School Counselor and Administrator Perceptions of Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Collaborative efforts by school counselors and school administrators that are grounded in social capital principles have the potential to better support students' educational success, health, and well-being in the wake of challenging and adverse events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study was to assess perceptions of school counselors and administrators to determine the extent to which they had a shared vision of the challenges and strengths in their school's initial response to the pandemic. We also explored their sense of the anticipated future needs within the context of social capital theory and trauma-informed practices. Participants included 381 current pre-K–12 school administrators and school counselors throughout the United States who completed a mixed-methods survey in spring 2020. Use of these findings can help school stakeholders continue to foster students' social/emotional, academic, and career and college readiness development during continued and future mass trauma events.

Keywords

COVID-19, pandemic response, school counselor–administrator collaboration, social capital theory

"We had to figure out ways to serve all of these students and provide quality education."

– School Counselor Participant

Social capital theory can be used as a guiding framework for addressing challenges to implement a school's mission. This theory proposes that organizational resources and expertise are centered within social networks, and that effective change capitalizes on the use of social connections (Coleman, 1990). Collaborative efforts between school counselors and school administrators can lead to increased social capital among school stakeholders, resulting in more positive educational outcomes for all students (Boyland et al., 2019; Geesa et al., 2020; Lowery et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2020). Social capital can be enhanced by using relational networks to develop and enhance trust, goodwill, authority, community, empathy, shared identity, respect, and collaboration. Further, building social capital improves information sharing, fosters common norms, and increases social support (Leenders, 2014). These social resources then can be mobilized in the purposive actions needed to address challenges during times of stress (Leenders, 2014; Lin, 2001). The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presented one such challenge for schools whereby social capital could be used to guide responses. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of school counselors and school administrators in their initial response to the pandemic in relation to social capital and trauma-informed practices.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes and uncertainties for schools and educational processes. According to Hammond et al. (2020), the forced transition to online teaching and learning was accompanied by many challenges for learners, educators, and caregivers, including increased anxiety and stress, technology issues (lack of devices and poor connectivity), and worries about the future. Recent studies have highlighted the strain mass traumatic events can have on young people, such as students being left home alone and missing meals (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020); experiencing confusion, fear, grief, and behavioral problems (Patrick et al., 2020); and

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undergoing trauma, stress, and mood changes (Brooks et al., 2020).

As a result of these challenges, many school counselors and administrators turned to federal and state agencies and professional organizations for guidance in crafting their responses to student needs in the face of the pandemic. Professional organizations and state and federal agencies (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021; Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2013) provided recommendations and guidelines for schools to use in response to the pandemic and based on previous large-scale community responses to mass diseases. As such, early responses focused on preventative infection control procedures, including activities such as keeping good hygiene, hand washing, infection control, and immunizations (Stevenson et al., 2009). During this initial response, school administrators, school counselors, and teachers provided resources to help students and their families become aware of the school's action plan to minimize spread of the virus (Murray, 2010). Administrators were advised to keep quarantine periods as short as possible, improve communication about pandemic-related policies and procedures, provide adequate personal protective equipment, and provide additional resources to support students during this time of mass trauma (Brooks et al., 2020).

Trauma-Informed Educational Practices

Following these initial health and safety measures, schools began to think about what shifts were needed to provide trauma-informed educational practices. Because trauma has the potential for adverse physiological, emotional, and social impact, knowing how to work with students using trauma-informed educational practices was critical for educators (Morton & Berardi, 2017). Again, preexisting federal resources were available. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) was one such federal agency that previously furnished guidelines for trauma-informed practice that emphasized the need to provide programming that establishes a sense of safety, trustworthiness, and transparency. SAMHSA (2014) guidance also indicated that trauma-informed programs should include peer support and be grounded in principles of collaboration, mutuality, and empowerment, and that everyone in the system should be aware of the impact of cultural, historical, and social issues on trauma response and provided a voice and choice in all aspects of programming. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2017) adapted the SAMHSA guidelines and recommended that trauma-informed school programming promote positive interactions, be culturally responsive, establish mechanisms for peer support, provide targeted support for at-risk groups, and provide individual student support for those experiencing severe stress reactions.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

School counselors were further tasked with continuing to provide services guided by the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2019). The model's four key components—define, mange, deliver, and assess—provide the foundation for comprehensive school counseling programs to promote the academic, college and career, and social/emotional development of all students. Comprehensive school counseling ensures the success of all students by developing mindsets and behaviors associated with goal attainment, health, and well-being.

During events such as the pandemic, school counselors and administrators needed to shift their thinking about how to promote student competencies, as outlined in the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (ASCA, 2014, 2021), within the broader context of a trauma-informed school. Specifically, school counselors and school administrators needed to think about whether and how they could continue to foster the evidence-based mindsets and behaviors necessary for academic and career success in the midst of a pandemic and within a remotely delivered educational context. The *mindsets* are the social/emotional attitudes and beliefs students have about themselves, the educational process, and career goal attainment. The *behaviors* include the learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills necessary for academic, career, and social/emotional success. Comprehensive school counseling is more successful when school counselors and administrators have a shared understanding of its principles and practices (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016).

School Counselor–School Administrator Collaboration

According to social capital theory, systemic collaboration is the key to educational success, especially during times of stress when these social resources can be marshalled to implement the purposive actions needed to cope with challenges (Leenders, 2014; Lin, 2001). Both the frequency and quality of collaboration is greater in schools when school administrators are aware of instrumental practices of their staff (Min et al., 2016). In the initial stages of the pandemic, systematic collaboration between school counselors and administrators was needed to implement effective emergency operations plans. Later, further collaboration was necessary to implement trauma-informed practices grounded in the core principles of comprehensive school counseling, including continued efforts to foster the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors. Within the context of social capital theory, a common vision with well-established mechanisms for information sharing and social support is crucial for successful collaboration in dealing with adversity (Leenders, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

We utilized social capital theory (Leenders, 2014; Lin, 2001) to frame our study because we sought to assess school counselors' and school administrators' perceptions of their initial response to the pandemic in three areas within the context of social capital theory and trauma-informed perspectives. First, participants rated their ability to continue to foster the ASCA Mindsets &

Behaviors in a remote learning environment. Second, they evaluated the utility of state and federal resources in guiding their response to the pandemic. Finally, they shared their perceptions about one another's roles and effectiveness in implementing those roles, and described challenges and strengths in their initial response to the pandemic. School administrators and school counselors also shared concerns and anticipated needs when students, faculty, and staff returned to in-person education.

Research Questions

In this study, we investigated three broad research questions:

1. What were school counselors' and school administrators' perceptions of their ability to continue to foster the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What were school counselors' and school administrators' perceptions of the relevance and utility of state and federal guidelines and resources in their initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What were the differences and similarities in school counselor and school administrator perceptions regarding the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors and state and federal guidelines in their initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methods

We developed and utilized one original survey (rating scales and open-ended, brief response questions) to assess school counselor and administrator perceptions of their initial response to the pandemic, the utility of various resources, and the anticipated needs on return to in-person education.

Participants

The participant sample ($N = 381$) was composed of 153 school or district administrators and 228 school counselors. The majority of participants identified as White (90.6%) with 4.3% identifying as Black/African American and 3.6% as another racial group. Most participants (74.9%) identified as female; 23.7% identified as male. Most participants were in the age range of their 40s (37.4%), 50s (25.4%), or 30s (20.3%). A few respondents were in their 20s (5.7%) or older than 60 (9.7%). Almost half of the respondents had served in their position for 10 years or more (46.0%); a few were in their first year (4.9%) and the remainder had been in their position for 2–9 years.

Participants described limited racial diversity in their student populations. The majority of participants (60.3%) reported that students of color comprised 25% or less of their student population. Of the remaining participants, 19.4% indicated a student population with 26%–50% students of color, 10.6% indicated 51%–75% students of color, and 9.1% indicated more

than 75%. Participants reported greater economic diversity in their schools, with almost one third (34.6%) indicating that 26%–50% of their students received free and reduced lunch, 25.1% reporting that 51%–75% received this service, 21.4% reporting that more than 75% of their students received the service, and 18.3% indicating 25% or less.

Procedures

Electronic surveys, developed via Qualtrics, were disseminated through contacts at state departments of education and national and state-level professional school administrator and school counselor associations. Responses were submitted anonymously. Participants initially completed two rating scales. They then had the option to provide qualitative responses to 10 brief, open-ended questions. Of the participants, 84 school counselors and 55 administrators responded to these questions.

Instruments

We developed one original survey with two rating scales (i.e., ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors rating scale and Disaster Response rating scale) and one set of open-ended questions for the purpose of this study.

American school counselor association mindsets & behaviors rating scale. Participants rated their perception of the degree to which they had been able to promote the six ASCA mindsets for student success during their initial response to the pandemic. An example item is: "Since onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, school counselors in our school/district have been able to encourage the following mindsets for all students." They then rated each mindset using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). They were also asked to rate their perception of the degree to which they had been able to promote the three categories of behaviors for student success: learning strategies, self-management, and social skills. For example, they were provided with the behavioral category followed by this sentence stem: "Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, students in our school/district have been able to participate in classroom lessons, activities and/or individual/small-group counseling that allow them to:" This stem was followed by each specific behavior associated with the respective standards for that behavioral category using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). We obtained a total score for each behavior standard by summing the individual behaviors associated with that category. Scores on the mindsets subscale could range from 6 to 30 while scores on the three behavior standard subscales could range from 11 to 55 for Learning Strategies and Self-Management and 10 to 50 for Social Skills.

Disaster response rating scale. Participants rated their perception of the degree to which they were aware of or felt state and federal guidelines and district plans were useful in guiding their

response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants rated state and the federal guidelines (e.g., FEMA, CDC) and their district emergency plans. They evaluated utility of the three guideline categories for each phase of response (i.e., preparedness, crisis response, and recovery) using a Likert-type scale (0 = *Not familiar with the guidelines*, 1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *Somewhat*, 3 = *Very*, 4 = *Extremely*). These ratings yielded three subscales—State Guidelines, Federal Guidelines, and District Plans—and, when combined, created a total score. We calculated subscale and total scores only for those familiar with the guidelines. Each subscale score could range from 3 to 9. Total scores could range from 9 to 36.

Open-Ended Survey

Upon completion of the rating scales, participants had the option to respond to 10 open-ended questions that focused on areas including: perceptions about one another's roles during their initial response, effectiveness in implementing those roles, effectiveness of collaboration, challenges and strengths in their initial response, concerns and anticipated needs when returning to in-person education, and state and federal improvements needed in supporting schools' response to future mass trauma events.

Data Analyses

The next sections present the study's quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

Quantitative. We used descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations) to depict participant responses to the survey, and used independent samples t tests to compare school counselor and administrator responses to the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors rating scale and the Disaster Response rating scale. Participants who indicated they were not familiar with guidelines were excluded from analysis of the utility of district, state, and local guidelines.

Qualitative. Consensual Qualitative Research - Modified (CQR-M; Spangler et al., 2012) was developed as an adaptation of the original CQR method (Hill et al., 2005) for use with qualitative survey data collection and analysis. We used CQR-M procedures to analyze themes represented in school counselor and school administrator responses to the open-ended questions. Consensual Qualitative Research - Modified allows for reliable interpretation of survey data themes by establishing a consensual approach to analysis of the domains and categories represented in participants' responses (Spangler et al., 2012).

The qualitative data were evaluated in two phases. Initially, one team (consisting of three graduate students and one university faculty member in school counseling) separately analyzed responses to the open-ended survey questions to generate domains, categories, and subcategories from participant responses. School counselor and administrator responses were analyzed separately. Team members then met to compare the domains and categories initially and independently identified by the graduate students. They edited wording and modified domains/categories, as needed, to develop consensus. During this process one domain was identified as having two subcategories.

These domains, categories, and subcategories were used by a second team (composed of six graduate students and the same university faculty) to code responses and establish frequencies for each category and subcategory. Again, the team coded school counselor and school administrator data separately. This larger team was divided into two groups of three graduate students each. One group coded the school administrators' data and the other group coded the school counselors' data. Teams attempted to code each response into only one category that best encapsulated the response, but complex responses at times were coded into multiple categories (Spangler et al., 2012). The second phase team members then met to compare coding and when responses were coded differently, the group discussed discrepancies until achieving consensus. Response frequencies were counted for each category/subcategory and frequency counts were then used to calculate the proportion of responses that category/subcategory represented in the total number of responses. Finally, this group of six graduate students reviewed the completed domain/category/subcategory tables to identify similarities and differences in school counselor and administrator categories/subcategories within each domain. The team then met as a whole to establish consensus on their perception of similarities and differences. Differences of 30% or more between category proportions for school counselors and administrators were identified as significant (Spangler et al., 2012).

Results

In the following sections, we describe quantitative results and qualitative findings from our mixed-methods study.

Quantitative Results

Overall, school counselors and school administrators agreed or strongly agreed that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, their schools had been able to encourage the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for all students. The mean for the overall mindsets component was 17.87 ($SD = 4.06$) for school counselors and 17.73 ($SD = 4.52$) for administrators. In regard to learning strategies, the majority of participants typically agreed or strongly agreed (school counselors $M = 33.22$, $SD = 8.15$; school administrators $M = 35.01$, $SD = 6.97$) that they were able to continue to foster the ASCA learning strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found a statistically significant difference between school counselor and administrator perceptions ($p < 0.05$), with administrators providing the slightly higher rating. Participants also generally agreed or strongly agreed (school counselors $M = 35.16$, $SD = 8.25$; school administrators $M = 35.99$, $SD = 7.30$) that they were

able to foster ASCA self-management skills. Finally, participants agreed (school counselors $M = 29.45$, $SD = 7.59$; school administrators $M = 29.53$, $SD = 7.72$) that they were able to continue to foster ASCA social skills.

In terms of school counselors' and school administrators' knowledge of guidelines for Kdisaster response, 2% of building administrators reported being unfamiliar with guidelines at all levels. Of all administrators (building and district), 6% were unfamiliar with state guidelines and 12% with federal guidelines. Three percent of building administrators reported being unfamiliar with even their district guidelines. School counselors were two to three times more likely to be unfamiliar with the guidelines than their school administrators. Specifically, 6% of school counselors were unfamiliar with guidelines at all levels while 11% and 23% were unfamiliar with state and federal guidelines, respectively. Nine percent of school counselors were unfamiliar with their district guidelines. We found no difference between school counselor and administrator perceptions of the overall utility of guidelines. Those participants who endorsed being familiar with the guidelines found them somewhat useful, with no significant difference between the two groups (school counselors $M = 19.17$ $SD = 6.77$; administrators $M = 20.78$ $SD = 6.71$). When looking at the subscale trends, generally speaking, district-level guidelines were seen as most useful (school counselors $M = 7.44$, $SD = 2.56$; administrators $M = 8.31$, $SD = 2.42$). State guidelines were rated as slightly more useful (school counselors $M = 6.95$, $SD = 2.42$; administrators $M = 7.12$ $SD = 2.33$) than federal guidelines (school counselors $M = 6.11$ $SD = 2.31$; administrators $M = 6.30$ $SD = 2.47$).

Qualitative Results

The qualitative component of the survey (i.e., open-ended questions) offered participants an opportunity to provide feedback around topics such as challenges, pressing needs, school counselors' roles, and use of state and federal guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants responded to open-ended questions related to their perceptions of the effectiveness of their collaboration, challenges/strengths in their initial response, and anticipated needs on return to in-person education. We discuss categories that occurred proportionally in 20% or more of the responses within each domain, incorporating rich descriptions to illustrate the theme. We also report any similar thematic categories described by both school administrators and school counselors, even if they did not meet the 20% threshold.

Within the *effectiveness domain* (see Table 1), school counselors believed that administrators provided positive affirmations and support (67.7%) and were accessible to staff, including school counselors (24.7%). One school counselor shared: "I am so thankful that our leadership team has encouraged us throughout this journey. I appreciate the regular communication and meetings we've had." Administrators felt school counselors were still able to provide emotional support

(62.7%) and provide families with resources (20.3%). A school administrator shared:

> Mine have done a great job of communicating with kids and families, but we are all going to need even more counselors in the future as we help adjust schedules to reduce stress AND meet students' social/emotional and trauma needs.

Both groups also identified areas for improvement to enhance effectiveness. School counselors wanted school administrators to involve staff and school counselors more in decision making and planning (57%) and to use more effective strategies to address staff and school counselor concerns (22.9%). From the administrator perspective, 17.3% wanted their school counselors to provide more support to administration. These responses represent a significant difference (Spangler et al., 2012) between the two groups in that proportionally more school counselors expressed a desire for collaboration than school administrators. Further, in this domain, administrators would like to have seen school counselors provide more remote classroom instruction (51.3%) over topics such as social/emotional learning and social skills. A subset of both groups felt their counterpart colleague did not need to do anything to improve effectiveness (school counselors = 10.9%; school administrators = 4.2%).

In the *challenges domain* (see Table 2), a similar proportion of school administrators and school counselors identified technology and internet access as major issues (school counselors = 65.8%; administrators = 44.4%). School counselors also identified communication barriers (39.9%) as a challenge. Both groups expressed similar concern about the availability of resources, especially in terms of affecting their ability to adequately support students with special needs (e.g., special education, English language learners), from historically marginalized groups, from lower income families, and in rural environments. However, proportionally this was a significantly greater concern for school counselors (school counselors = 30.8%; school administrators = 9.8%). For example, one school counselor stated, "Many families were struggling with food and shelter insecurity, so school wasn't a priority, and many parents lacked the knowledge needed to teach their students and support the use of technology." School counselors also felt they needed more time to prepare and implement programming (25.3%).

School administrators indicated that other major challenges in initial response to the pandemic included creating a district plan (53.6%) and transitioning to e-learning (24.3%). They also expressed concern about lack of access to students and families (23.9%). One school administrator shared:

> The "timing" of school closing was a challenge to all of us. Finding out at 2:00 on a Friday (before a 2:45 dismissal) that we were closing down for an unknown period of time and then sending home laptops with elementary students was a daunting for all.

Table 1. Domain One: Perceptions of Effectiveness.

Responses	Category and Subcategories	Frequency of Category	Proportion in Category, %
School counselor responses: School administrator effectiveness	Provided positive affirmations and support	271	67.5
	Weekly check-ins and increased accessibility to staff/counselors	99	24.7
	Engaged and connected	53	13.3
	Nothing needed to improve efficacy[a]	43	10.9
School administrator responses: School counselor effectiveness	Continued to provide emotional support	251	62.7
	Provided families with resources	81	20.3
	Checked grades/monitored student progress	34	8.4
	Were well prepared[a]	17	4.2
School counselor responses: School administrator improvement	Involve staff/counselor in decision making & planning[b]	228	57.0
	Effective in addressing concerns	92	22.9
	More opportunities for trauma training	14	3.5
School administrator responses: School counselor improvement	More remote guidance lessons	205	51.3
	More support to administration[b]	69	17.3
	Provide home visits	53	13.3
	Create online counseling groups	37	9.3
	Offer remote office hours	37	9.3

Note. School counselor responses per domain = 400, School administrator responses per domain = 400. The number of total responses at times exceeds the total number of study participants because multiple categories could be reflected in individual participant responses.
[a]Represents a nonsignificant difference between groups on a similar theme.
[b]Represents a significant difference between groups on a similar theme.

Table 2. Domain Two: Perceptions of Challenges in School's Response to Pandemic.

Responses	Category and Subcategories	Frequency of Category	Proportion in Category, %
School counselor responses	Technology issues[a]	265	65.8
	Communication barriers	161	39.9
	Meeting needs of low SES/special needs students	124	30.8
	Needing more time to prepare & implement programming	102	25.3
	Lack of training	60	14.9
	Limited help-seeking behaviors from the most vulnerable students/families[a]	42	10.5
	Lack of teamwork	32	8.0
	Providing social/emotional support remotely	18	4.6
School administrator responses	Needing a district-wide plan	69	53.6
	Technology issues and access to internet[a]	57	44.4
	Transition to e-learning	32	24.3
	Lack of access to students/families	31	23.9
	Economic barriers to service delivery	25	19.7
	Availability of resources for students/families	13	9.8
	Limited parent involvement[a]	17	8.4

Note. School counselor responses per domain = 402, School administrator responses per domain = 129. The number of total responses at times exceeds the total number of study participants because multiple categories could be reflected in individual participant responses.
[a]Represents a nonsignificant difference between groups on a similar theme.

A smaller proportion of both school counselors (10.5%) and administrators (8.4%) described limited parental involvement and help-seeking behaviors from the most vulnerable students and families as challenges.

While school administrators and school counselors identified challenges, a *strengths domain* (see Table 3) also emerged in their responses. Administrators believed that their top strengths included overall preparation and planning (78.7%), shifting to video platforms for meetings (37.5%), and providing technology supports (36.2%). This theme is illustrated by an administrator who shared:

Zoom meetings/Google meetings. Theme days to keep students wanting to learn and come to school. Phone calls from teachers and

Table 3. Domain Three: Perceptions of Strengths in School's Response to Pandemic.

Responses	Category and Subcategories	Frequency of category	Proportion in Category, %
School counselor responses	Meeting basic needs and connecting families to resources, including food[a]	160	83.1
	Using video meetings[b]	69	35.5
	Remote service delivery (advising, student check-ins, counseling)	48	24.9
	Communication and collaboration with families (phone calls, newsletters, websites, etc.)[b]	43	22.3
	Tablet distribution[b]	36	18.4
	Providing creative solutions for graduation exercises	7	3.9
School administrator responses	Preparation and planning	66	78.7
	Using video meetings[b]	32	37.5
	Providing technology support, including mobile Wi-Fi buses and 1:1 tablets[b]	30	36.2
	Distributing food[a]	13	15.6
	Flexibility	11	12.5
	Teacher effort and investment	8	10.0
	Communication and collaboration with families[b]	3	3.1

Note. School counselor responses per domain = 193, School administrator responses per domain = 84. The number of total responses at times exceeds the total number of study participants because multiple categories could be reflected in individual participant responses.
[a]Represents a significant difference between groups on a similar theme.
[b]Represents a nonsignificant difference between groups on a similar theme.

administrators. Signs in yards. Notes mailed home. Really, it was the nonacademic items that were key to a successful extended learning situation. The personal connections that were made before March 13th (2020) and continued after are paramount for students' buy-in.

A similar proportion of school counselors indicated that video platforms for meetings (35.5%) and providing technology supports/tablets (18.4%) were strengths. However, school counselors felt their greatest strength was their ability to meet the basic needs of their students and families by connecting them with resources (83.1%). Some school administrators also identified that providing for basic needs in the form of food distribution was one of their strengths (15.6%), although proportionally to a significantly smaller degree than school counselors. Both groups indicated that communication and collaboration with parents was another strength (school counselors = 22.7%; administrators = 3.1%). Many of these themes are reflected in the response of one school counselor:

I provided a lot of support in terms of helping families find food, writing grants to help families pay rent and utility bills, and providing information to parents, through a newsletter, to help them feel more confident in working with their children. I also recorded several lessons that teachers placed on their Google Classrooms as a way to stay connected to kids.

The *anticipated needs domain* (see Table 4) reflected those things school administrators and school counselors felt would be required by staff, students, and families for successful recovery from the negative impact of the pandemic on return to in-

person education. School counselors prioritized health and safety (43.9%) while administrators highlighted the need to address the loss in opportunities to learn by focusing on regaining and reviewing skills (43.8%). School counselors also identified the need to maintain progress (14%), although proportionally to a significantly lesser degree. An administrator discussed the challenge with addressing these lost opportunities and bringing in new content: "[We are] keeping our focus on meeting students where they are and THEN moving forward; I'm afraid it will be easy for staff to get stuck in 'remediation mode.'" School administrators also expressed a unique concern that there be a realistic time frame to implement changes needed as a result of the pandemic (20.9%).

Both groups anticipated that they would have to address social needs, like reestablishing sense of belonging and relationships (school counselors = 31.7%) and socialization (school administrators = 11.5%). Both groups felt consistency, normalcy, routines, and structure would be needed on return to in-person learning (school administrators = 22%; school counselors = 21.7%). A small proportion of both groups expected a continued need for access to both community and technology resources (school counselors = 10.7%; school administrators = 4.8%). Both groups identified a need to address emotions and coping. School counselors expected to see a need for developing coping mechanisms in response to new guidelines and expectations (22.1%) and administrators felt the need for emotional support would increase (21.1%) A school counselor summed up these concerns: "I worry about how I am going to help kids who are scared to death to function 'normally' at school after having experienced a major trauma event."

Table 4. Domain Four: Perception of Anticipated Needs on Return to In-Person Education.

Responses	Category and Subcategories	Frequency of category	Proportion in Category, %
School counselor responses	Health and safety measures (including social distancing)	304	51.4
	Sense of belonging and re-establishing relationships[a]	235	39.7
	Provide ways to cope with new guidelines & expectations[a]	130	22.1
	Consistency, normalcy, and routines[a]	128	21.7
	Trauma-informed care	112	18.9
	Ways to combat student disengagement	95	16.1
	Increased access to support services	89	15.1
	Strategies to maintain progress[b]	83	14.0
	Continued access to resources (technology & community)[a]	63	10.7
	Ways to manage the unknown	47	7.9
School administrator responses	Ways to regain skills/review of previous year skills[b]	99	43.8
	Structure[a]	50	22.0
	Emotional support[a]	48	21.1
	Realistic time frame for changes	47	20.9
	Socialization[a]	26	11.5
	Support for online/remote education	24	10.4
	Realistic state and federal expectations	15	6.6
	Continued technology access[a]	11	4.8
	Patience	6	2.8

Note. School counselor responses per domain = 592, School administrator responses per domain = 226. The number of total responses at times exceeds the total number of study participants because multiple categories could be reflected in individual participant responses.
[a]Represents a nonsignificant difference between groups on a similar theme.
[b]Represents a significant difference between groups on a similar theme.

Table 5. Domain Five: State and Federal Changes Required to Better Support School Response to Mass Trauma.

Responses	Category and Subcategories	Frequency of Category	Proportion in Category, %
School counselor responses	Better preparedness[a]	45	50.6
	Improved funding and resources[a]	31	34.8
	Offer more training	13	14.6
School administrator responses	Better preparedness[a]	15	39.4
	Improved funds for technology and universal Wi-Fi access[a]	12	31.5
	Improved transparency	6	15.7
	Better communication	4	10.5

Note. School counselor responses per domain = 89, School administrator responses per domain = 39. The number of total responses at times exceeds the total number of study participants because multiple categories could be reflected in individual participant responses.
[a]Represents a nonsignificant difference between groups on a similar theme.

The final domain included perceived needs in terms of *state and federal changes to better support schools' response to mass trauma* (see Table 5). School counselors and administrators were in agreement on two key needs. Both indicated that better preparedness (school counselors = 50.6%; administrators = 39.4%) and improved funding and resources (school counselors = 34.8%; administrators = 31.5%) were top priorities. One administrator eloquently described this latter need:

> We need increased funding and flexibility, in particular don't treat every city, county, and state the same. They also need to find a way to level the playing field to help ALL students move forward. Especially in terms of the establishment of wi-fi for everyone within an accessible distance to their homes and mental health supports for students, families and teachers.

Discussion

Social capital theory posits that social resources can be mobilized during times of stress to effectively address challenges. Building social capital improves information sharing, fosters common norms, and increases social support (Leenders, 2014). Trauma-informed practices similarly highlight the importance of factors, such as safety, trustworthiness, collaboration (NCTSN, 2017; SAMHSA, 2014), and reflect principles consistent with social capital theory (e.g., transparency, mutuality, empowerment). We explored the extent to which these principles were reflected in school counselors' and school administrators' initial response to the pandemic and thoughts about anticipated needs on return to in-person learning. Specifically, we were interested in evaluating the congruence between school

counselors' and administrators' perspectives in terms of their ability to continue to promote the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (ASCA, 2014, 2021) and whether their responses were enhanced by district, state, and federal guidelines for addressing mass trauma events. Ultimately, we sought to determine whether these professional groups reflected a common vision that would be consistent with social capital theory and trauma-informed practices.

The similarity in school counselors' and school administrators' perceptions around their ability to foster use of the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors to help students manage, cope, and engage in what for many was a new, virtual, remote learning experience is consistent with the two groups having common norms. Both groups felt best about their ability to continue to promote self-management skills followed closely by learning skills, although school administrators provided slightly more optimistic ratings of their ability to continue to promote learning strategies in an online environment. This difference is likely due to the fact that school counselors were implementing the actual interventions related to the standards and therefore may have been more aware of limitations within a distance learning environment. Not surprisingly, both groups felt social skills were most difficult to promote in a virtual learning environment.

School counselors and administrators familiar with district, state, and federal guidelines for emergency operations and trauma response reported finding them only somewhat useful. School administrators were two to three times more likely to be familiar with the guidelines than school counselors. This difference is likely due to the nature of administrators' roles in terms of their responsibility for implementation within the guidelines. These guidelines reflect best practices in disaster preparedness and response. Even though both school counselors and school administrators endorsed having limited knowledge of them, many qualitative themes were consistent with trauma-informed principles, including safety, collaboration, support, and empowerment of historically vulnerable groups. School administrators also felt planning and preparation efforts strengthened their capacity to respond effectively in the early days of the pandemic. However, both groups felt that more support in developing preparedness strategies would be useful, and they indicated a need for increased funding to implement new mandates while trying to maintain existing obligations (e.g., academic performance assessments). These latter findings are particularly concerning given the continued decline in education funding even in the face of increased need related to the pandemic (Baker & Di Carlo, 2020).

Each professional group's qualitative responses reflected perspectives consistent with their respective disciplines. In general, both school counselors and administrators appreciated how effective their colleagues were in maintaining their professional roles in the midst of adversity. Both groups (especially school counselors) felt proud of their ability to provide students and their families with much-needed basic resources, although administrators more narrowly focused on food distribution and school counselors discussed connecting families more broadly with community resources (including food). And although both worried about vulnerable students, this concern was significantly greater for counselors. This shared concern is grounded in reality because significant disparities remain in access to full-time, in-person education across grade level for students of color and from low-income families (Oster et al., 2021).

Communication and technology were common themes. Both groups expressed frustration with technology systems and limited access to technology supports. These findings are consistent with a report revealing significant K–12 technology challenges and needs during the pandemic (Francom et al., 2021). On the other hand, both groups felt positive about their ability to provide creative technology support and use video platforms for meetings and service delivery. Other pandemic research has revealed that a lack of prior experience with education technology did not hinder school personnel's ability to shift effectively to distance learning (Francom et al., 2021), and researchers found no difference in teaching effectiveness based on prior experience with learning management systems (Dindar et al., 2021). School counselors in the current study reported a sense of self-efficacy and pride in their ability to shift to remote advising and counseling services. Although school administrators would have liked their school counselors to have been able to offer even more remote counseling services, they were generally pleased about their schools' ability to demonstrate flexibility in educational service delivery.

Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2021) described this process as turning a curse into a blessing in order to develop much needed digital competency in school personnel and students. However, although both groups felt positive about their investment in increased and innovative communication to connect with parents (e.g., phone calls, newsletters, websites), school counselors felt that remote communication with administrators, teachers, students, and caregivers remained challenging. Further, school counselors were three times more likely than administrators to identify increased collaboration as an area for improvement. This difference is noteworthy because school leadership approaches that foster connectedness and collaboration promote both resiliency and innovation in the face of adversity (Bagwell, 2020).

Limitations

This survey was conducted within the first 6 months of the pandemic and at a time when many thought the intensity and duration of disruption would be much shorter. As such, study results may not fully account for the prolonged disruptions to learning that have occurred. Recent studies have estimated that the cumulative K–12 loss in learning opportunities could be as

much as 9 months for students ([Dorn et al., 2020](#)). These lost opportunities are even more pronounced for students of color. Further, the prolonged changes to activities of daily living during a pandemic (e.g., health precautions, economic instability, restricted social support) have contributed to increased mental health concerns for students and families ([CDC, 2021](#)).

Implications

Both school counselors and administrators expressed a desire for increased collaboration on leadership teams. Involvement of school counselors and other school/community stakeholders on district-wide and school-specific emergency operations teams would increase social capital, especially when school administrators utilize a relational approach to leadership. Leadership teams can work together to implement best practice guidelines and be more nimble when responding to crises such as the pandemic. Specifically, leadership teams can ensure implementation of school-wide trauma-informed practices (e.g., [NCTSN, 2017](#); [SAMHSA, 2014](#)) in an attempt to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on students' social and emotional functioning.

Results from this study suggest a need for Tier 1 interventions targeting social skills first, followed by self-management skills and learning strategies. Established practices such as multitiered systems of support (MTSS) paired with comprehensive school counseling programs could serve as a framework for comprehensive programming to address these needs, and school-specific data should guide local plans and practices. School counselors and administrators also expressed significant concern for marginalized and vulnerable students. As such, schools must address disparities in the impact of the pandemic on the academic and social/emotional development of these students.

Leadership team collaboration should lead to trauma-informed Tier 2 and 3 supports to address gaps in achievement exacerbated by the pandemic. Advocacy also is needed to increase education funding to support vulnerable students, to avoid creating a lost generation ([Baker & Di Carlo, 2020](#)). Research investigating best practices to support vulnerable populations in the wake of movements against social/emotional learning and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is especially needed. In spite of these challenges, the pandemic has presented education professionals with an opportunity to foster resilience and creativity ([Bagwell, 2020](#)). The ongoing pandemic has altered educational practices and forced many educators to increase their digital competency ([Francom et al., 2021](#)) and facility with learning management systems ([Dindar et al., 2021](#)). Use of digital educational platforms also can enhance students' college and employability skill sets ([Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021](#)). Future research needs to assess the feasibility and transferability of applying education technology practices to support development of the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors.

Conclusion

School administrators and school counselors have been working to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by continuing to deliver educational content in whatever format has been required. As schools enter a recovery phase as the pandemic becomes endemic, administrators and school counselors must prepare to redress increasing educational disparities in academic achievement and social/emotional development. Now, more than ever, data-driven decision making should be used to advocate and re-allocate resources to support vulnerable students. Leadership teams that include school counselors, administrators, and other school/community stakeholders can leverage social capital to implement effective emergency operations planning and recovery initiatives.

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