

## **The Counselors' Role in Assessment: A Qualitative Study of Current School Counselors and Their Responsibilities with Assessment**

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### **Abstract**

Designed to learn more about the responsibilities of school counselors in regard to assessment, a survey was conducted in central Kentucky with current school counseling professionals. The method for this study included a qualitative approach as current school counselors reflected on ten questions presented to them in the form of a survey. These questions allowed for participants to describe which, if any, of their school counselor roles pertained to assessment planning, practice, implementation, and/or analysis. were gathered from elementary, middle, and high school counselors. Results tabulated from throughout the state revealed: while some public-school counselors spearheaded assessments within their schools, others provided more of a supporting role. It is suggested that administrators become aware of the ASCA framework and the counselor's role as it was designed. While it may not include all aspects of assessment, it does reference the assessment practices counselors should oversee.

*Keywords:* assessment, collaboration, support, application, analysis

## Introduction

The school counselor's role is everchanging in Kentucky schools. With recent legislation, school counseling has been redefined. While some schools focus on their school counselor having a flexible approach to spending the majority of their time with students to support them both socially and emotionally, other schools have redefined the school counselor role to include responsibilities pertaining to assessment. Although the intention of this assignment is to have an additional person supporting students in their assessment goals, it can be burdensome for the counselor to forgo their opportunities to support social and emotional needs of students in an effort to complete the necessary paperwork and procedures related to the responsibilities of overseeing assessment.

## Literature Review

McGahey, Arenal-Mullen, & Akpan (2017) examined the roles assigned to school counselors and were troubled by the trend of a school counselor serving in the role as administrator, coordinator, and facilitator of state assessments. Instead of these direct roles with assessment, McGahey, Arenal-Mullen, & Akpan (2017) reminds readers that ASCA recommends for the majority of a school counselor's time to be served in direct service to students, (p. 82). Olsen, Foxx, Flowers, & Hayakawa (2021) shared from Nelson et al., 2008; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008) "High school counselors spend more time on non-school counseling activities and administrative tasks, less time working

directly with students than they prefer," (p. 34). Olsen, Foxx, Flowers, & Hayakawa (2021) shared in their finding of their study of 4,598 K-12 counselors that were current ASCA members "the majority of school counselors spend little time on important activities such as establishing program foundations (e.g. mission statement) and collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing data to make program decisions and meet the needs of underserved student populations," (p. 39).

Burnham, Fye, Jackson, Ocampo, & Clark (2024) reiterated in their introduction of their 2024 study ASCA's 2019 non-guidance/counseling responsibilities to include: "building a master schedule, coordinating testing, serving as a substitute, computing grade-point averages, writing individual education plans and entering data," (p. 3). Their study included 291 practicing school counselors. The responsibilities related to testing, when they analyzed their participants, were responsibilities of 269/291 participants so 92% of their total participants communicated they were involved in testing and assessment. All of these participants reflected that their assessment responsibilities included interpreting assessment results to parents, however approximately 68% of these participants were directly involved in coordinating testing at their schools, and 70% of them conducted in-service training on testing, (p. 6).

## Methodology

This study was a qualitative study collecting qualitative information and current school counselors on their roles and responsibilities related to Assessment. The interview questions were created in relation to the lens in which they viewed assessment as a portion of their responsibilities while

serving as a school counselor. Some of the questions probed knowledge of assessment terms which would be linked to the application of assessment. In some schools, the school counselor may serve as a member of an MTSS team and collaborate with colleagues in the formation of Intervention groups or they may be required to apply assessment results to student scheduling. To assess the participants' level of accountability in matters of assessment, there were questions related to the familiarity of current laws and regulations related to Educational Assessment, as well as the location for resources, they could access to increase their knowledge of current assessment laws and regulation. An additional question inquired on the counselor's role in interpretation of assessments followed up by questions connected to assessment validity and reliability, as well as the risks invalid and unreliable assessment tools could have on accurate assessment analysis. Additional questions inquired on the counselor's role in implementation or design for assessment. Some schools require their school counselor to be the Assessment Coordinator for their school which means they would be required to design the school environment for state assessment including the compliance with overseeing the proctors and volunteers who would be partnering with the school counselor to provide modifications or accommodations to students with special needs when implementing the state assessment. A question related to collaborative partnerships to interpret or make decisions based on test results was included in the survey, along with a question that inquired on technology tools used for the administration, analysis, and reflection of various forms of assessment.

## Data Collection

Data collection occurred through the implementation of a google forms survey of ten questions as described in the design section of this article. There were twelve participants who responded to these questions, and their experience spanned elementary, middle, and high school settings. Their questions were open ended so the participants had flexibility to answer their questions without restrictions.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis process began by looking at how the responses were weighted across placements. All participants in this study were school counselors serving within public schools, however, the majority of these participants (41.7%) were serving in high school placements. The next largest category of participants was serving in elementary (33.3%), with the smallest category of participants (25%) serving at the middle school level (see Figure 1).

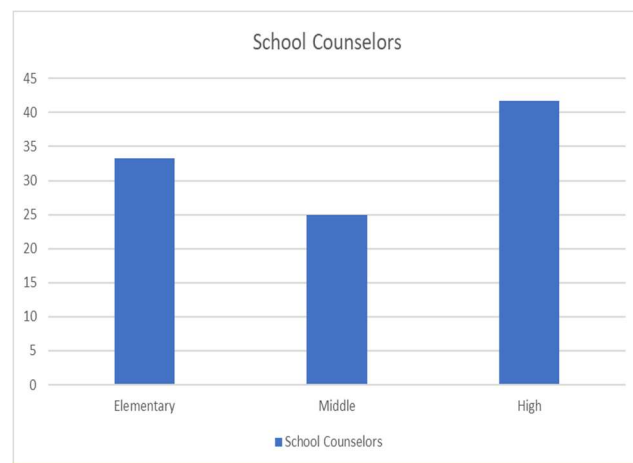


Figure 1 Graph of Participants

Clarke & Braun (2013) shared in their perspectives of qualitative research that

seeking to understand data through the lens of context is of utmost importance. Since the questions in this study were open-ended questions (See Figure 2), the themes considered in the analysis of this

data did not only view the assessment responsibilities of current school counselors as a whole, but also looking within, through the lens of their location in which they serve (elementary, middle, or high school).

### Figure 2 Survey Questions

1. What are some specific terms related to P-12 assessment that you and your collaborative partners discuss throughout your school year? (ex. mean, median, mode, gap groups, statistics, scales, standard deviation, etc.)
2. Do you feel you are familiar with current laws and regulations related to educational assessment?  
(Yes or No)
3. If yes, how do you stay current on laws and regulations related to educational assessment?
4. If no, are you aware of resources or contacts of individuals who can provide you with information relating to current laws and regulations related to educational assessment?
5. What is your knowledge of mathematical constructs and how do you utilize them in interpreting test scores?
6. Are you familiar with the terms: validity and reliability?
7. Please identify the threats you are aware of related to validity and reliability in assessment including potential bias.
8. As a school counselor, what application of analysis and/or the improvement of assessment practices have you been a part of in your school counseling role? (ex. as related to needs assessments, high stakes assessments, standardized achievement tests, aptitude tests, behavior tests, personality tests, and/or college and career inventory assessments etc.)
9. Please share about your responsibilities and knowledge in the design or collaborative partnerships you participate within, to plan for the accommodations of students during assessment.
10. What technology tools do you use in your current role related to student assessment to assist you with designing, accommodating, interpreting, or communicating results of student assessment?

The themes that emerged from the responses to the questions revealed themselves, allowing theories to not be constricted to pre-determined themes, but from inductive reasoning surrounding the authentic responses (Clark & Braun, 2013). To understand what the research revealed,

an open coding took place, categorizing responses according to similarities while revealing each participant's reflections.

## Results

The study began with examining the participant's response of terms they were familiar with which they affiliated with assessment. It was found their responses could be divided into two categories. 'Category A: Terms related to Reporting of Data: benchmark, gap groups, mean, median, mode, standard deviation, tiers, statistics, scales, averages, and percentiles. Category B: Terms related to assessment tools, or the purpose of assessment: progress monitoring, STAR testing, special education evaluations, IEPs, 504s, and Kentucky State Assessment data.

By reviewing the terms that these individuals shared they were most familiar, it appears their exposure to data was more related to responding to data vs. preparation for planning or instruction. In having served in public schools as a school counselor these authors could indeed see that it appears conversations of assessment for current school counselors continue to connect to the often role school counselors play in P-12 schools, that of which is serving on a Multi-Tiered System of Support Team. Other terms they were familiar with appear to connect to the school counselor fulfilling the role of chairing 504 and IEP meetings. These results revealed that career assessments, needs assessments, and threat assessments which are often implemented by the school counselor, were not the first connection to assessment these current school counselors considered. Although the school counselor's role is described as a multi-faceted role within school to promote

academic, career, and personal development of students (Education Advanced, 2024), the first ideas of assessment to these counselors were more academic related than for the other two categories. According to the ASCA National Model (2025) at least 80% of a school counselor's time should be in direct and indirect student services, but unfortunately many school counselors spend their time in what ASCA references as inappropriate school counseling activities: "coordinating school-wide individual education plans, 504 plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS and school attendance review boards," (ASCA, 2025).

In Question Three, these individuals were asked if they felt familiar with current laws and regulations related to educational assessment, 67% of them felt they were familiar, while 33% did not feel they were as familiar. However, these participants mentioned in their responses to Question Four which inquired on resources or contacts they could check with on legislations and laws related to the assessment, that their District Assessment Coordinator, through various PD opportunities, and their Building Assessment Coordinator would be options to assist them with staying informed on regulations and in some cases, even their Deputy Superintendent would be a contact option for these matters. Also, some of the participants mentioned KDE weekly emails were electronic resources that would assist them staying current on knowledge and regulations related to assessment.

In Question Five, participants were also asked to reference mathematical constructs which they utilize to interpret test scores. It was interesting that 42% of the participants in this study responded they had little to no knowledge pertaining to mathematical constructs as there were other

individuals in their schools who worked more with assessment data. One person mentioned they felt comfortable in organizing data for analysis, another provided more specifics of their encounters with mathematical concepts related to percentages, averages, identifying student needs, and monitoring their growth. A third person shared they were familiar with some construction of data in creating line plots and pie charts to provide visuals of data for their colleagues. The background of one counselor was shared to include a past career in speech therapy, which she shared aided in her assessment knowledge.

Another counselor mentioned how an assessment workshop hosted by Scott Tremble, a representative from the Kentucky Association for Assessment Coordinators, equipped her with skills and knowledge to apply in her interpretation of test scores. Terms like central tendency, percentiles, validity indicators, tiers, and intervention groups were also found in the responses shared relating to their knowledge as school counselors in their interpretations of various mathematical constructs.

When in Question Six, the participants were asked to share their understanding of validity and reliability, there appeared to be a large gap between their familiarity with the term validity (81.8%) vs. familiarity with the term reliability (18.2%). (See Figure 3)

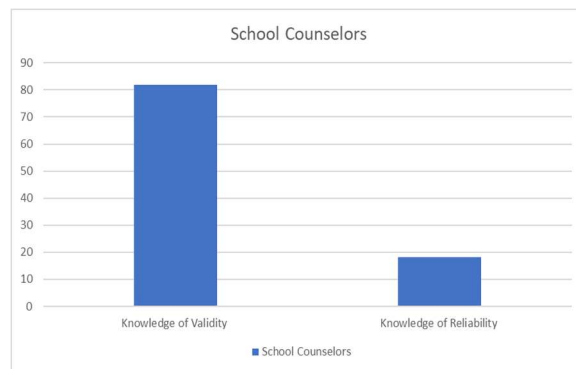


Figure 3: Participant knowledge of the terms of validity vs reliability.

In reflecting on the individual responses, only one school counselor who served in a middle school and one school counselor who served in an elementary school, shared they were familiar with the term “reliability.” There was one participant who shared they did not really know what either term means. On the other hand, the majority of participants did describe one or both terms.

It appeared their responses to Question Seven on potential threats to validity and reliability could be categorized in two categories: Description A. Invalid or Unreliable Assessment Data Recognition and Description B: Other related terms. Description A. Invalid or Unreliable Assessment Data Recognition: can be recognized by the teacher when students have experienced trauma vs interventions which mean the interventions are implemented inconsistently and would affect validity, as well as be impacted by the lack of student motivation, increased distractions, lack of fidelity, and/or lack of triangulation of data. Description B: Other related terms: can show measurement related to bias, poor samplings, sampling bias, measurement errors, the consistency in the implementation of accommodations, and modifications after the measurement of data.

These results did reveal the necessity in recognizing both of the terms: validity and reliability. However, for this section, the connection and understanding of reliability appeared to be the term that they were not as familiar with. One individual interpreted the term reliability as unrelated to the tool but focused on if the results would be reliable based on a student's access to their required accommodations. Another counselor reflected on reliability as being impacted by proctor training. Although both of these perspectives are correct, these researchers were surprised there was not as much focus in their response on the scoring of an assessment, or the assessment tool when considering assessment reliability. The most intriguing response was reliability being questioned through the triangulation of data. This again related to looking through the lens of these results versus the reliability of the assessment tool itself, and if the results they triangulated were skewed or valid.

In Question Eight, these individuals were to reflect on their involvement and application of analysis and improvement of assessment practices. Two individuals mentioned they did not have any responsibilities related to this practice; others gave some specific responsibilities they had regarding this role. One specific individual mentioned standards-based assessment analysis, but that it did not play a role in content design. Two individuals described their role that included identifying groupings for assessment implementation, location of assessments being administered, keeping a record of accommodations needed by each student, and assigning individuals to provide those accommodations when assessments were given. A third individual mentioned they were involved in administering the assessments but did not analyze the data retrieved from those assessments. A fourth individual looked at

data disaggregation, comparative analysis, trend analysis, and assisted in identifying targeted interventions. BIPs, Pre and Post Assessments, IReady, STAR, standardized achievement tests, KSA, KYOTE, and CERT were assessments found in Question Eight Responses that were not originally going to be part of a school counselors' role in planning for assessment. Thankfully, there were two participants who mentioned participating in assessment analysis for behavior assessments (FBAs), postsecondary readiness assessments, and needs assessments including screeners used for connecting students with Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) services, were more the type of assessments these researchers and ASCA would have planned for school counselors to oversee. ASCA 2025 defines the tools and assessments of which counselors should administer to be reflective of student and school needs specifically to: "Monitor students across life readiness, and academic success," (p .8).

In Question 9, the researchers wondered about the collaborative partnerships these current counselors participated in within their roles of assessment, and in planning for accommodations of students during assessment. To familiarize their context of these collaborative partnerships and to see how the answers varied according to placement, the researchers divided these responses into categories of High School Counselors, Middle School Counselors, and Elementary School Counselors. High School Counselors shared their collaborative partnerships to including their Special Education coordinators. Another individual shared that their co-counselor partnered with them in this role. However, a participant/counselor mentioned that currently she completes all of the assessment responsibilities herself.

Middle School Counselors shared their collaborative partnerships. One participant shared they collaborate with those they assign to administer the assessments, while the other shared they regularly collaborate with their Building Assessment Coordinator, their 504 team members and those who serve with her on an ARC (Administration Release Committee) which serves students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Elementary School Counselors shared that their collaborative partnerships included the trainers they had in preparation for the assessment windows, their proctors, and case managers they assigned for assessment implementation, Special Education teachers and staff along with administrators, often plan and implement assessment accommodations for students with IEPs and 504 plans, and one participant with an FRC was able to work with the administration of needs assessments. Question 10 inquired on student's perception of technology used in their school counseling role. Those mentioned were Tableau, Excel, Infinite Campus, Google, ViewSonic, and platforms related to assessment data management systems such as STAR and I-Ready etc.

### Discussion

Previous research has tackled the perception of roles for school counselors. The school counselor is ultimately to be aligned with a proactive perspective in providing support for students who complete assessments to guide them in achievement. It is also important that school counselors are equipped to execute their assigned roles in a productive manner, so in the

reflection of this data, the multi-faceted role of a school counselor is spliced again as

many of these participants have assessment as their responsibility at their home school. However, it does appear they will need additional support, to be successful in this role and for some of these participants, that was not their current reality. For others, they have individuals at the district or state level they must depend on, in their preparation for these responsibilities.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Although there is a small sample size involved in this study, when compared to previous studies, there continues to be a concern over the assessment responsibilities of school counselors. In reflection of the survey tool used to measure the counselor's roles with assessment responsibilities, there are features of some of the questions to consider, (see Figure 2).

Question 1 on the specific terms related to assessment that showed the provided list of terms for counselors to connect, were more teacher related and this could have had an impact on the participants' response.

In Question 2 when analyzing the participant responses through the lens of their job setting, it appeared the counselors who served in the middle school were those who felt the least familiar with legislation and laws related to assessment. These researchers wondered what some of the possible reasons for this trend could be. Is it possible that in the middle school setting counselors are not as involved in the administration and analysis of assessment as they are in the elementary or high school settings?

In Question 3 when reflecting on the reliability of the assessment, is it

possible that because often school counselors are carrying out the expectations of the state in overseeing the state assessment, there is an assumption of reliability? Also, in the cases of MAP and IReady, those assessments are nationally normal, so there are also possible assumptions that both are very reliable because of the national presence of both exams. However, it is the researcher who has firsthand knowledge that these testing options often replace one another in a district for reasons that pertain to the question of which exam is more reliable. There are also other universal screeners that are being explored by some districts in addition to NWEA, MAP and IReady. In the other questions that appeared in this survey, limitations and delimitations were not of as much concern as the phrasing of the questions that appeared to be more straightforward.

### **Conclusion**

Administrators need to be aware of the ASCA framework and the counselor's role as it was designed. While it may not include all aspects of assessment, it does so for the assessment practices counselors should oversee. They also need to reflect the meeting of student's needs as a whole. Collaboration opportunities for school counselors should include working with stakeholders not necessarily to analyze data, or to administer assessment, or to directly play a role in the analysis of assessment data, but rather to partner with P-12 and community partners to provide necessary support and assistance for students'

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