is hope for the system to change	3	15.79%
	All children can be successful on their own terms	3	15.79%
	All students are capable of their own definition of success	16	84.21%
Dispositions	Recognition of how an individual's circumstances have been impacted by systemic oppression	14	73.68%
	Demonstrate avoidance of blame, shame, and judgment	5	26.32%
	Work proactively rather than reactively or in response to an issue	9	47.37%
	Strive to work proactively	10	52.63%
	Demonstrate a commitment to change	3	15.79%
	Demonstrate a commitment to creating equitable change	16	84.21%
	Demonstrate a pursuit for cultural humility	8	42.11%
	Demonstrate a desire to understand identities that are different from their own	11	57.89%
Knowledge	Understand potential steps for initiating change	14	73.68%
	Understand procedures for initiating change	5	26.32%
	Knowledge of intersecting identities and intersectionality	5	26.32%
	Understanding of how various cultural identities intersect and create unique experiences of privilege and oppression	14	73.68%
	Knowledge of election agendas taking place within school districts	0	0%
	Knowledge of legislative issues impacting local school districts	19	100%
	Understand who within the group can lead others to change	4	21.05%
	Understand the unique role of individuals within a larger movement for change	15	78.95%

Table F.4 Continued

Skills	Build social capital	3	15.79%
	Build social capital (i.e., utilize relationships as a resource for creating change)	16	84.21%
	Identify and respond to the needs of all students	16	84.21%
	Reflect on the needs of students	3	15.79%
	Build trusting relationships with people across groups	14	73.68%
	Build mutual trust with interested parties in the system	5	26.32%
	Examine structures and policies through data	3	15.79%
	Use data to evaluate how policies and programs create opportunity gaps	16	84.21%
	Examine the impact of systems on groups who are silenced	3	15.79%
	Examine the impact of systems on disenfranchised, disempowered, or invisible groups	16	84.21%
	Advocate against practices or policies that promote inequity within the school*	10	53.63%
	Advocate against school policies, committees, or practices that are systemically oppressive*	9	47.37%
	Rewrite the rules of the system to end the marginalization of students	2	10.53%
	Create policies and practices that provide equitable opportunity and access for marginalized students	17	89.47%
	Demonstrate group facilitation skills	14	73.68%
	Demonstrate team management skills	5	26.32%
	Use negotiation skills to promote positive outcomes for students	14	73.68%
	Negotiate for optimal outcomes	5	26.32%
	Practice self-care to prevent burnout	17	89.47%
	Practice mindfulness	2	10.53%

Note: All items met consensus criteria in Round Two.

**Feedback was used to integrate the two items for the final list.*

Vita

As a Knoxville native, Haley Ault has pursued three degrees from the University of Tennessee. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in school counseling before working as a middle school counselor in the Knoxville area for six years. As a school counselor, she developed a passion for mentorship and collaboration with emerging school counselors which ultimately led her to pursue a doctorate in counselor education and supervision at the University of Tennessee. Through her doctoral studies, she has cultivated an enthusiasm for promoting professional excellence in school counseling, developing practical evidence-based teaching practices, and establishing program structures that enhance the graduate school experience for counselor trainees. Specifically, her research interests include school counselor leadership identity, K-12 career and college programming, and assessment in counseling. Upon graduation, she will continue her journey as an assistant professor of counselor education at the University of South Florida. She is overwhelmed by the support of her colleagues and loved ones as she takes this next step.