Senate Bill 5030: The Implementation of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs in Washington State

by

Kelly Torrez

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Lina Shanley, Ph.D., Chair

Dr. Julie Alonzo, Ph.D., Core Member

Dr. Rhonda Nese, Ph.D., Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Kelly Torrez

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Title: Senate Bill 5030: The Implementation of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs in Washington State

Schools and districts across the country are turning towards comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs) to help improve student outcomes in schools. This dissertation examines the implementation of CSCPs in Washington State following the enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 5030 in 2021. SB 5030 legislation mandated that all K–12 public school districts develop and implement a CSCP aligned with the American School Counselor Association national model, addressing students' academic, career, and social-emotional development. Through a mixed-methods approach, this study investigated the experiences of school counselors and administrators during the implementation process to identify themes related to program development, barriers encountered, and perceived impacts on student outcomes.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Kelly Torrez

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Concordia University Chicago, Chicago
Lewis & Clark College, Portland
Tarleton State University, Killeen
Concordia University, Portland
Oregon State University, Corvallis

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, 2026, University of Oregon
Certificate for Equity and Inclusion, 2021, Lewis and Clark University
Administrator Degree Certification, 2007, Tarleton State University- Killeen
Master of Arts, Teaching, 2001, Concordia University
Bachelor of Arts, Social Studies, 2000, Oregon State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Teacher and Administrator Preparation
Instruction and Engagement
Equity in Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Principal, Battle Ground Public Schools, 2025-Present

Assistant Principal, Battle Ground Public Schools, 2022-2025

Assistant Principal, Gresham-Barlow School District, 2016-2022

Assistant Principal, Lincoln County School District, 2013-2016

Dean of Students, Molalla River School District, 2011-2013

Teacher, Molalla River School District, 2007-2011

Staff Developer, AVID, 2006-2008

Teacher, Killeen Independent School District, 2003-2007

Teacher, Colton School District, 2001-2002

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DEDICATION

To my parents, thank you for all you have sacrificed for me throughout my life and instilling in me the values of hard work and the importance of education. I love you both so much, and I would not be where I am today if it were not for you.

To my brother, you are an amazing human, you make me so proud, and I love you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of a school counselor is complex and multifaceted. In the United States school system, school counselors support the academic and social/emotional growth of students of all ages and grades. Elementary school counselors primarily focus on social and emotional development while high school counselors are expected to support students to meet their graduation requirements and support their academic success, in addition to helping students prepare for post-secondary paths. At all levels, school counselors also support mental health needs, personal growth, and the social challenges of school, all of which can impact academic success for students.

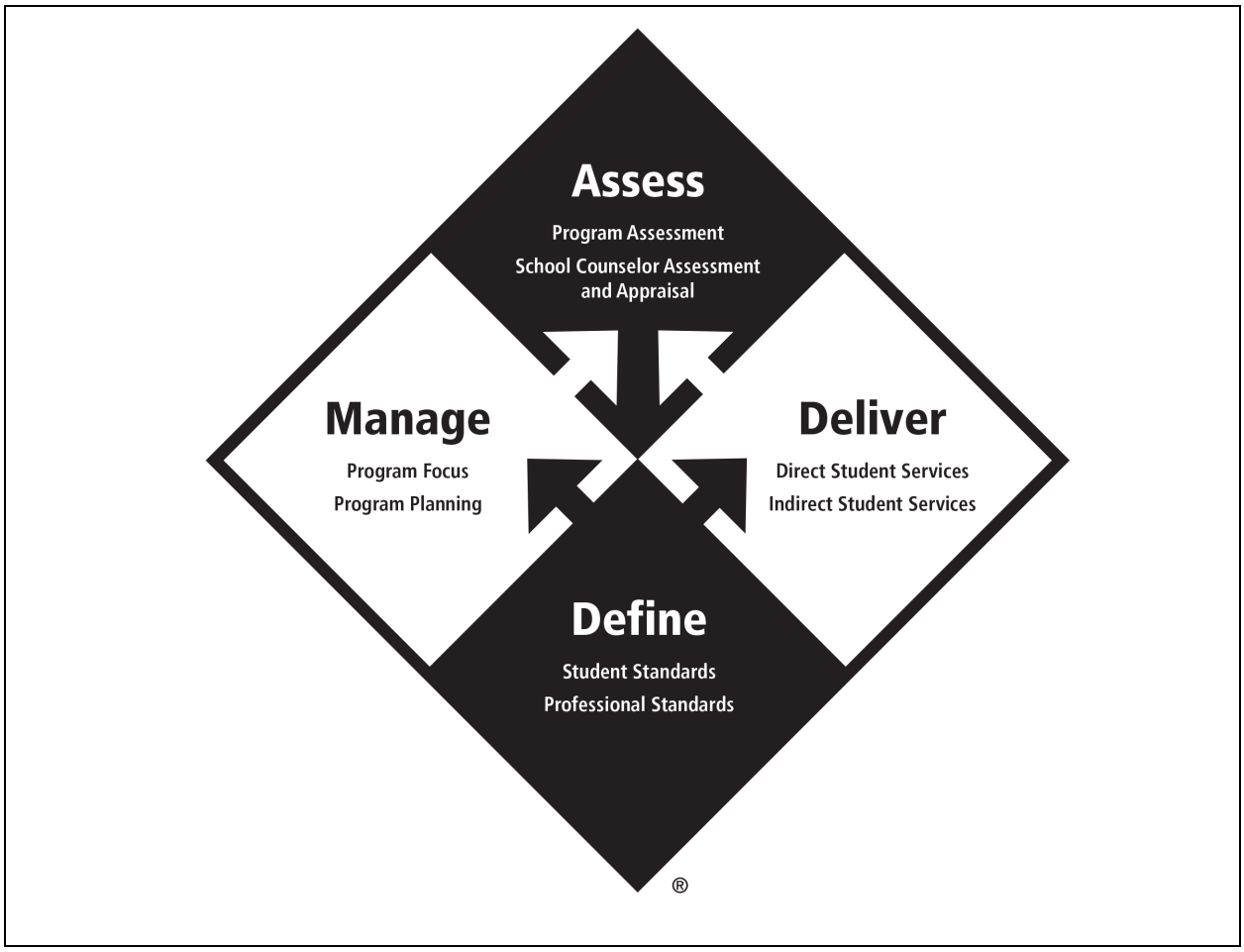
To add a layer to the complexity to the school counselor role, student needs continually shift over time due to societal factors such as technology, economic changes, and issues related to race and equity. School counselors must adapt and support students across multiple areas of their lives, which requires them to stay informed, culturally responsive, and flexible. The role of a school counselor has a wide range of demands including possessing a deep understanding of child and adolescent development, fostering collaboration with staff and families, and participating in ongoing professional development. Counselors must also find balance among their many responsibilities to best support students.

In 2003, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) introduced a national model to clearly define the role of school counselors (Figure 1). Historically, the counselor's role lacked clarity, which led many schools and districts to assign duties unrelated to counseling, such as test administration or student discipline. The ASCA Model builds upon school counseling standards originally established in 1991 (Gysbers, 2010). It offers a comprehensive approach to

school counseling, emphasizing a delivery system that supports students' academic achievement, social and emotional development, and post-secondary planning. Because the ASCA Model provides clear structure and standards for the school counselor's role, many schools, districts, and states across the United States are adopting it as their delivery model.

Figure 1

American School Counselor Association (2019). ASCA School Counselor Professional Domains.



The Evolution of the Role of the School Counselor

The role of the school counselor has evolved significantly since the early 20th century. What initially began as a focus on vocational guidance—helping students prepare for

employment or college—has expanded to include a broader and more holistic approach. As the profession evolved, the responsibilities of school counselors grew to include supporting students not only in their career development but also in their academic progress, social and emotional well-being, and personal growth.

Unsurprisingly, Mau et al. (2016) found that students who benefit from a comprehensive school counseling program tend to experience greater academic success. This is because counselors today are not solely focused on coursework or graduation requirements—they recognize how issues such as anxiety, depression, family conflict, peer pressure, and self-esteem can directly impact a student's ability to learn and thrive in school. School counselors can create conditions in which academic success becomes more attainable and work to ensure all students, regardless of background or circumstance, receive the support they need to fully engage in their education.

The 20th Century School Counselor

When the role of a school counselor was first developed in the early 1900s, it was a result of the Progressive Movement and the individuals in the movement who wanted to improve education (Gysbers, 2010). In a presentation at the National Education Association convention in 1909, Charles W. Eliot emphasized the value of vocational education guidance as part of the educational experience (Gysbers, 2010). As a result, schools introduced a new vocational guidance position; however, it was a position often filled by teachers or administrators who had a list of duties designed to help connect students to vocational opportunities (Gysbers, 2010). Because there was not a specific person assigned to be the counselor, vocational guidance was provided by educators in addition to their teaching or administrative responsibilities.

In the 1920s, the role started to shift as more students enrolled in schools, and educators saw the need for more guidance for students to support their personal well-being and adjustment in school (Gysbers, 2010). Educators started to believe that vocational guidance should require more specialized training and be provided by a professional outside of the classroom. Educators also began to realize that academic factors can impact vocational choice, so a more comprehensive approach beyond vocational planning was needed (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). As such, in the 1930s, with the Great Depression affecting both schools and the job market for graduates, the counselor role shifted towards providing students with personal adjustment counseling that focused on their psychological well-being and not just vocational guidance (Cinotti, 2014). According to Lambie and Williamson (2004), counselors were encouraged to focus on gathering information about students to help motivate and encourage them in school.

In the latter half of the 20th Century, additional significant shifts were seen in the counselor's role. Throughout World War II, school counselors focused on how to support war efforts both at home and abroad (Gysbers, 2010). This focus led to more women in the workforce and a booming post-war economy. After the war ended, two significant pieces of legislation were passed, *The Vocational Education Act of 1946* and the *National Defense Education Act of 1958*. Both pieces of legislation increased funding for vocational guidance and job preparation in American schools, which allowed for increased training and job opportunities for school counselors (United States Code, 1946). As the need for additional counselors grew, so did the need for training, support, and advocacy, which led to the creation of the ASCA in 1952 (ASCA, 2019). The mid-century Space Race and the rapid economic growth demonstrated a need for students to have more academic support to meet the demands of potential post-secondary vocational options. Although legislation provided an increase in funding to support the work of

counselors, the counselor role was often filled with administrative tasks such as testing and data entry (Blake, 2020).

Prior to the 1960s, counselors worked almost exclusively in secondary schools. School counselors were added to elementary schools in the 1960s, but the counselor's role continued to lack definition and was viewed primarily as a support service to teachers and administrators (Cinotti, 2014). Additionally, civil rights for students became a critical area where students required support from school counselors (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The struggle to identify the counselor's role, combined with the *Educational Act for Handicapped Children* (Lambie & Williamson, 2004) led to the introduction of a comprehensive approach to school counseling by the end of the 1970s. The *Educational Act for Handicapped Children* required all children to get a free and appropriate education which expanded the work of school counselors in schools. With the comprehensive approach and the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission of Excellence in Education (NCEE, 1983), states began to adopt school models for comprehensive school counseling in the 1980s and 1990s (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counseling models varied across states, but most schools used comprehensive school counseling models through the turn of the century.

The School Counselor in the 21st Century

At the turn of the 21st century, the emphasis for school counseling shifted from guidance to a more integrated approach that encompasses academics, career readiness, and social and emotional learning (ASCA, 2019). In 2001, a group of school counseling professionals collaborated in developing guiding principles for the profession. The following year, the nationwide Transforming School Counseling Initiative was developed to address school counseling and the changing needs of students in the 21st century (Burnham et al., 2024). As a

result of these two initiatives, the ASCA Model for School Counseling was developed in 2003 (ASCA, 2019). According to the ASCA framework, the purpose of developing the national model was to (a) shift the school counseling service model from being responsive to some students' needs to actively supporting all students, (b) provide a consistent approach to all school counseling programs across the nation, and (c) recognize school counseling as a necessary function for the success of students (ASCA, 2019).

However, despite recent efforts to clarify the role of school counselors, schools and districts often struggle to attain accurate descriptions of what their roles entail. Expectations for counselors range from supporting student academic performance to facilitating social and emotional learning and counseling students on a range of future pathways. These multi-faceted and often changing expectations are difficult to meet and balance, leading to ambiguity in school environments (Blake, 2020; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). As American society has transformed through the decades, so has the role of the counselor. Instead of their work becoming more refined and manageable, however, counselors were required to provide support to students in more areas and with higher needs. This evolution has led to increased complexity in the role of the counselor in schools.

The Role of Today's School Counselor

Broad internet searches can help one to get a sense of the breadth of responsibilities assigned to school counselors. The wide array of tasks associated with school counselors has even made its way into Generative Artificial Intelligence platforms. When prompted with the question, "what is the role of a high school counselor," ChatGPT produces the following key responsibilities: (a) academic guidance, (b) college and career counseling, (c) personal and social support, (d) crisis intervention, (e) advocacy for equity and (f) parent and teacher collaboration

(OpenAI, 2024). Each of these roles is part of supporting students more holistically—academically, mentally, socially, emotionally, as well as with their overall health and well-being. The research base and specific considerations for each responsibility are discussed below.

Academic Guidance

School counseling activities often include academic supports. This is especially the case for high school counselors, as academic guidance is a large part of their responsibilities. Prior research shows that schools with effective counseling programs positively impact student academic outcomes (Mau et al., 2016). Starting in the middle grades, counselors are charged with the task of balancing the courses students want to take with course taking requirements, both for graduation and to meet the requirements of their post-graduation plans. Meetings with students typically occur annually, but if a student needs to change or modify their academic plan, counselors may meet with them several times throughout the year. Counselors are also required to track all the courses students have taken during their time in high school to determine whether they meet the requirements for graduation (Dahir, 2004). At times, when students are not successful in their classes, counselors need to redraft plans for graduation, which could include finding alternative settings for the student to complete their graduation requirements. Wilkerson and colleagues (2018) found that comprehensive school counseling that includes academic guidance improves students' academic outcomes.

School counselors often also work with students who need academic support in addition to that provided in general education classrooms. If a student is struggling academically, counselors may intervene and connect them to resources for support or be the liaison to bring the student and teachers together to identify what supports may be needed. Students with disabilities or medical conditions can also qualify and request a 504 Accommodation Plan to help support

academics, and in many schools and districts, counselors help draft the accommodation plans and monitor the students' progress (Burke et al., 2024). According to Goodman-Scott and Boulden (2019), counselors spend a significant amount of time working with students, staff, and families in the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of these plans.

College and Career Counseling

The origin of school counseling, vocational guidance, is still a relevant and critical role for secondary school counselors, in particular. Federal legislation, for example, the *No Child Left Behind Act,* requires schools and districts to appropriately prepare students for their post-secondary plans (Hines et al., 2019). Mau et al (2016) found that counselors believed that college and career counseling was the primary goal of their counseling programs. Counselors are expected to help students identify career pathways, help with college and/or apprenticeship opportunities, assist in college entrance and scholarship applications, connect students to college preparation resources, and work with students on their transition plans for post-secondary pathways (Hines et al., 2019). For students of color, those who live in poverty, and/or those who are first-generation college students, college and career counseling may well make the difference in their post-secondary success (Martinez et al., 2017).

Personal and Social Support

Another critical area of responsibility of school counselors currently involves supporting students' mental health and well-being. The mental health of students is a national concern, underscored by an increase in teen suicide, gun violence, and the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lambie et al., 2019). In an article published by *Education Week*, Lieberman and Kim (2024) state that in the six years between 2018 and 2024, there were 228 school shootings where a victim was injured or killed. According to a study by Singer and

colleagues (2018), suicide is the second leading cause of death for people under the age of 25. Cases of anxiety and depression have increased in adolescents, contributing to the need for trained professionals in schools to support students' mental health (Singh et al., 2020). School counselors are trained in mental health support and are often the only personnel in schools with the background knowledge and skills to effectively provide support to students in need of such support (ASCA, 2019).

School counselors often coordinate social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, as well. SEL is related to mental health and well-being and is a necessary component of adolescent development and becoming a functional adult in society. The five components of SEL are: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making (CASEL, 2023). These skills help adolescents develop their identities, make positive and healthy decisions, maintain positive mental health, and learn to manage emotions (CASEL, 2023). School counselors not only work individually with students on their social and emotional learning, but they also provide whole-class instruction to build such skills.

Crisis Intervention

Relatedly, due to the increase of mental health and behavioral needs, school counselors must be trained in how to intervene and respond in times of crisis (Morris & Minton, 2012). With the increase of teen suicide in the United States, schools and districts expect counselors to not only intervene if a student is experiencing suicidal ideations, but they also must assist students and families with safety plans for students who is at risk of suicide (Gray & Reibel, 2022). If a student or staff member dies or has a major accident during the school year, school counselors frequently pull together a crisis team to help support both students and staff.

Counselors may also be called to classrooms to respond to a student with escalated, especially dangerous, behavior. Because they are trained in de-escalation techniques and mental health support, school counselors are often called first to intervene.

Because of the increase of deaths by suicide, many states have required schools and school districts to develop curriculum and lessons about the signs of suicide and where to seek help for mental health crises. Suicide prevention programs can help students build skills such as healthy coping strategies and building connectedness to other people (Singer et al., 2018). Screening and intervening in crises also require school counselors to spend time developing safety plans, monitoring progress, and following up with students. In Washington, for example, school counselors are required to deliver classroom lessons on the signs of suicide and develop a screening tool to identify students who may be having suicidal ideations (Washington State Legislature, n.d.).

Advocacy for Equity

Student advocacy is another vital component of school counselors' jobs. When counselors advocate for individual students and/or programs to support all students, students experience positive outcomes (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016). For many students, especially if they are living in poverty, have medical conditions, have learning disabilities, come from diverse backgrounds, and/or identify as part of the LBGTQIA+ community, the school counselor becomes a key advocate to address inequities in the educational system (Hines et al., 2017). According to Trusty and Brown (2005), school counselor advocacy should be focused on eliminating barriers for all students, creating opportunities to develop academically, collaborating with stakeholders to meet student needs, and creating positive systemic change in schools. In this vein, school counselors work to reduce barriers for students in accessing

appropriate curriculum and courses and work with other stakeholders to address systemic issues around equity and access to support services (Hines et al., 2017).

Another aspect of school counselor advocacy for students is connecting students and families to the resources they may need to be successful, such as tutoring services, community based mental health resources, and/or supports through the McKinney-Vento Act, a law stating that students who are houseless must be provided protections in schools (Strawser et al., 2000). Such supports could include connecting houseless students to organizations with Title X resources or getting families the forms to get their child access to free/reduced price meals.

Parent and Teacher Collaboration

Research has shown that parent involvement in schools increases the academic outcomes for students (Brown et al., 2024), and part of a cohesive and comprehensive counseling program involves school counselors collaborating with both parents and teachers to identify ways to support students. This collaboration can be used to address academic challenges, social and emotional learning, mental health concerns and supports; identify opportunity gaps for students; and/or address student behavior. Parent outreach by the counselor can help bring together a team to support the student and their learning and invite and embed parents into the academic community (Kim et al., 2018). For teachers, this collaboration can provide opportunities for colleagues to learn from each other about how to support specific students and address their needs. Because school counselors support students with their social/emotional well-being and post-secondary plans, it is essential that school counselors invite parents to partner with them to support the student. Developing a collaborative partnership with the parents can help school counselors identify targeted supports for the student, and the collaboration can lead to an

increase of parental involvement within the school setting (Brown et al., 2024). School counselors can also work with the parents to advocate on behalf of the student.

The Development of the ASCA Model

A guiding framework helps to make all the different responsibilities and roles school counselors have clearer and more manageable within the comprehensive school counseling program. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a model in 2003 for a comprehensive counseling program that supports the academic achievement, social and emotional health, and preparation for post-secondary paths for all students (ASCA, 2019). The ASCA Model provides guidance and principles for school counselors and administrators who work with those school counseling programs. According to ASCA (2019), their comprehensive model helps standardize school counseling practices across the country and reestablishes the critical role counselors play in the development and support of students and their success in their post-secondary life. The intent of the ASCA Model is to guide school counselors to develop a comprehensive school counseling program that (a) is based on data-informed decision making; (b) is delivered to all students in a systematic way; (c) includes developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on mindsets and behaviors students need for academic success and post-secondary readiness; (d) closes achievement and opportunity gaps; and (e) focuses on students' academic, attendance, and discipline growth and achievement (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA states that counselors should be highly trained, with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, meet all the licensing requirements for the state in which they work, participate in and receive continuing education in best practices for school counseling, and follow all professional and ethical standards. When counselors meet all these requirements, they are prepared to support students and their academic success. Also, when counselors fulfill all the

ASCA Model's outlined requirements, they are more equipped to develop a sustainable comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP), enabling them to focus on key duties and responsibilities (ASCA, 2019).

In addition, ASCA indicates that the following are the appropriate duties for school counselors: (a) academic planning and goal setting, (b) classroom lessons that are developmentally appropriate and based on student success standards, (c) short-term counseling as needed, (d) referrals for long-term counseling support, (e) collaboration with stakeholders to promote and support of the student, (f) advocacy at student-focused meetings, (g) reviewing data to identify student needs and challenges, and (h) acting as an advocate to improve equity and opportunities for all students (ASCA, 2019). These eight roles of the counselor are important foundational principles of the framework. The impact of the national model has been significant and has led many states, including Washington, to adopt the framework state-wide (Dahir et al., 2009).

Washington State Senate Bill 5030

To address the multiple roles of the 21st century school counselor, Washington state, along with many others, is working to develop a sustainable model for school counseling programs. During the 2021 Legislative Session, representatives from Washington passed a bill requiring all schools and school districts across the state to develop a CSCP aligned to the ASCA Model (WOSPI, 2021). The comprehensive plan must focus on the delivery of instruction, the use of core counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and being responsive to student needs (WOSPI, n.d.-a).

The passed legislation, Senate Bill 5030 (SB 5030), was the result of several years of advocacy by the Washington School Counselors Association to get schools throughout the state

to follow a model of best practices (OSPI, n.d.-b). School districts were encouraged to focus on three components of school counseling: academic, career, and social emotional learning, with the educational governing body for the state of Washington, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), recognizing that counselors are the personnel best trained to recognize and address student needs in those three components (WOSPI, n.d.-c). OSPI also supports use of the ASCA Model as the model of best practice for comprehensive school counseling (WOSPI, n.d.-d). All Washington state school districts were expected to use the 2021-2022 school year to draft a CSCP and transition plan. In the following school year, schools and districts were expected to implement those transition plans and CSCPs (WOSPI, n.d.-e). The legislation also states that schools and districts must develop transition plans that fit within the current funding, which implies that the state would not provide additional funding for schools and districts to develop the transition plans or the CSCPs.

School Counselor Training Requirements in Washington State

Although CSCPs have been developed by schools and districts in Washington, school counselors and counseling teams are still struggling to find a balance between fulfilling the expectations of the ASCA Model and their roles as school counselors. Because the role of the counselor has shifted so much since the bill's inception, it has been difficult for schools and districts to adapt their systems to match the new legislation. Additionally, the current ASCA Model was initially developed within the last 23 years, and for veteran educators, the model was not part of their training they received in their school counseling programs. This creates a burden on schools and districts to adequately train their staff on the structures of CSCPs and how to appropriately deliver school counseling services to students.

Generational gaps are also important to consider in light of current training and employment criteria. For example, to serve as a school counselor in Washington state, individuals must complete a state-approved school counseling program and earn a master's degree in counseling or school psychology (OSPI, 2026). School counselors receive specialized training in the delivery of services that support students' academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health development. As a result, schools and districts may only employ individuals who hold a valid state-approved school counseling credential. Current requirements are aligned with the ASCA model, but school personnel are likely to have a range of experience with and knowledge of the ASCA model.

Meeting SB 5030 Requirements

Research shows that students who have access to and participate in a comprehensive counseling program are more academically successful and better prepared for their post-secondary paths (Dahir et al., 2009). Although the role of the school counselor has evolved over time, the ASCA Model provides a clear framework that defines counselors' roles and responsibilities, helping ensure these programs are implemented effectively. In Washington, where SB 5030 requires the implementation of a CSCP aligned with the ASCA Model, schools and districts must be intentional when setting up transition plans and new systems to incorporate the foundational principles that best support the work of the school counselor. Perhaps not surprisingly, many schools and districts in Washington have struggled to transition their CSCP to match the ASCA Model.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

The Search Process

I conducted a thorough search to find literature related to comprehensive counseling plans and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Model using the following databases: ERIC, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO open dissertations, Education Data Base, and Dissertations and Theses @ University of Oregon. In each database, only research that had been peer reviewed was selected. I used Google Scholar to find additional articles; however, not all articles found through Google Scholar could be verified as peer reviewed. The search terms and phrases used included: *school counselor roles, ASCA Model*, *high school counselors*, *high school counseling programs*, *comprehensive counseling plan*, *implementation of the ASCA Model, models for comprehensive school counseling, student-to-counselor ratios*, *RAMP schools, history of school counseling*, and *benefits to comprehensive school counseling plans*.

From Guidance Counselor to School Counselor

Although ASCA was established in 1952 and the role of school counselors has continually evolved, it was not until 1990 that ASCA issued a statement to officially change the title of the role from *guidance counselor* to *school counselor*. Their belief was the term guidance counselor did not accurately represent the roles which school counselors play in education and there needed to be recognition of the knowledge, skills, training and responsibilities of the profession (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In a study conducted by Zyromski and colleagues (2019), individuals who referred to themselves as "guidance counselors" scored lower on a survey measuring knowledge of the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies, compared to those who identified as "school counselors." The study involved 276

participants from at a state counseling conference in Ohio in 2018. Participants were divided based on their self-identified title: those who used "guidance counselor" received a version of the survey where the word "school" was replaced with "guidance," while those who identified as "school counselors" received the same survey with the word "school" intact. Aside from this wording difference, all survey questions were identical. One of the most significant implications from this study is the perception that how counselors see themselves can impact the understanding of the scope of their profession and responsibilities, including the ASCA Model and established competencies and standards.

The ASCA Model and School Counseling Standards

The ASCA Model is a structured, outcome-based program designed to implement national counseling standards in schools (Mau et al., 2016). ASCA believes that school counselors are uniquely qualified and properly trained to support student success and their social/emotional development and well-being and having a clearly defined model allows schools to align practices in a collaborative and proactive approach to close the achievement gap (ASCA, 2024). Using a wealth of research regarding school counseling programs, the ASCA Model is comprised of four components: define, manage, deliver, and assess (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA Component #1: Define

To support academic growth and achievement, improved attendance and a decrease in discipline incidents, ASCA established 35 standards for educating and supporting students— mindset standards and behavior standards— that promote student success academically, socially/emotionally, and in post-secondary pursuits (ASCA, 2019). Student mindset behaviors are related to the beliefs that students have about themselves in relation to their academic growth and success, while the behavior standards are the behaviors and executive functioning skills

students need to develop or refine to help make them a successful student: learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills (ASCA, 2019). Figure 2 organizes these standards within categories to illustrate the behaviors/mindsets counselors should help all students develop.

Figure 2

American School Counselor Association (2019). ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success.

Category 1: Mindset Standards School counselors encourage the following mindsets for all students		
M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being		
M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed		
M 3. Sense of belonging in the school environment		
M 4. Understanding that postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success		
M 5. Belief in using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes		
M 6. Positive attitude toward work and learning		
Category 2: Behavior Standards Students will demonstrate the following standards through classroom lessons, activities, and/or individual/small-group counseling		
Learning Strategies	**Self-Management Skills**	**Social Skills**
B-LS 1. Demonstrate critical thinking skills to make informed decisions	B-SMS 1. Demonstrate ability to assume responsibility	B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication and listening skills
B-LS 2. Demonstrate creativity	B- SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control	B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students
B-LS 3. Use time-management, organizational and study skills	B-SMS 3. Demonstrate ability to work independently	B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success
B-LS 4. Apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning	B-SMS 4. Demonstrate ability to delay immediate gratification for long-term rewards	B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy
B-LS 5. Apply media and technology skills	B-SMS 5. Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long and short-term goals	B-SS 5. Demonstrate ethical decision-making and social responsibility
B-LS 6. Set high standards of quality	B-SMS 6. Demonstrate ability to overcome barriers to learning	B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills
B-LS 7. Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals	B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem	B-SS 7. Use leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse teams
B-LS 8. Actively engage in challenging coursework	B-SMS 8. Demonstrate the ability to balance school, home and community activities	B-SS 8. Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self when necessary
B-LS 9. Gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives to make informed decisions	B-SMS 9. Demonstrate personal safety skills	B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and the environment
B-LS 10. Participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities	B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities	

In addition to developing the student success standards, ASCA recommends establishing grade-level competencies that support specific expectations and skill development as students prepare for their post-secondary path (ASCA, 2019).

In addition to the student standards established by the ASCA, professional standards and competencies for school counselors were also established. These were developed to aid in the implementation and growth of the CSCP to best support academic achievement in students and post-secondary planning and social/emotional development in adolescents (ASCA, 2019). Like the 35 mindset and behavior standards for student success, the school counselor standards and competencies are also categorized as either mindsets, the beliefs school counselors have about students; or behaviors, the professional foundation, service, and planning that supports the comprehensive counseling plan (Figure 3). Each of the mindset and behavior standards are further outlined in the ASCA framework, giving school counselors measurable indicators to assist in the implementation, refinement and/or enhancement of the CSCP.

The last component of defining the ASCA Model is a set of ethical standards for school counselors. These principles of ethical behavior are deemed necessary to maintain the highest standards of integrity, leadership and professionalism in the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2019). Each of the fifteen standards (responsibility to students; confidentiality; comprehensive data-informed program; academic, career, and social/emotional plan; dual relationships and managing boundaries; appropriate referrals and advocacy; group work; student peer-support programs; serious and foreseeable harm to self and others; underserved and at-risk populations; bullying, harassment, and child abuse; student records; evaluation, assessment, and interpretation; technical and digital citizenship; and virtual/distance school counseling) have detailed criteria school counselors use to evaluate their practice and the effectiveness of the

CSCP. These standards serve as a guide for the CSCP and school counselors when working with all students, regardless of the population served, the area in which the school is located, or the school level. The standards were designed to provide support and direction for all the components of the ASCA Model and to inform key stakeholders about the expected behaviors and mindsets of the CSCP (ASCA, 2019).

Figure 3

American School Counselor Association (2019). ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies.

Mindsets School counselors believe:		
M 1. Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.		
M 2. Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.		
M 3. Every student should graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary opportunities.		
M 4. Every student should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program.		
M 5. Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, or other school staff and education stakeholders.		
M 6. School counselors are leaders in the school, district, state and nation.		
M 7. Comprehensive school counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career and social/emotional outcomes.		
Behaviors School counselors demonstrate the following standards in the design, implementation and assessment of a comprehensive school counseling program		
Professional Foundation	**Direct and Indirect Student Services**	**Planning and Assessment**
B-PF 1. Apply developmental, learning, counseling and education theories	B-SS 1. Design and implement instruction aligned to ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success in large-group, classroom, small-group and individual settings	B-PE 1. Create school counseling program beliefs, vision and mission statements aligned with the school and district
B-PF 2. Demonstrate understanding of educational systems, legal issues, policies, research and trends in education	B-SS 2. Provide appraisal and advisement in large-group, classroom, small-group and individual settings	B-PE 2. Identify gaps in achievement, attendance, discipline, opportunity and resources
B-PF 3. Apply legal and ethical principles of the school counseling profession	B-SS 3. Provide short-term counseling in small-group and individual settings	B-PE 3. Develop annual student outcome goals based on student data
B-PF 4. Apply school counseling professional standards and competencies	B-SS 4. Make referrals to appropriate school and community resources	B-PE 4. Develop and implement action plans aligned with program goals and student data
B-PF 5. Use ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success to inform the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program	B-SS 5. Consult to support student achievement and success	B-PE 5. Assess and report program results to the school community
B-PF 6. Demonstrate understanding of the impact of cultural, social and	B-SS 6. Collaborate with families, teachers, administrators, other	B-PE 6. Use time appropriately according to the national

environmental influences on student success and opportunity	school staff, and education stakeholders for student achievement and success	recommendation and student/school data
B-PF 7. Demonstrate leadership through the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program		B-PE 7. Establish agreement with the principal and other administrators about the comprehensive school counseling program
B-PF 8. Demonstrate advocacy in a comprehensive school counseling program		B-PE 8. Establish and convene an advisory council for the comprehensive school counseling program
B-PF 9. Create systemic change through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program		B-PE 9. Use appropriate school counselor performance appraisal process

An international study out of Turkey (Karaman et al., 2019) aimed to measure student perceptions of their school counselors in relation to the ASCA Model's established mindset and behaviors. The researchers wanted to develop an assessment to determine if students' perceptions of their success could be tied to the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors because students and school counselors are the two main parts of a comprehensive counseling program. Using pre and post data from the same schools, the researchers measured students' perception of the support they received from school counselors. Karaman and colleagues found a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of their school counselors and the grit those students displayed in their academic learning.

Another key foundational principle of the ASCA Model is the ratio of students to counselor, as that ratio has a direct impact on a counselor's ability to fulfill the foundational principles, mindsets, and behaviors. Due to undefined roles and low funding for K-12 public schools, counselors often are assigned large caseloads of students (Hilts et al., 2023). ASCA recommends that schools follow a 250:1 ratio (or less) to maximize the counselor's ability to support the academic, mental health, social and emotional, and post-secondary needs of all students. Because the ASCA Model has an emphasis on outcomes for students, a 250:1 ratio

allows school counselors to have a manageable caseload and fulfill the direct and indirect services requirements of the model. If the school counselor to student ratio becomes too high, students are less likely to have access to a highly qualified school counselor (Donohue et al., 2022).

Donohue and colleagues (2022) examined school counselor to student ratios, student access, and student academic performance in a multistate study. They collected school and student data from six state departments of education: Arizona, Idaho, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. These six were identified by their education departments' willingness to participate in the study and whether there was information available on how many school counselors were assigned to each school. The researchers analyzed the following data: school characteristics and demographics; student ethnicity; percentage of English learners (ELs); percentage of special education students; percentage of students on free and reduced lunch; and performance data on state standardized tests, absenteeism, discipline incidents, expulsions, access and enrollment in AP or dual enrollment classes, and college readiness indicators. They found that the two states with the lowest school counselor to student ratios, New Hampshire and Rhode Island, had higher student achievement and college entrance (Donohue et al., 2022). Additionally, the researchers found that across all the states studied, access to school counselors was greater if the students were white. Another key finding in the study is that states with legal requirements regarding school counseling programs and school counselor to student ratios had both better ratios and higher student outcomes.

To gain a better understanding of the impact school counselors have on student academic success, Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) conducted a study using archived study data collected from students from each year they were in high school. The study used 5,840 high school students

who either attended a school with a counselor: student ratio at or below the recommended 250:1 or a school with a counselor: student ratio above 425:1. The study collected demographic information on the students and schools that consisted of Title I status, graduation rates, and racial/ethnic identities. Additionally, the study looked at cumulative grade point averages (GPA), number of Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses students took, and what post-secondary classes or programs students participated in. The researchers concluded that students attending a school using the recommended ratio had higher GPAs, a higher participation rate in AP and/or IB classes, and a higher graduation rate than students who attended schools operating outside of the recommended ratio. With the increase of mental health needs due to societal changes and the COVID-19 pandemic, caseloads that exceed the recommended ratio of 250:1 may reduce the impact that a counselor can make on all students (Hilts et al., 2023). In 2022-2023, only two states in the United States had an average caseload of students that fell at or below the recommended 250:1 ratio–New Hampshire and Vermont. Washington state was reported to have a counselor to student ratio of 373:1, well above the recommended 250:1 (ASCA, 2024).

One of the beliefs behind ASCA's recommended school counselor to student ratio is every student should have access to a knowledgeable and skilled school counselor who is working to ensure each student's academic success (ASCA, 2019). Several studies have shown that having a school counselor to student ratio at or below 250 can result in higher student outcomes; however, students of color, students in poverty, students who are multilingual learners and/or students with disabilities often get less access to school counselors compared to affluent white students (Hilts et al., 2019) due to the likelihood that they live in school districts with less revenue provided by the state and local governments.

Hilts and colleagues (2019) conducted a study of 639 school counselors across the United States. Using a survey, researchers collected demographic data about school counselors and the schools where they worked to determine if student outcomes are linked to school counselor to student ratios. Researchers found that the likelihood of meeting the recommended school counselor to student ratio was not only linked to the students those counselors served but also to their own identity. The study found that counselors who identified as white are two times more likely to have a student caseload at or below the recommended 250:1 ratio. Additionally, students in predominately white schools often live in more affluent communities, increasing the likelihood they will have more access to school counselors. Because school counselor and school counseling services are extremely valuable to students who are marginalized, the lack of access to school counselors perpetuates the achievement gap.

ASCA Component #2: Manage

For school counselors to effectively meet the established ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for students and themselves and to conduct the lessons, intervention strategies, and planned activities for which they are responsible, they must be able to manage the different parts of the program and the role each school counselor plays. ASCA (2019) recommends that school counselors develop a mission and vision for the comprehensive program and the school. The mission and vision should communicate to students, staff, and families their beliefs about the comprehensive program and how those beliefs align to the school's and/or district's mission and vision. The mission and vision should also inform stakeholders about the purpose of school counseling and how that purpose aligns with ASCA's ethical standards.

As stated previously, historically, the role of the school counselor was seen as more of a utility player and an advisor for post-secondary life instead of a necessary role for assisting

students with their academic success. To help school staff understand the role school counselors should have in schools, ASCA (2019) developed a list of activities that are appropriate and inappropriate for school counselors (Figure 4). By outlining what is appropriate and inappropriate to require school counselors to do, the school community—students, staff and families—can have a clear understanding of what school counselors need to be doing to best support students' academic success, their social/emotional well-being, and post-secondary goals. Additionally, defining the appropriate activities provides support to the school counselors so they can maximize their time when supporting students.

How school counselors use their time is an important component of the ASCA Model for a CSCP. A component of the ASCA Model requires school counselors to do a time study to better understand how their time is allocated throughout the day. After completing the study, school counselors are to use the data to organize their time and activities to best support students. ASCA (2019) recommends school counselors spend 80% of their time providing direct services to students and 20% of their time on indirect services to best support the student mindsets and behaviors school counselors are responsible for supporting.

Direct services are defined as activities that involve working directly with the students, such as delivery of classroom lessons, supporting small groups, individual sessions, and supporting students with their social/emotional well-being. The delivery of direct services is tied to an increase in student engagement and student academic achievement and a decrease in incidents of student discipline (Carey et al., 2012). Indirect services are activities not involving time with the students, such as collaboration, consultation, and referrals. Interestingly, school counselors who follow the ASCA model and intentionally implement direct for students report they have more satisfaction in their jobs (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011).

Figure 4

American School Counselor Association (2019). Appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors

Appropriate Activities	Inappropriate Activities
Advisement and appraisal for academic planning.	Building the master schedule.
Orientation, coordinator and academic advising for new students.	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students.
Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests.	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs.
Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent.	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent.
Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems.	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences.
Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students.	Providing long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders.
Consulting with teachers to schedule and present school counseling curriculum lessons based on developmental needs and needs identified through data.	Covering classes when teachers are absent or to create teacher planning time.
Interpreting student records.	Maintaining student records.
Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement.	Computing grade-point averages.
Consulting with teachers about building classroom connections, effective classroom management and the role of noncognitive factors in student success.	Supervising classrooms or common areas.
Protecting student records and information per state and federal regulations.	Keeping clerical records.
Consulting with the school principal to identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems.	Assisting with duties in the principal's office.
Advocating for students at individual meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards as necessary	Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, 504 plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS and school attendance review boards.
Analyzing disaggregated schoolwide and school counseling program data.	Serving as a data entry clerk.

A decade later, Olsen and colleagues (2021) conducted a study to examine how counselors were allocating their time in alignment with the ASCA Model. A survey was sent out to all ASCA members, and those who were actively working in an elementary, middle or high school were invited to participate. In all, 4,598 school counselors responded to their survey. The researchers used descriptive statistics to identify the frequency with which school counselors

were able to allocate their time to spend on ASCA aligned activities, and they found that over 70% reported that they *occasionally*, *rarely* or *never* complete those activities. Additionally, the researchers learned that the activity school counselors were the least likely to complete was analyzing student data. If they do not make time to disaggregate or analyze data, school counselors are unable to determine whether the direct services provided are making a positive impact on the student and/or school (Olsen et al., 2021). Given the many conflicting responsibilities school counselors must juggle, having administrator support is essential.

Thus, an additional component of the ASCA Model in managing a CSCP is having an annual administrative conference. To better support the work school counselors are doing within schools, they are supposed to meet annually with administrators to review the priorities of the school counseling program and how those goals align with the school improvement goals; explain and show how their time is being allocated; review ratios and caseloads; determine what services, both direct and indirect, will be delivered to students; and go over the school counselors' plans for professional development and their roles on other committees in relation to the school's goals (ASCA, 2019).

Together, school counselors and administrators are supposed to discuss and agree on what the priorities for the year should be and how the administrators can support the work of the school counselors. The counseling team and the administrator should meet within the first two months of the school year, and in that meeting discuss the goals for the year and review each counselor's time study. If the time study is not in alignment with the ASCA's recommended 80/20 time allocation, the team is supposed to identify ways to be proactive and reallocate duties that do not fall under the appropriate activities for school counselors. The administrative conferences are intended to open the lines of communication between administrators and school

counselors and allow all to have a clear understanding of the plan for the year. Additionally, the hope is that when administrators and school counselors are collaboratively partnering in the annual goals and data review, administrators will work to ensure that students have access to a school counselor and those positions remain funded within the schools (Walsh et al., 2007).

School counselors do not only deliver instruction and support in individual sessions inside an office. As part of the ASCA Model, school counselors are required to deliver classroom lessons related to the adopted school, district, and/or state school counseling curriculum (ASCA, 2019). The delivery of lessons is important because they reach all students, not just those who seek out the school counselor (Lopez & Mason, 2018). The lessons should be aligned with the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors and have clear learning objectives that support the adopted curriculum. The lessons can be delivered either in the classroom setting or with small groups, depending on the needs of the students. Research has shown that classroom lessons delivered by a school counselor can positively impact students' academic achievement, social/emotional well-being, and/or post-secondary development (Lopez & Mason, 2018).

Lopez and Mason (2018) examined 139 lessons from counselors using a 12-category rubric from the Louisiana Department of Education. The purpose of their study to was examine how lessons were designed and the impact of those lessons on students. The researchers found that lessons that were rooted in the ASCA standards and had learning activities that reinforced those standards had a higher impact on students than lessons that were not fundamentally rooted in those standards. The researchers also found that many of the lessons that school counselors were delivering fell in the social/emotional category, suggesting that student need might be higher in that area versus academic achievement or post-secondary planning.

The final element to the management component of the ASCA Model is the development of an advisory council. Comprised of students, families, school counselors, teachers, administrators, and community members, the advisory council is supposed to examine the annual goals and outcome data to determine the effectiveness of the comprehensive school counseling program. The council should meet twice a year and review the data sets provided. The council is also supposed to provide recommendations on the CSCP and voluntarily advocate for sustained funding and resources (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA Component #3: Deliver

The Deliver component outlines how school counselors implement the ASCA National Model within an established CSCP at the school or district level. As previously noted, the ASCA Model recommends that counselors dedicate 80% of their time to providing direct services to students. These services, which include instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counseling, are designed to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to meet the ASCA *Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success*. By doing so, counselors support improved student outcomes in areas such as attendance, behavior, and academic achievement (ASCA, 2019).

Instruction within the direct services of the CSCP can range from classroom lessons delivered by the counselor; to small group instruction over a specific skill, mindset or behavior; to individual instruction one-on-one with the student. School counselors design lessons based on the goals of the ASCA Model—academic achievement, social/emotional well-being and/or post-secondary readiness (ASCA, 2019) and the needs of the students in the school/district. Because ASCA does not provide specific curriculum for CSCPs, it is often up to school counselors to

identify what skills or mindsets need to be addressed on an individual or large-scale basis within the school (Dack & Merlin-Knoblich, 2023).

Classroom instruction typically consists of whole-group lessons delivered within the classroom setting. When appropriate, this instruction may extend to a school-wide format, such as assemblies, particularly when the topic addresses student needs that span multiple grade levels. Delivering instruction in this way ensures that all students receive equitable access to essential information and skill development, promoting the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success. Additionally, classroom instruction increases counselor visibility and fosters stronger relationships between school counselors and the broader student body (ASCA, 2019).

In contrast, small group instruction targets a more specific population—typically 3 to 12 students—over a series of structured sessions. These groups are designed to support students with shared needs and to promote measurable improvements in academic, social/emotional, or behavioral success. Steen and Kaffenberger (2007) examined the academic impact of small group counseling on elementary students in Northern Virginia. Group topics were based on a needs assessment completed by parents the previous spring. Of the 120 students identified for participation, 80 were identified by teachers as experiencing academic difficulties. Students attended eight to ten sessions during their lunch or recess periods to avoid missing instructional time. The findings indicated that small group counseling was effective in addressing student concerns and improving academic outcomes.

Like small group instruction, individual counseling focuses on addressing the specific needs of students. It is often used when a student's concern is unique, more complex, or requires additional time and attention from the school counselor. This one-on-one support targets particular issues or behaviors that may be hindering the student's academic success, providing

personalized strategies and interventions to help the student overcome barriers and thrive in the school environment. Nice and colleagues (2023) found that students who received targeted instruction and interventions focused on adaptability and essential life skills developed a stronger foundation and were better prepared for post-secondary pathways and adulthood.

Together, individual and small group counseling comprise one of the most widely recognized components of a school counselor's direct services. Utilizing established counseling theories and techniques, school counselors support students during times of personal, social, or emotional difficulty that may hinder their academic progress (ASCA, 2019). These counseling sessions help students identify the root causes of their challenges, develop effective coping strategies, and build the resilience needed to overcome obstacles. Additionally, school counselors provide critical support to students experiencing crises—both during and in the aftermath—helping to safeguard their emotional well-being and promote recovery.

Appraisal and advisement are additional key components of the direct services provided by school counselors, aimed at understanding students' abilities and post-secondary interests. School counselors work with students—either individually or in small groups—to assess their interests, skills, and achievement levels, as well as to identify any potential challenges that may affect their academic success (ASCA, 2019). This assessment can be done through analyzing various sources of student data and meeting with students about their future interests. School counselors can then make recommendations to students, families, and staff regarding potential interventions and opportunities for students to increase their academic success, social/emotional well-being, and/or post-secondary development.

The remaining 20% of a school counselor's responsibilities are categorized as indirect services. Although these tasks do not involve direct interaction with students, they play an

important role in supporting student success and promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities throughout the school. School counselors work with families, staff, and community stakeholders to address the needs of students and their academic success (ASCA, 2019). In these responsibilities, counselors are providing consultation about students, collaboration with stakeholders regarding students, and completing referrals on behalf of students.

Consultation occurs when school counselors are either seeking or providing recommendations on behalf of students. This activity usually involves identifying interventions or specific instruction to help students with their academic success, social/emotional well-being, and/or post-secondary planning. School counselors frequently work with other educators to identify the strategies that will assist them to meet the needs of the students. School counselors often collaborate with other stakeholders, such as staff and families, to work toward a common goal and share responsibilities in supporting students (ASCA, 2019). Collaboration activities vary depending on the needs of the students and the school community; however, the most common activities in which school counselors collaborate are teaming with stakeholders to help meet the needs of the school community and participation in school/district committees, parent workshops, community partnerships, and crisis response (ASCA, 2019). When the consultation and collaboration indicate that students need resources beyond what is readily available in the school/district, school counselors often make referrals to outside sources and agencies that can provide additional support to the student to meet their needs.

ASCA Component #4: Assess

The final component of the ASCA National Model emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation of the CSCP to determine its effectiveness at the school and district levels. School counselors are expected to engage in collecting and analyzing data to identify both

strengths and areas for improvement in the program's design and service delivery. This data should align with the ASCA *Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success* and be used to measure the program's impact on student outcomes. Based on the findings, counselors are then expected to develop targeted improvement plans to address identified gaps and enhance overall program effectiveness (ASCA, 2019).

Although assessing the CSCP is a key component of the ASCA Model, research shows that many school counselors spend minimal time disaggregating student and program data (Olsen et al., 2021). Without thorough analysis of these data, counselors are unable to effectively identify student needs, making it difficult to implement targeted interventions that support student success. Prior research has emphasized the importance of using data to evaluate program effectiveness, demonstrating that student performance and academic achievement improve when counselors systematically analyze both student and program data (Ware & Galassi, 2006).

Recognized ASCA Model Programs

Schools and districts that have demonstrated a commitment to the development of a comprehensive school counseling program using the ASCA Model can apply to be a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). This designation recognizes the work of school counselors, staff, administrators, families, and the members of the community who have fundamentally supported the CSCP and the mission and vision of the school/district. RAMP school eligibility is dependent upon school counselors and administrators collecting evidence on how each component of the ASCA Model is being implemented within the school and how direct and indirect services are performed (ASCA, n.d.).

Wilkerson and colleagues (2013) studied the educational outcomes of students in RAMP schools versus non-RAMP schools. They used extant data from the Indiana Department of

Education from 2011, with data on 1,481 schools that fit the criteria they had established for the study. The schools were then sorted into categories: RAMP schools (n = 75) and non-RAMP schools (n = 1,406). Researchers analyzed data from both the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+) and Graduation Qualifying Examinations (GQEs) and concluded that English Language Arts (ELA) and Math scores were significantly higher in RAMP designated schools.

Across the country, a total of 1,309 schools received RAMP designation status from 2010-2024 (ASCA, n.d.), and of those schools, 29% are high schools. In the state of Washington, where there are 2,474 public K-12 schools (OFM, 2024), only seven in the entire state have earned a RAMP designation (ASCA, n.d.). Although the application can be arduous, these low numbers are a bit surprising given that commitment to the CSCP is associated with positive student outcomes.

Implementation of the ASCA Model

To begin implementing a CSCP, ASCA recommends that school counselors start with aligning their beliefs about school counseling (ASCA, 2019). Utilizing the established Mindsets & Behaviors and school counselor competencies and standards, the school counselor or counseling team drafts a document that articulates those beliefs and what they hold most true for themselves as school counselors. Using what they have drafted, school counselors then work to establish the mission and vision of the CSCP. The articulated beliefs should drive this vision of what student outcomes the counselor or counseling team want to see because of the CSCP. This fundamental component of the implementation process establishes a shared purpose and commitment for student outcomes.

Program goals should be written at the beginning of each year that support student academic improvement and success and are tied to the school goals or improvement plan (ASCA, 2019). Student and school data should be analyzed, and goals should be aimed at closing gaps in academic achievement and/or discipline infractions. Once goals have been established, the school counselor or counseling team need to hold an administrative conference to review what the goals are for the year and how those goals are tied to the improvement of the school.

School counselors also must be active in collecting and analyzing data to determine where there is need, where there are gaps, and whether their program has met the established goals for the year (ASCA, 2019). Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) identified that for the ASCA Model to be implemented well, school counselors must not be afraid to use data and to regularly make data-driven decisions. Additionally, the researchers stressed the importance of re-evaluating the CSCP regularly, as beliefs may change over time, and school demographics and data can also change.

Counselor Beliefs and Perceptions

The beliefs of the school counselor are directly tied into the CSCP, making it necessary to understand their beliefs and perceptions of the ASCA Model. Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) conducted a study to establish a baseline on school counselors' beliefs about the importance of the ASCA Model and certain school counseling program components. Of the original 3,000 identified potential participants, 1,279 ASCA members responded to the survey. Hatch and Chen-Hayes used the *School Counseling Program Component Scale* (SCPCS), a tool developed by ASCA, to identify counselors' perceptions of the components of the ASCA Model. They found that the components that counselors identified as the most important were establishing goals for the CSCP and having counselor-to-student ratios addressed within the schools.

School counselors have multiple responsibilities in addition to facing continued role ambiguity, leading to an increased likelihood of stress and burnout (Maor & Hemi, 2020). This stress and burnout have led researchers to identify how the ASCA Model and CSCP can impact job satisfaction among school counselors. Maor and Hemi (2020) studied the impact of non-counseling related responsibilities and role ambiguity on school counselors and their ability to perform their assigned tasks. The researchers recruited 205 school counselors to participate in the study. Participants were given three different instruments to provide feedback on: the counselor burnout scale, the school counselor stress scale, and the professional identity scale. Researchers reported a correlation between higher stress and burnout levels among counselors who were performing non-counseling related tasks or did not have defined counseling roles within the school.

In a study in 2011, Jaymes Pyne researched counselors' perceived job satisfaction in relation to using the ASCA National Model, as an extension to the research done by Andrea Dixon Rayle in 2006. Payne administered a survey to 117 school counselors in Michigan to study the level of school counselors' job satisfaction and implementation of the CSCPs. He reported that the correlation between job satisfaction and implementation of a CSCP was .56, indicating a moderate to strong positive relation. Simply put, when administrators are supporting school counselors and the CSCP, counselors have a higher rate of job satisfaction (Pyne, 2011). Ten years later, Riddle and Pannel (2021) built upon Payne's research, examining counselors' job satisfaction in relation to their ability to deliver direct and indirect services to students. An instrument called the *School Counselor Activity Rating Scale* (SCARS) was sent to 119 school counselors who held at least a master's degree, were affiliated with their state's professional association, and worked either part time or full time in a K-12 setting. The results of this study

indicated that school counselors who adhered to the ASCA Model reported higher levels of job satisfaction and spent more time working directly with students compared to counselors who did not follow the model.

Implementation Challenges

Research suggests that the ASCA Model for CSCPs produces improved student outcomes in academic achievement, attendance rates, and discipline rates (Carey et al., 2010a); however, schools and districts find challenges with the implementation process and adherence to the ASCA Model. In 2008, Sink and colleagues conducted a study in Washington to identify the academic achievement of students in middle schools that had a CSCP. They found that counselors were spending too much of their time on non-counseling related responsibilities and indirect services. The model emphasizes counselors dedicating 80% of their time to direct services for students, a factor that coincided with changes in student outcomes. Researchers also found that as staff increase their collaboration and support of the CSCP in the school, student outcomes increase (Sink et al., 2008).

Fye and colleagues (2018) conducted a study to identify the level of implementation of school counselors' practices and the variables which predict the ability to implement the ASCA Model in their schools. The researchers invited 4,000 ASCA members from across the United States to participate in the study. Participants were sent emails inviting them to complete an online survey, and 252 ASCA members completed the survey answering questions regarding their demographics, school counselor practices, and principal supports (a 6.3% participation rate). Based on their data, the researchers concluded that were implementing approximately 75% of the components outlined in the ASCA National Model, rather than fully implementing the model in its entirety, and that the most significant predictive variables for the success of a CSCP

was the adherence to appropriate activities for the role of the counselor and perceived administrative support. Additionally, the researchers noted that the success of a CSCP depends on administrators understanding counselors' roles and collaborating closely with them.

In a later study, Fye and colleagues (2022) explored school counselor stress and job satisfaction related to CSCPs. They found that counselors who continue to have non-counseling duties assigned to them incur more stress and dissatisfaction in the jobs, which ultimately impacted how the CSCP was implemented. School counselors who were able to follow a CSCP closely aligned with the ASCA Model experienced more satisfaction in their job and less professional burnout.

Present Study

Effective implementation of the ASCA National Model depends on strong collaboration between school counselors and administrators to ensure the CSCP aligns with the model's standards. Although the ASCA Model is well-supported by research demonstrating positive outcomes for students, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding how the model is implemented in practice, particularly within school settings. This gap is especially important to address in Washington state, where all K–12 public schools are mandated through SB 5030 to implement a CSCP.

This study explores the process by which schools and districts in Washington state developed and implemented CSCPs to meet the requirements of SB 5030. Through this study I aim to identify how some schools have effectively developed and implemented CSCPs and identify gaps in the process to support schools who are still working toward implementing their own comprehensive school counseling program. The following research questions guided my study:

- To what extent are Washington state school and district CSCPs aligned with the ASCA Model and SB 5030?
- How are Washington state schools and districts assessing the effectiveness of CSCP implementation?
- What successes have Washington state schools and districts identified related to implementing CSCPs?
- What have been barriers exist for Washington state schools and district attempting to implement a CSCP?
- What continuing support do Washington state schools and districts need from the state to effectively continue a CSCP?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine the development and implementation of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCPs) in Washington schools and explore the lived experiences of school counselors and school/district administrators as they developed and implemented the ASCA Model in response to Washington Senate Bill 5030 (SB 5030). In the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the quantitative research phase was used to explore CSCP implementation across Washington schools, while the qualitative research phase provided a deeper understanding of the experiences of school counselors and administrators as they navigated the development and implementation of CSCPs in their schools and districts.

The first phase of the study was quantitative. I first administered a survey about CSCP implementation and the extent to which the ASCA Model has been followed by school counselors and administrators. After examining quantitative survey results, I examined qualitative survey results generated from responses to open-ended questions. Next, I collected and analyzed data through a phenomenological qualitative approach involving focus groups of school counselors and administrators. Focus group questions were driven by responses from the survey and designed to derive a deeper understanding of school counselor and administrator experiences with the development and implementation of SB 5030 and their CSCP. Through this mixed-method approach, I was able to conduct a comprehensive study of school and district implementation plans, explore the fidelity of the implementation process, and identify noteworthy outcomes of the implementation process.

Setting

This study was conducted in Washington state between October 2025 and January 2026. The year prior to data collection, there were 1,071,082 students in K-12 settings in Washington state (OFM, 2024) and 2,474 public K-12 schools. In the 2022-2023 school year, Washington state had a student to counselor ratio of 373:1, which is substantially larger than the ASCA recommended student to counselor ratio of 250:1 (ASCA, 2024). Additionally, the achievement gap continues to increase in Washington state, demonstrating a significant need for student access to qualified school counselors (WOSPI, 2020).

Participants

Participants included current school counselors and administrators working in public schools in Washington state. Individuals were recruited using convenience sampling through an online survey distributed in October 2025 to districts across Washington state. In all, approximately 645 school counselors, 740 building administrators and 304 district administrators were invited to participate. The survey window was open for 30 days during October 2025 and November 2025. During this time, there was additional outreach targeting various districts across the state using online school district information to identify school counselors and administrators and invite them to participate in the study via email. A total of 49 school counselors and administrators completed the initial survey. From this group, 10 participants volunteered to take part in the qualitative phase of the study. These school counselors and administrators participated in one of two focus groups, with five participants in each group.

Of the 49 participants who completed the survey, 23 identified as an administrator working in various settings: two district level, seven elementary school, six middle school, and eight high school. In addition, there were 26 school counselors: seven elementary, seven middle

school, and 12 high school. Participants also identified their location in the state and the community setting of their school or district. Of the four locations in the state: Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast, 63% of the survey participants worked in schools or districts in Southwest Washington (Figure 5). Additionally, 63% of respondent schools or districts were located in a suburban area (see Figure 6).

Figure 5
Survey participants by location in Washington state

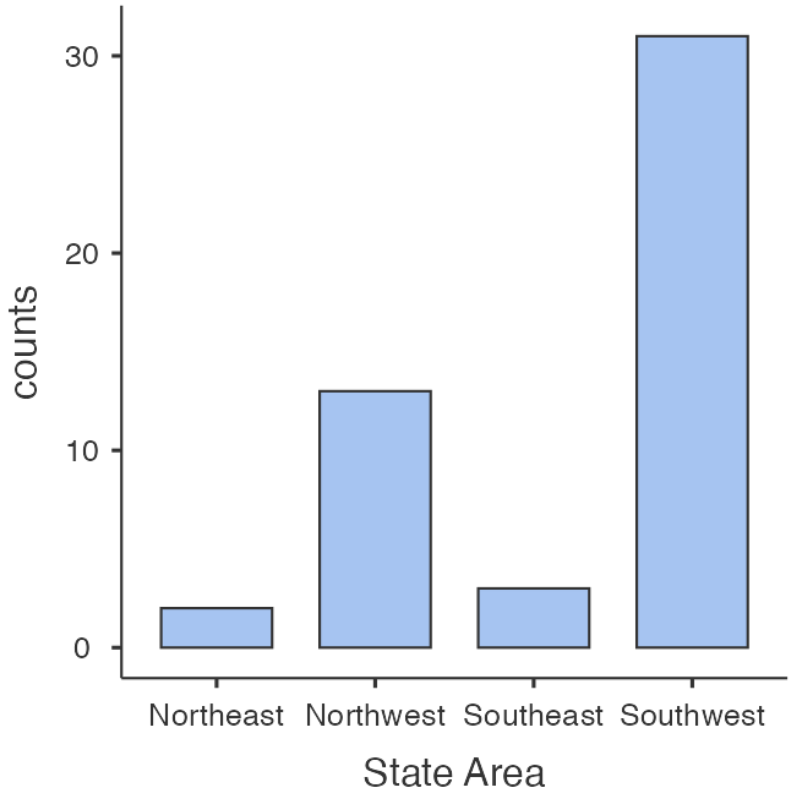
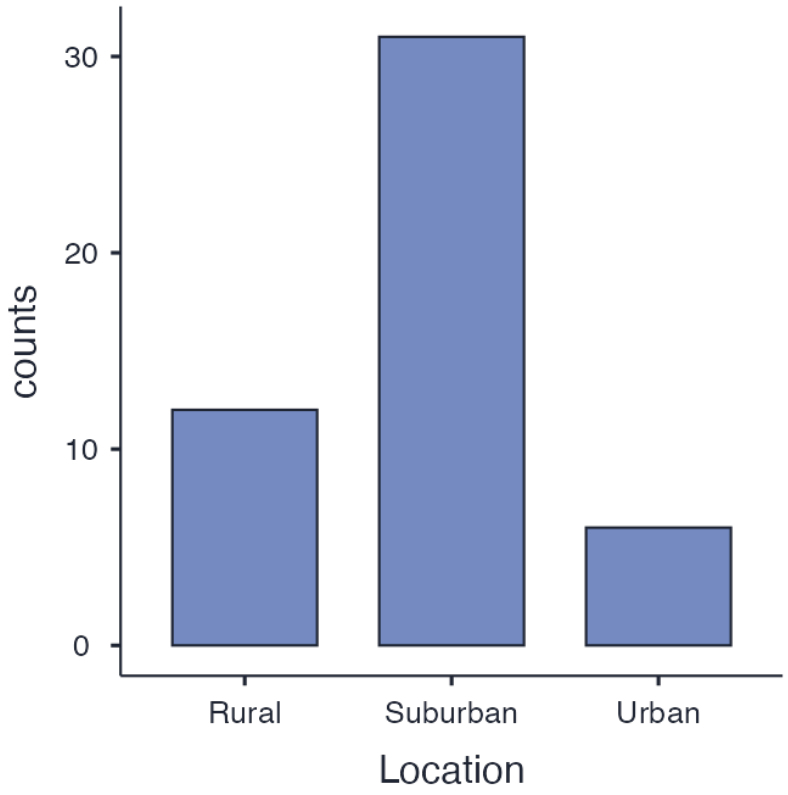


Figure 6
Survey participants by community setting in Washington state



Data Collection: Quantitative

Quantitative data were collected through a researcher-developed survey designed to assess school counselors' perceptions and practices related to the development and implementation of SB 5030. The survey was reviewed by three experts in school counseling, school administration and education policy prior to distribution to establish face and content validity. In response to this review, I adjusted the questions and response options based on the recommendations I received. As an example, one school counselor suggested that I add more options for questions other than *yes* or *no* to get more detailed answers about where their school was in the implementation process for CSCPs. Once finalized, the survey was administered in Qualtrics with a survey link distributed via email.

The *Senate Bill 5030 Implementation and Effectiveness Survey* (Appendix C) includes Likert scale items measuring the extent to which counselors have aligned their roles with the requirements of the ASCA Model including time allocation, delivery of direct and indirect services, and engagement in program management and evaluation. Survey questions also identify the extent of understanding of the ASCA Model of CSCPs by school counselors and administrators. Three *Senate Bill 5030 Implementation and Effectiveness Survey* sections include close-ended items, and the last section requests short answer responses.

Demographics. In the first section, participants were asked to answer eight anonymous demographic questions. Responses to these questions were used to describe participants and delineate the size of the schools and districts represented in addition to the location (urban, suburban or rural) in the state. Demographic questions also included position within the school/district, size of the school/district, and the length of time the respondent had been in their positions. Participants were required to respond to all questions; however, in the interest of respecting personal privacy, no personal information such as race or gender was collected in the survey.

Perceptions and Understanding. The second section of the survey consisted of ten questions designed to identify participants' self-reported perceptions and understanding of Senate Bill 5030 and their beliefs about the roles and impact of school counselors. The aim of this section was to identify the starting points for schools and districts in their understanding of CSCPs and how much of a change it was for their schools to be required to adopt the model. Response options for these questions were designed using a Likert scale ranging from *not at all* to *very well*.

Implementation and alignment. The third section of the survey had ten questions and asked participants about the implementation process required by Senate Bill 5030. In this section, participants also responded to questions about how closely their CSCP aligned with the ASCA national model outlined in the bill. Likert scale response options ranged from *not at all* to *fully implemented*.

Open response. The final section of the survey was a set of short answer questions. This section included four open-ended questions about the successes, challenges, and impacts of CSCP development and implementation. Through short answer responses, participants share specific information regarding the development and implementation processes and impacts on their schools/districts, both positive and negative, since their CSCP implementation began.

Optional follow up. In this study, before entering the formal survey, participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview or small focus group to share further insights. Participants were asked to provide an email address if they were willing to participate in a focus group for follow-up later in the research process. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a separate Qualtrics link was provided if participants did not want to participate in the focus groups. All interested participants were later contacted for the qualitative portion of the study, as described below.

Data Analysis: Quantitative

In the quantitative phase, I first cleaned the survey data and removed data for the five respondents who started the survey but did not complete it. Next, survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the status of implementation, meeting the implementation timeline, participants' role in schools, and participants' understanding of CSCPs as specified in research questions one through four. Analyses were conducted using Jamovi (Jamovi, 2025) to

identify patterns in participant responses. Additionally, chi-square analyses were performed to examine whether there were statistically significant relationships between CSCP implementation levels and (a) adherence to the 80/20-time allocation as required by ASCA, (b) meeting the 250:1 student-counselor recommended ratio, (c) meeting the timeline required in SB 5030, and (d) participant involvement in the CSCP development process. These analyses were conducted to explore factors associated with CSCP implementation described in research questions one and four.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Survey

Survey participants were asked to provide answers to five questions that were designed to address research questions two through five. These questions asked participants to share about their challenges with the development and implementation of their CSCPs, what successes they had seen because of the implementation of CSCPs, how they were assessing their CSCP and what continuing support they needed from the state to support their CSCP. Qualitative survey responses were organized according to the corresponding research question and subsequently coded to identify emerging themes. After initial coding, qualitative survey response data were run through the OpenAI ChatGPT platform to confirm the identified themes and to identify any potentially missed themes (ChatGPT, 2024). See description of focus group data analysis described below.

Focus Group Protocol Adjustments

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the survey were also used to refine and revise the initial focus group protocol. Focus group protocol adjustments were made to further investigate participants' perceptions of the ASCA Model, barriers to implementation, and the impact of implementing CSCPs on schools and districts. Focus group

questions were adjusted based on patterns observed in the survey responses, including reported implementation, levels of understanding of CSCPs, and commonly reported successes and challenges. For example, because only 20% of respondents reported that their school or district had fully implemented a CSCP, additional probing questions were incorporated to better understand the development process and to identify systemic, structural, and contextual barriers that may contribute to incomplete implementation. This approach allowed the qualitative phase to build directly upon the quantitative findings and provide greater depth and explanation of the observed survey data.

Data Collection: Qualitative Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted in January 2026: one focus group consisting of five school counselors and a second focus group of five school administrators. To maintain the integrity of each group's perspective, participants were assigned to only one focus group, with no overlap between the two. Each focus group session was held via Zoom and lasted about an hour. Participants were asked open-ended questions (see Appendix B) about the development and implementation process of their CSCPs. Focus group participants identified barriers to implementation and described student outcomes they have experienced due to the new model. Each focus group participant responded to one or more of the questions.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Focus Groups

Focus group sessions were recorded via Zoom and later hand transcribed. Transcribed data were coded through axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to identify patterns and themes. Deidentified data were also run through the OpenAI platform ChatGPT to identify any potentially unidentified themes or categories using queries including grouping responses by the posed question and asking ChatGPT (ChatGPT, 2024) to identify the main themes. I then

compared the coding conducted with AI and the coding I had completed to identify the overlapping themes. I conducted two rounds of coding to ensure the accuracy of the findings to capture the experiences of participants and identify key themes related to the implementation of SB 5030, the continuing assessment of the implementation, the successes and barriers to the implementation, and any additional identified needs from Washington state to support CSCPs in schools and districts.

Integration of Data

After themes were identified through qualitative analysis, the quantitative survey data were revisited to examine whether patterns in the survey results supported or contradicted the identified qualitative themes. Integrating the findings between the quantitative and qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences with the implementation of CSCPs in their schools.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

Prior to completing the survey, participants were required to complete a signed informed consent form via Qualtrics. Participants who did not provide consent were unable to advance to the survey on the Qualtrics platform. The informed consent form for focus group participants was sent to participants prior to participation in the focus group through the DocuSign platform. The focus group for counselors had an additional counselor sit in because they were on a shared campus with a colleague, so the informed consent was sent to them after the focus group was conducted.

Data Security and Confidentiality

The identities of all participants were kept confidential. Survey data were scrubbed of any identifying information such as IP addresses or mention of school/district information. All focus group participants were required to rename their profiles with initials and provided the option to turn off their camera during the session. Electronic and written data records were kept secure in a password protected laptop and in a locked home office.

Researcher Positionality

As a current school administrator in Washington state with experience in both rural and urban settings, I experienced the implementation process of CSCPs without any formal training or professional development to assist me in supporting staff with the transition. I approached my research with a strong belief in the value of school counseling services and supports and in the importance of collaboration between counselors and administrators. These values might have impacted how I perceived responses, particularly regarding program effectiveness and resource allocation. Additionally, several of the focus group participants were current or former colleagues. Despite the prior relationship, participants were perceived as being open and honest about their perceptions and experiences. Despite my personal experiences and relationships with some participants, I made a strong commitment to conduct this study with transparency and integrity, providing a balanced and credible analysis of the successes, challenges, and needs associated with CSCP implementation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of data analyses exploring the development and implementation of CSCPs in Washington state. For all research questions but research question five (which was addressed by qualitative findings alone), descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses provide a quantitative overview of patterns and differences across survey responses. These results are followed by qualitative findings from participant perspectives, which offer additional insight into the processes, challenges, and factors influencing implementation. Finally, the integration of various data sources provides a deeper understanding of how CSCPs were developed and implemented and how CSCPs impact student learning. Key themes include factors related to how the process unfolded, challenges encountered by individuals, schools, and districts, and impacts on school counseling program functions resulting from the enactment of Washington Senate Bill 5030. Study activities also revealed insights about the current stage of implementation across schools—highlighting variations in progress, areas of successful implementation, and ongoing needs or gaps to be addressed.

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are School and District CSCPs Aligned with the ASCA Model and SB 5030?

To understand the impact SB 5030 had on schools and districts in Washington state, I first identified levels of implementation in participating schools and districts.

Alignment: Quantitative Results

Analysis using descriptive statistics showed that most respondents reported *partial implementation* of their CSCP (n = 31, 63.3%). Fewer respondents reported *full implementation* (n = 10, 20.4%), while six respondents (12.2%) indicated that their plans were still *in development*, and only two (4.1%) reported that their school or district has *not followed through*

with implementation. Of the ten respondents who reported they were fully implemented, only 40% (n = 4) reported that they met the implementation timeline for the 2022-2023 school year. That is, only 8% of total respondents indicated that they met the timeline for full implementation of the ASCA Model in their schools or districts. Additionally, 26.6% (n = 13) of respondents indicated that they were able to meet the timeline for implementation; however, nine of those 13 reported only partial implementation.

One determining factor related to fully implementing the ASCA Model is examining the time allocated to direct student support. The ASCA Model specifies that 80% of school counselors' time is spent directly supporting students and the other 20% is spent on indirect services. Survey results indicated that 35% of respondents (n = 17) reported meeting this recommended time allocation of 80/20 (see Table 1). However, among respondents who reported full implementation of the ASCA Model, only four indicated that they met the recommended time allocation, suggesting potential gaps between reported implementation status and adherence to the model's guidelines.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between the status of implementation (*fully*, *partially*, *in development*, *not at all*) and whether schools and districts reported meeting the 80/20 requirement (*yes*, *making progress*, *no*, *unsure*). The results did not reach statistical significance, χ^2 (9, n = 49) = 16.50, p = .057 indicating that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the status of implementation of CSCPs and meeting the 80/20-time allocation requirements. It is also important to note that while this analysis is helpful for identifying potential patterns in the data, there are multiple cells with fewer than 5 observations, so these results (and chi-square results that follow) should be interpreted with caution.

Table 1

Status of Implementation and meeting the 80/20 requirements

Meeting the 80/20 requirements		Fully implemented	Partially implemented	The Plan is in development	Not at all	Total
Yes	Observed	4	13	0	0	17
	Expected	3.47	10.76	2.08	0.69	
Making progress	Observed	4	10	3	0	17
	Expected	3.47	10.76	2.08	0.69	
No	Observed	1	7	1	2	11
	Expected	2.25	6.96	1.34	0.44	
Unsure	Observed	1	1	2	0	4
	Expected	0.82	2.53	0.49	0.16	
Total		10	31	6	2	49

Another determining factor of full implementation of the ASCA Model is the recommended ratio of 250 students to one counselor. Survey data showed that of the ten respondents who indicated that they have fully implemented the ASCA Model, only 40% ($n = 4$) reported meeting the 250:1 student-counselor ratio. Similar to the 80/20 requirement, only 40% of the respondents indicated that they have fully implemented the ASCA Model which suggests there may be gap in understanding related to the meaning of full implementation. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between the status of implementation (*fully*, *partially*, *in development*, *not at all*) and schools/districts meeting the 250:1 student-counselor ratio (*no* or *yes*). The results did not reach statistical significance, χ^2 (3, $n = 49$) = 1.86, $p = 0.602$, indicating that there is not a statistically significant relationship

between the status of implementation of CSCPs and meeting the 250:1 student-counselor ratio (see Table 2).

Table 2

Status of Implementation by Area in Washington State in Comparison to the 250:1 Student-Counselor Ratio

Current 250:1 ratio		Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	The Plan is in Development	Not at all	Total
No	Observed	6	22	5	2	35
	Expected	7.14	22.14	4.29	1.49	
Yes	Observed	4	9	1	0	14
	Expected	2.86	8.86	1.71	0.57	
Total		10	31	6	2	49

An additional determining factor for schools and districts to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of their CSCPs is whether they were able to meet the timeline for implementation. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between (a) whether schools and/or districts met the established timeline with four levels: yes, they were able to meet the established timeline; they had developed an outline of a plan; they were able to implement some of the components of the ASCA Model; and no, they did not meet the timeline; and (b) the status of implementation of CSCPs in schools and districts across four levels: *fully implemented*, *partially implemented*, the plan is *in development*, or *not at all*. The results were statistically significant, χ^2 (9, n = 49) = 26.3, p = 0.002, indicating a significant association between the status of implementation of CSCPs in schools and districts and whether those schools and districts were able to meet the timeline required in SB 5030 (see Table 3).

In looking at the category where schools and districts implemented only some of the components of the CSCP to meet the timeline for implementation, most of the observed data

were higher than the expected data. This trend suggests that more participants indicated that they were able to implement some of the components of the ASCA Model across all levels of CSCP implementation than would be expected due to chance. It is also interesting to note that of the ten participants who indicated that their school has fully implemented their CSCP, six of those ten were only able to implement some of the components during the required timeline.

Table 3

Status of Implementation Compared to Meeting the Timeline for Implementation.

Met Timeline		Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	In Development	Not at all	Total
No	Observed	0	5	2	2	9
	Expected	1.84	5.69	1.102	0.367	
We developed the outline	Observed	0	2	3	0	5
	Expected	1.02	3.16	0.612	0.367	
We implemented some components	Observed	6	15	1	0	22
	Expected	4.49	13.92	2.694	0.898	
Yes	Observed	4	9	0	0	13
	Expected	2.65	8.22	1.592	0.531	
Total	Expected	10	31	6	2	49

Alignment: Qualitative Focus Group Results

Participants in the counselor focus group collectively agreed that once the initial development and implementation occurred, the SB 5030 requirements had been met. One participant stated, *"I honestly felt that the first year… getting us together to write the plan was just to check the box… the goal was accomplished, they [referring to the CSCP] are on the OSPI website as one of the examples, and that's it."* Participants in the administrator focus group stated that they relied on their school counselors to be monitoring and evaluating the

effectiveness of the CSCPs and letting them know if they have a need. Of the ten participants of the two focus groups, only two reported that they have CSCP implemented with fidelity in their school. Additionally, the same participants indicated that their schools were not in compliance with the recommended student to counselor ratio.

Alignment: Integrated Results

Focus group data supported the findings from the quantitative survey results. The data revealed inconsistencies in participants' understanding of CSCPs and what full implementation entails within schools. Across both research methods, participants indicated that levels of implementation varied significantly after the CSCPs were developed in compliance with SB 5030.

Research Question 2: How Are Schools and Districts Assessing the Effectiveness of CSCP Implementation?

As schools and districts have implemented and utilized CSCPs in schools across the state, this question explored how the model is being assessed and refined as determined by the needs of students and the greater school community.

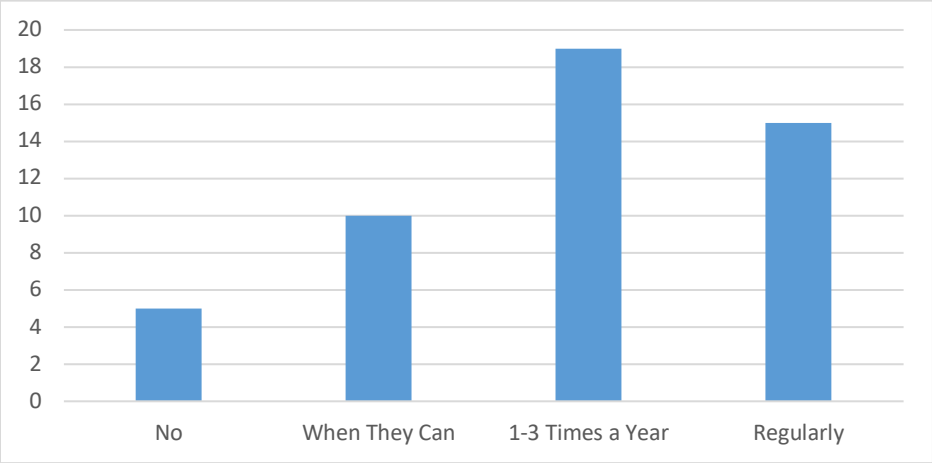
Assessment: Quantitative Results

To assess the effectiveness of CSCP implementation, survey participants were asked how often counselors are able to provide classroom lessons to students, as that is a requirement of the ASCA Model for CSCPs. When asked how often counselors can push into classrooms to do lessons with students (*never*; yes, counselors present lessons *when they can*, but we do not have a set schedule; yes, the counselors present lessons *1-3 times a year*; and yes, counselors are in classrooms presenting lessons *on a regular basis*), only 10% of participants (n = 5) stated that their counselors do not push into classrooms for lessons. This suggests that most counselors

provide classroom lessons during the school year, which is an important component in the CSCP framework (Figure 7). Participants were also asked to respond to a question about whether they believed a CSCP would have a positive impact on student development. Of the 49 participants in the survey, 85.7% (n = 42) indicated that CSCPs in school have a positive impact on student development.

Figure 7

Number of Participants Indicating the Frequency of Counselor-Taught Classroom Lessons



Assessment: Qualitative Survey Results

Three key themes emerged from the open-ended survey responses regarding how schools and districts are assessing CSCPs and their continued use after the implementation process. Respondents highlighted a combination of data-driven practices, planning and goal alignment, and areas of uncertainty or inconsistent implementation. Data-driven approaches included the use of academic, behavior and attendance records, student surveys, time studies, and graduation rates to inform program effectiveness. Planning and goal alignment involved setting counselor goals, integrating them with school and/or district improvement plans, and conducting regular reviews to monitor progress. Additionally, several respondents indicated uncertainty about processes or

measures of success, reflecting variation in how CSCPs are implemented and assessed across schools and districts (see Table 4).

Table 4

Themes from Survey Responses Explaining How Schools and Districts are Assessing CSCPs.

Theme	Examples	Survey Responses
Data-driven	Using behavior, attendance, SEL surveys, time studies, and graduation rates to guide practices and evaluate CSCP success.	*"Monitoring Use of Time Study data, anecdotal feedback from counselors, behavior/attendance data, suicide intervention questionnaire data."* (District Admin) *"We are reviewing the data we have access to. We are doing surveys to gather information."* (Elementary Counselor) *"In our school we track data and time usage closely. We also track the reason for students accessing the counselors."* (MS Admin)
Planning and goal alignment	Developing counselor goals and aligning them to comprehensive plans and holding annual reviews to ensure alignment with school improvement plans.	*"Part of the plan is developing goals for our counselors' time and efforts and we measure success based on these goals."* (High School Admin) *"Our CSCP goals are also closely tied to our larger building SIP goals so we are part of a system working to improve an overall goal rather than working independently."* (Elementary Counselor) *"Annual Admin/Counselor meeting to review goals for the year; regular meetings to check in on progress."* (MS Admin)
Inconsistent implementation or uncertainty	Many respondents were unsure about processes, measures of success, or whether the plan was being implemented effectively at their site.	*"Not sure."* (Multiple respondents across roles) *"They are not assessing success."* (HS Counselor) *"I have no idea."* (MS Counselor)

Assessment: Qualitative Focus Group Results

Focus group data supported findings from the quantitative survey results. Participants in the counselor focus group collectively agreed that once the initial development and implementation occurred, the SB 5030 requirements had been met. Participants in the administrator focus group stated that they relied on their school counselors to be monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the CSCPs and letting them know if they had a need.

Participants in both focus groups highlighted themes such as the challenge of moving past the implementation phase due to both administrative and counselor turnover. Successful programs relied on steady leadership and continued advocacy. One participant stated that during the first year of implementation and the year after, their district had a counselor on special assignment who led the CSCP work throughout the district. Due to budget cuts, that position was eliminated, resulting in a lack of forward movement. Without additional support, one counselor said, *"It just feels like there's so much time spent in survival mode or addressing immediate needs… there is not consistency year over year where we can build."* Moving beyond the implementation proved to be challenging because the process did not include a plan to support the ongoing assessment of the CSCP plan. Focus group members unilaterally agreed that there had been no follow-up to the plan that was submitted to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Assessment: Integrated Results

To better understand the extent to which schools and districts are assessing their CSCPs, survey data were analyzed to assess key components of CSCP implementation. Quantitative survey data revealed that school counselors were commonly able to deliver classroom lessons. Qualitative survey responses suggested themes of data-driven practices, planning and alignment, and inconsistent implementation, which informed the development of focus group questions and allowed for deeper exploration of these patterns. Focus group results showed that assessment of the implementation of CSCPs was either minimal or not occurring.

Research Question 3: What Successes Have Schools and Districts Identified Related to Implementing CSCPs?

For many schools and districts, the transition to CSCPs represented a significant shift in how school counseling departments traditionally operated. As schools and districts adapted to this new framework, this question sought to identify successes and positive outcomes related to CSCP implementation.

Successes: Quantitative Results

Only 35% of respondents (n = 17) reported that their school or district had implemented a CSCP, while 65% reported either not having a CSCP (n = 24) or being unsure if one was in place (n = 8). When asked about implementation following the passage of SB 5030, 84% of respondents (n = 41) reported that their school or district had either partially implemented (n = 31) or fully implemented (n = 10) a CSCP. Quantitative survey data further indicated strong participant support for the potential impact of CSCP implementation. Specifically, 85.7% of respondents (n = 42) reported that they believed implementing a CSCP would positively influence student development within their schools (see Table 5). This question was designed to understand participants' perceptions of the CSCP plan implementation across areas of student growth.

Table 5

Belief that CSCPs will Positively Impact Student Development by Participants' Current Role in Schools.

Current Role	No	Yes
District level administrator	0	2
Elementary school administrator	1	6
Elementary school counselor	2	5
High school administrator	1	7
High school counselor	2	10
Middle school administrator	0	6
Middle school counselor	1	6
Total	7	42

Successes: Qualitative Survey Data

Survey responses described successes participants experienced because of CSCP implementation. Open-ended survey responses generated four key themes: increased direct student support, a reduction in non-counseling tasks, data-driven practices and a positive perception of the school counseling program (see Table 6). One participant stated, *"I have a lot more time for counseling and classroom presentations" and another stated, "it has a better data-based evaluation model."* These findings suggest that the CSCPs have enhanced both the structure and effectiveness of school counseling services and school counselors have a better ability to structure their time to best meet the needs of students.

Table 6

Successes reported by survey participants because of CSCP implementation.

Theme	Explanation	Sample Quotes
Increased direct student support	Counselors are more able to spend an increased amount of time working directly with students (individual, small-group, or classroom) in addition to allocating time to students with high needs.	- *"I have a lot more time for counseling and classroom presentations…lots more time to focus on the mental health and social emotional and behavioral need of our students."* – Elementary Counselor - *"Direct student support…small groups…shift to focus more of their time on students instead of planning and paperwork."* – HS Admin
Reduction of non-counseling tasks	Counselors' responsibilities are more focused on counseling; administrative and classroom coverage tasks are minimized.	- *"District makes sure counselors do not do class coverage or discipline."* – Elementary Counselor - *"Having an overall district focus regarding using counseling to support students."* – Middle School Counselor
Data-driven practices	Using data to guide practice and decision making.	- *"It has a better data-based evaluation model."* – HS Admin - *"Data Collection, Decrease in referrals, stakeholder input."* – Middle School Counselor
Positive perception of school counseling program	Administrators and counselors perceive value in the program for providing guidance, frameworks, or collaborative opportunities.	- *"Common language when talking with colleagues in other buildings."* – HS Counselor - *"This has given counselors a place to share their successes and challenges to District."* – HS Counselor

Successes: Qualitative Focus Group Results

Analysis of focus group responses identified multiple themes regarding successes of implementing a CSCP (see Table 7). The most identified success was the shift in mindset regarding school counseling. Participants stated that implementing a CSCP provided them with a clear framework to describe their role and daily activities and increased collaboration with other colleagues. With that, the professional role of school counselors shifted, and counselors were seen as proactive building leaders whose role is to help students. One participant stated, *"Counselors are seen more as proactive versus reacting to problems."* Participants also noted that implementing the ASCA Model has allowed for more opportunities to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) goals and curriculum into the schools, resulting in an increased recognition of mental health support amongst school staff. Another finding was improved collaboration between administrators and counselors and how that collaboration led to the use of counselor time and responsibilities. Because the expectations of a school counselor were clearer and ASCA requires counselors and administrators to meet regularly, counselors were no longer being asked to take on responsibilities outside of the school counselor requirements.

Focus group participants described their perceptions of where their schools and districts were in the implementation process and discussed their ability to implement the ASCA Model with fidelity. One of the themes that emerged during both focus groups was the collaborative process that was used to develop the initial CSCP plan after SB 5030 passed in 2021. Participants emphasized the important role of district-level leadership in guiding the development and implementation of comprehensive counseling plans following the passage of the 2021 bill.

Table 7

Focus Group Themes on the Successes of the Implementation of the ASCA Model.

Theme	Explanation	Sample Quotes
Shift in mindset regarding school counseling	Participants described a shift in how counselors perceive their work, moving from reactive or individualized services toward a systemic approach focused on serving all students.	*"It's a different mentality of being a school counselor." / "We reflect on random acts of counseling and want all students to receive certain things."*
Professional role of school counselors	The counseling model contributed to greater recognition of counselors as proactive program leaders rather than reactive support staff.	*"They are creating curriculums… planning things to support the team." / "It's made the counseling position more respectable."*
Integration of SEL into school goals	Counseling and social-emotional learning (SEL) were beginning to be integrated into broader school improvement planning and educational priorities.	*"SEL has come to be a part of our actual goal setting." / "We have SEL goals as well as academic goals." / "Things are aligning."*
Increased recognition of mental health support	Participants noted growing awareness among educators of the importance of student mental health and its relationship to learning, behavior patterns and attendance.	*"Helping to educate teachers about the importance of supporting mental health." / "Mental health is a legitimate concern." / "It goes very well with the whole child."*
Improved collaboration between administrators and counselors	Formalized structures and planning processes fostered increased communication and collaboration between administrators and counseling staff.	*"It provides a road map for conversations between admin and counselors." / "There are open conversations happening about the need for direct services."*
Use of counselor time and responsibilities	Participants described clearer expectations for counselor roles and more deliberate allocation of time toward student support activities.	*"It allows for a more intentional use of time." / "We don't necessarily ask them to do things we would have asked them to do in the past."*

Across districts, leadership was primarily provided by district personnel, school administrators, and school counselors. These committee members were responsible for coordinating efforts across schools and districts to ensure compliance with SB 5030 and putting policy into practice. One participant described this role, noting, *"We have a high school counselor…who worked with our counselors and their administration to really build that and start to implement the pieces."* Another recalled, *"The assistant superintendent…led it, as well as the director in charge of counselors."* These accounts suggest that strong leadership was essential for initiating the plan, providing guidance, and sustaining momentum during the early

stages of implementation. Additionally, the collaborative structure allowed districts to use expertise from multiple stakeholders and ensure that planning was guided by compliance with the bill and what schools and districts were capable of implementing.

Successes: Integrated Results

One consistent theme across the study was an increased understanding of school counselor roles and CSCPs. Qualitative findings further supported this trend, with both survey and focus group participants highlighting the importance of collaboration between school counselors and administrators in clarifying roles and aligning efforts toward shared student outcomes.

Participants described how CSCP implementation has created opportunities for greater communication and cohesion. For example, one high school counselor noted, "*This has given counselors a place to share their successes and challenges to District*." Similarly, an administrator emphasized increased intentionality in integrating counseling work into broader school goals, stating, *"And we also have SEL as part of our school improvement plan too."* Together, these findings suggest that CSCP implementation not only enhances role clarity but also fosters stronger alignment between counseling programs and school-wide initiatives.

Across both focus groups, participants consistently identified increased intentionality in classroom instruction as a notable strength associated with CSCP implementation. Specifically, counselors described more deliberate integration of lessons aligned with student needs and standards. One participant shared, *"Ours run lessons, but our counselor builds the majority of the advisory lessons too, so she is looking at the SEL standards and how do we pop those in there."* Another participant emphasized the importance of collaboration, stating, *"because I need to be making these lessons, I need to be partnering with these teachers."* Together, these findings

suggest that CSCP implementation has contributed to more structured and collaborative approaches to classroom-based counseling services which directly impacts student outcomes. School counselors and administrators are then able to use the student data to determine the effectiveness of the CSCP.

Research Question 4: What Have Been Barriers for Schools and District to Implement a CSCP?

Schools and districts identified varying levels of progress in their implementation of CSCPs and alignment with the ASCA Model. Identifying and understanding the barriers to implementation provides greater insight into the supports and resources schools and districts may need to fully implement CSCPs.

Barriers: Quantitative Results

To understand the barriers to implementation of CSCPs in schools, I first looked at the development process for CSCPs. Survey participants were asked if they had participated in the development of the CSCP their school or district implemented and were given three possible response options: *yes*, *no*, and *I am new to my school/district and the plan was already established*. Of the 49 participants, 43% ($n = 21$) responded that yes, they were part of the development process, 51% ($n = 25$) responded that they were not part of the development process, and 6% ($n = 3$) responded that they were new to their school or district.

A chi-square analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the status of implementation and whether survey participants were involved in the development of their school/district's CSCP. The results were statistically significant, χ^2 (6, $n = 49$) = 13.4, $p = 0.038$, indicating a significant association between the status of implementation of CSCPs in schools

and districts and whether those participants were involved in the development of CSCPs in their schools or districts (see Table 8).

Table 8

Analysis of Implementation, by Involvement in the Development

Involved in development		Fully implemented	Partially implemented	In development	Not at all	Total
Yes	Observed	2	17	2	0	21
	Expected	4.29	13.29	2.57	0.86	21
No	Observed	8	12	4	1	25
	Expected	5.10	15.82	3.06	1.02	25
I am new	Observed	0	2	0	1	3
	Expected	0.612	1.9	0.37	0.122	3
Total	Observed	10	31	6	2	49
	Expected	10	31	6	2	49

In the category of partial implementation of the CSCP, there was a higher rate than expected of those who participated in the development of the CSCP suggesting a relationship between involvement in the development of CSCPs and their implementation status.

Barriers: Qualitative Survey Data

A qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey responses identified six key themes representing barriers to CSCP implementation in schools and districts (see Table 9). The two most frequently cited themes were time constraints and funding and resources. One high school administrator noted, *"Time and funding are always the issue,"* while a middle school counselor stated, *"Lack of funding, lack of time to have training for more than just the counselors."* Related themes included staffing challenges and ratios and competing responsibilities or non-counseling tasks, which are closely linked to funding and resources. Insufficient funding limited the ability to hire adequate personnel, and when staffing was inadequate, counselors were more likely to be assigned non-counseling responsibilities, reducing time for direct student services.

Table 9

Barriers to CSCP Implementation Reported by Survey Participants

Theme	Explanation	Sample Quotes
Time constraints	Lack of time to complete required responsibilities and workload	*"TIME it all takes." – Elementary Counselor* *"Same as above – the time to plan."* – Middle School Counselor
Staffing challenges and ratios	Difficulty meeting the student to counselor ratio and staffing shortages	*"Our ratio is about 500:1."* – Middle School Admin *"We will never have the funding for a 1:250 ratio."* – High School Counselor
Administrative and district support	Limited understanding of counselor roles and limited guidance from school and district leaders reduce effectiveness.	*"Little actual counseling leadership experience at the district level to support."* – High School Counselor
Competing responsibilities and non-counseling tasks	Counselors being assigned tasks outside of their main responsibilities which impacts time needed for direct services.	*"There's so much paperwork…other non-counseling tasks…we can't run the CSCP as we need to."* – Elementary Counselor *"Key elements…are not met or honored by your district."* – High School Counselor
Funding and resources	A lack of funding restricts staffing and professional development opportunities.	*"Time and funding are always an issue."* – High School Admin
Implementation and buy-in challenges	A lack of understanding by administrators and teachers makes pushing into classrooms for lessons challenging and makes the counseling model reactive instead of proactive.	*"Teachers are too busy…or maybe teachers are not interested in counseling lessons."* – Elementary Counselor

Two additional themes were administrative and district support and implementation and buy-in challenges. One middle school counselor shared identified as barriers, *"Lack of understanding by admin…stressful to constantly advocate and educate about what counselors could and should be doing,"* while an elementary counselor stated that they had received, *"Almost zero district support."* Limited administrative support, coupled with a lack of teacher and staff buy-in, creates significant obstacles to fully implementing a CSCP and sustaining its key components.

Barriers: Qualitative Focus Group Results

An analysis of the focus group responses identified four overarching themes regarding the barriers to the implementation of CSCPs (see Table 10). Lack of authentic implementation was the most predominant theme. Members in each focus group identified that they believed the development process of the CSCP for their school or district occurred to meet the timeline stated in SB 5030 but lacked a plan to authentically implement the CSCP in their school or district.

Table 10

Focus Group Themes on Barriers to Implementation of the ASCA Model

Theme	Explanation	Representative Quotes
Lack of authentic implementation	Initial CSCP planning was often done for compliance with the SB 5030 timeline rather than meaningful implementation and limited follow-up.	*"I honestly felt that the first year…getting us together to write the plan was just to check the box." "…the goal was accomplished, they are on the OSPI website as one of the examples, and that's it."*
Loss of momentum due to staffing and leadership changes	Progress was disrupted by staff turnover and leadership transitions.	*"…we lost staff, and then we lost traction…he left the district to pursue other opportunities…" – "…we were actually on the cusp of making the decision to try and go for [RAMP]…that is the closest we ever gotten to the model work in my opinion."*
Partial implementation	Components of CSCPs were implemented inconsistently.	*"…we brush off pieces of it and try. We try to run groups…we try to collect data, but there is never a way for all of the pieces to come together in one year."*
Limited evidence of student outcomes	Participants noted minimal measurable growth in student outcomes due to inconsistent interventions, cohort variability, and external factors.	*"Nothing that comes to mind…no data result, the data results we can point to." "…we don't have consistency…how do we compare this year's seniors to past students?"*

Focus group participants also discussed the loss of momentum due to staffing and leadership changes impacting their ability to continue either the development or implementation process. When the people doing the work or leading the process left the school or district, it led to a lack of forward progress if the new employees did not share the same goals and priorities. It could also lead to partial implementation of the CSCPs. When schools and districts implemented only some of the components of the ASCA Model or the implementation process stalled due to a

lack of fidelity, a full comprehensive school counseling program was not achieved. In addition, participants discussed limited evidence of positive student outcomes, which could discourage continued implementation if measurable growth or change was not seen.

During the administrator focus group, one participant responded to a question about meeting the 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) with laughter, suggesting that this benchmark is widely perceived as unattainable. Similarly, a participant in the counselor focus group highlighted structural funding limitations, stating, *"because we have such a lot of our funding, like if you look at the prototypical model, it is not aligned to having even one full-time counselor in each building, let alone meeting the ASCA-recommended ratio, so then you can do services."*

A prominent related theme that emerged was the challenge of unfunded mandates. One administrator in the focus group explained, *"…there's a lot of things in education that are legislated to us to do without a lot of, um, oversight. And ultimately there's a lot of things in education you are going to just trust the system is working and kind of cross your fingers that if somebody feels like it is not meeting their need they'll let you know, and you'll try to adjust and support in which ways you can."* Participants expressed concern that without dedicated funding for SB 5030, the legislation risked becoming another mandate lacking ongoing evaluation and support, limiting its effectiveness.

A key factor contributing to these challenges was a lack of understanding of CSCPs among teaching staff. For example, one elementary school counselor shared, *"Teachers are too busy…or maybe teachers are not interested in counseling lessons,"* highlighting both structural and perceptual barriers. Participants emphasized that this lack of teacher understanding points to an ongoing need for increased awareness and education about the purpose and value of CSCPs

within the school setting. This concern was echoed in the focus groups, where one participant noted, *"I also think that for as much as my administrators don't understand what a comprehensive school counseling program is, my teachers don't understand what a comprehensive school counseling program is."*

Barriers: Integrated Results

Both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study identified significant barriers to the implementation of CSCPs within schools and districts. Quantitative findings revealed that staffing limitations and challenges meeting the requirements for CSCPs were among the primary challenges impacting implementation. These findings were reinforced by the qualitative data, in which participants described how insufficient staffing and limited funding negatively impacted their ability to fully implement CSCPs.

Research Question 5- What Continuing Support Do Schools and Districts Need from the State to Effectively Continue A CSCP?

Schools and districts have ongoing needs related to CSCP implementation. This question explored how governing bodies in Washington State can support both the implementation process and the long-term sustainability of CSCPs.

Support Needs: Qualitative Survey Results

Analysis of open-ended survey item responses revealed four major themes regarding continued support for schools and districts around CSCP implementation: funding and resources, time constraints and competing responsibilities, professional development and training, and systemic challenges related to equity and student needs (see Table 11). Funding and staffing emerged as primary needs, with participants consistently reporting that insufficient funding limited the ability to hire qualified and effective counselors, maintain recommended student-to-

counselor ratios, or provide necessary professional development. High student-to-counselor ratios and the assignment of non-counseling tasks further constrained counselors' ability to deliver comprehensive services. Participants also emphasized the importance of targeted professional development and training and leadership support to facilitate CSCP implementation, noting that a lack of understanding and/or advocacy at the administrative level stalled progress. Finally, systemic support needs, including high-need populations affected by trauma, poverty, and mental health issues, added more constraints to the program, making consistent and equitable ongoing implementation difficult.

Table 11

Survey Response Themes Regarding how the State can Continue or Increase Support for the Continuation of CSCPs

Theme	Explanation	Sample Quotes
Funding and resources	Insufficient funding limits staffing, professional development, data collection and time for direct services. High caseloads for counselors also impact the CSCP.	*"How do we cover the costs in a shrinking budget climate!"- District Admin* *"Funding and consistency of programs and systems". - High School Counselor* *"More funding from the state and ongoing PD."- Middle School Counselor*
Time constraints and competing responsibilities	Non-counseling tasks such as 504 plans, testing administration or administrative duties reduce time for direct services.	*"Taking many of the non-counselor duties off our plates could be done at the district level." – Elementary School Counselor* *"…lots of problems with families…we are still reacting because things are very unpredictable."- High School Counselor*
Professional development and training	Targeted professional development and training for counselors and administrators on the ASCA Model and the roles and responsibilities of school counselors	*"Admin might support the concept more if we had the option to influence plan development."- Elementary School Counselor* *"District level leadership whose dedicated job is a district level counselor."- High School Counselor*
Systemic challenges and equity concerns	When schools and districts have high-need populations due to trauma, poverty, and mental health, more support and training is required to meet the needs for those students.	*"…kids of all needs (autism, anxiety, depression, eating disorders) take just as much time as when I worked at a high trauma school."- High School Counselor*

Support Needs: Qualitative Focus Group Results

The themes identified from the survey data were used to inform the focus group questions, enabling a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding what school counselors and administrators need to build upon and sustain existing CSCPs within their schools or districts. Participants in the focus group identified the need to have increased and dedicated funding support furthering the implementation of CSCPs. One middle school administrator noted that with only a half time counselor, they are unable to meet the CSCP requirements for student-to-counselor ratios, delivering classroom lessons and meeting the 80/20 allocation for direct and indirect services.

Several focus group participants emphasized the need for ongoing professional development for school counselors, teachers, and administrators to strengthen understanding of how CSCPs operate within schools and contribute to overall school culture. One administrator acknowledged that he *"did not fully know what full implementation looks like,"* highlighting a significant gap in implementation knowledge. Without this understanding, administrators may struggle to effectively support or sustain implementation efforts. Counselors further noted that administrative leadership is essential in guiding CSCP work and emphasized the importance of ensuring that school leaders are well-informed about CSCP frameworks and practices.

Support Needs: Integrated Results

Across both qualitative data sources, participants consistently identified aligned themes regarding the supports needed from the state, particularly increased funding and resource allocation, as well as the need for ongoing professional development and training. In response to a survey question about what is needed to continue the work, one middle school counselor succinctly stated, *"more funding from the state and ongoing PD."*

These themes are closely interconnected, as providing meaningful professional development and training depends on schools and districts having appropriate and sufficient funding to support these efforts. Across both the survey and focus groups, participants emphasized that many of their needs, including professional development, additional counseling staff, and broader staffing increases to better meet student needs, ultimately require an increase in financial support.

Synthesis of Themes for Research Questions

Although the analysis of each research question yielded a range of distinct themes, several recurring ideas emerged across the research data. These overlapping themes signify areas of significance for participants and highlight key factors shaping the implementation of CSCPs.

Notably, lack of funding emerged as a cross-cutting theme, identified as a barrier to implementation, a limitation to ongoing assessment of CSCPs, and a critical need identified by schools and districts for sustained support from the state. Similarly, data-driven practices were highlighted both as a key approach to assessing CSCP effectiveness and as an indicator of successful implementation, suggesting that the use of data is essential to both accountability and program impact.

Collaboration and goal alignment also surfaced as prominent, interconnected themes. These were reflected in the extent to which schools and districts align with the ASCA Model, in how they assess their current CSCPs, and in reported successes related to implementation. The recurrence of these themes across multiple research questions highlights their importance in shaping both the process and outcomes of CSCP implementation.

The intersection of these themes provides a more comprehensive understanding of how schools and districts in Washington state are implementing SB 5030. Rather than existing in

isolation, these factors interact in ways that either support or constrain progress, offering important insights into what is needed for effective and sustainable CSCP implementation.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the development process and implementation of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP) as required by Senate Bill 5030 (SB 5030) in Washington state through the experiences of school or district counselors and administrators. Using a mixed-methods design, survey and focus group data were analyzed to understand perceptions of the development process, examine fidelity of implementation, and identify successes and barriers related to the implementation of CSCPs in schools. This chapter discusses research findings, implications for current practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings from this study revealed several key themes related to the successes of CSCP development and implementation, the barriers that hinder implementation or progress, the ways in which schools and districts assess their programs, and the types of ongoing support needed from the state. Notably, many of these themes were not isolated to a single research question but instead emerged across multiple research questions. For example, limited resources and the need for increased funding were consistently identified in relation to implementation barriers, program assessment, and ongoing support needs. Similarly, collaboration between school counselors and administrators surfaced as a central theme in both the development and implementation process, as well as in descriptions of program success. Time constraints for counselors also appeared across multiple questions, particularly in discussions of implementation challenges and the supports needed to sustain effective programming.

The overlap of these themes highlights the interconnected nature of CSCP implementation. Challenges such as funding limitations, insufficient time, and lack of collaboration are not discrete issues; rather, they are deeply embedded within the school system that shapes counselors' roles and responsibilities. As a result, these factors influence the ability of schools and districts to implement CSCPs with fidelity and to sustain them over time. Understanding how these themes intersect provides a more comprehensive picture of what is required to build and maintain effective, systemic school counseling programs that ultimately support positive student outcomes.

Alignment of CSCPs with the ASCA Model and SB 5030

Schools and districts in Washington state were expected to have CSCPs established by the end of the 2021-2022 school year and begin implementation in the 2022-2023 school year. Nearly three years have passed since schools and districts were expected to implement CSCPs, yet few respondents indicated they have been able to fully implement the ASCA Model. In fact, 42 of the 49 respondents indicated that their plan was either partially implemented or still in development. The following sections discuss themes that emerged regarding CSCP alignment or misalignment with SB 5030.

Misunderstanding of ASCA Model Requirements

Research findings suggest there may be a misunderstanding of what full implementation of CSCPs in schools look like. For example, only two focus group participants stated that their schools have fully implemented CSCPs, however, these two participants also indicated that their schools were not in alignment with the specific components for CSCPs. Similarly, survey results revealed a discrepancy among those who reported they have reached full implementation in that they also reported that many of those sites did not follow the 80/20 allocation of time between

direct and indirect services to students. Additionally, only 14 survey participants indicated that they were able to achieve the 250:1 counselor-to-student ratio recommended by ASCA for CSCPs. Most schools or districts indicated that they were not able to meet this requirement. Of the ten participants who indicated that they had fully implemented the CSCP model into their schools, only four indicated they were able to meet the 250:1 requirement. In the focus groups, all participants indicated that their schools did not meet the 250:1 requirement, which further supports the suggestion that schools and districts may not fully understand the various requirements of full implementation of the ASCA Model.

Adherence to the Timeline

The legislated timeline requiring districts to develop a plan within one year and then proceed immediately to implementation proved challenging for many schools and districts. Only 1 in 5 participants in the current study reported fully implementing their CSCP. This finding suggests that the timeline outlined in SB 5030 may have been insufficient for getting schools and districts to full implementation within one year. Additionally, there was a statistically significant relationship between adherence to the established timeline and the likelihood of full implementation, suggesting that schools and districts that met the timeline were more likely to have fully implemented their CSCP.

Assessing CSCP Implementation Effectiveness

Participants were asked in both the survey and focus groups how they assess CSCP implementation and effectiveness. Across all participants, counselors providing classroom lessons was one moderately strong indicator of CSCP implementation. Beyond meeting this requirement, strategies employed to assess CSCP implementation varied across both data sources and were closely tied to each school's or district's stage of implementation. Some participants

reported using strategies such as administrative conferences and data-driven decision-making to evaluate progress. In contrast, others described challenges with inconsistent implementation, which made it more difficult to establish clear or reliable assessment practices.

A key component of the CSCP is school counselors delivering classroom-based lessons focused on SEL and mental health supports. The extent and frequency of these lessons can provide a meaningful indicator for schools and districts to evaluate the effectiveness of CSCP implementation. When classroom-based lessons are delivered, students are equipped with knowledge and skills that can positively impact academic performance, behavior, and attendance, while also contributing to a supportive and positive school culture and climate (Pyne, 2011).

Shared Planning Time During Administrative Conference

The annual administrator conference was also highlighted as an important component of the CSCP development process where counselors and administrators meet to discuss annual goals and the student and school data, they are using to support those goals. Through that collaborative process, school administrators have a clearer understanding of what school counselors will be focusing on for the school year and how administrators can best support the work of the school counselors. Both school counselors and administrators identified the importance of the annual administrative conference to establish and review program goals. These goals are intended to address identified student needs and should be informed by student data (Fye, 2022). Through this process, counselors present their data-driven goals and engage in ongoing review with administrators to ensure alignment and accountability.

The planning time at the annual administrative conference also plays a key role in refining administrators' understanding of the targeted interventions school counselors use to

support students, as well as the broader impact of the CSCP on student and school success. Through this process, counselors and administrators develop a shared understanding of the program's framework, including its core components, structures, and intended outcomes, while also establishing a common language for discussing counselor roles, student needs, and program effectiveness. This alignment fosters greater collaboration and strengthens trust by increasing transparency around the scope and impact of the counselor's work within the school (Pyne, 2011).

As one elementary school counselor reflected, *"More standard practice in terms of delivering services throughout our elementary group, more data, more connection to our building SIP goals and district goals. With practice, we are learning more about the forms and how to fill them out accurately, and the data has helped to steer us in directions that are effective in practice, and to tweak those practices."* This collaborative process along with using student data can strengthen the impact of the CSCP and the overall climate and culture of the school.

Data-Driven Practices

Participants across both the survey and focus groups report using student data, including attendance, behavior, and academic performance, to inform decisions about how school counselors respond to student needs. In addition, school counselors and administrators are incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) data into their evaluation of student progress and the effectiveness of the CSCP. Collectively, these data sources provide important evidence of the CSCP's impact on the broader school community.

School counselors also utilize time studies, a key component of CSCP implementation, to examine how their time is allocated and to better understand the reasons students seek counseling support. Through this process, counselors track their daily tasks and the time they spent doing

them to see if how their time is being allocated to direct and indirect services. As one middle school administrator explained, *"In our school we track data and time usage closely. We also track the reason for students accessing the counselors."* This ongoing collection and analysis of data supports continuous refinement and improvement of the CSCP.

However, several participants indicated inconsistencies in data collection practices. Some reported that data are not collected systematically, while others expressed uncertainty about how CSCPs are assessed or believed that evaluation is primarily the responsibility of the district office. When CSCPs are not consistently assessed, opportunities for program improvement are limited, which may ultimately hinder the program's ability to effectively support student outcomes.

Inconsistent Implementation

Participants reported varying degrees of implementation in both the survey and focus groups. Counselors reported that they have experienced challenges with moving past the implementation process and refining their CSCP. One high school counselor stated, *"I think that it just goes back to the fact that we haven't been able to really put anything in place…"* In the survey, several participants identified that assessment of the implemented CSCP is not happening, or they are unsure how it is being assessed.

Importantly, most focus group participants felt that schools and districts completed their CSCP plan to *"check a box"* rather than to have an authentic and sustainable plan to support students and the school. Without having an authentic and sustainable plan for how to properly implement the CSCP in schools and how to assess the success of the plan, it is difficult for schools and districts to achieve full implementation.

Several participants reported that CSCP development meetings were often focused on completing the plan to meet requirements, rather than developing a clear strategy for implementation. For schools and districts with limited prior knowledge of the ASCA Model and the requirements of CSCPs, this represented a significant shift in understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. In an earlier study in Washington state around CSCPs (see Sink et al., 2008), quality and integrity of the implementation process were found to directly impact the success of CSCPs, and the quality of the CSCP was linked to improved student learning outcomes. In order for CSCPs to have a positive impact on students and their academic growth, CSCPs must be implemented fully and with fidelity (Fye et al., 2018).

Successes Related to SB5030 Implementation

Study participants noted some important successes attributed to the CSCP development process. Collaboration led to a shared understanding of CSCPs across school roles, an increase in positive perceptions of the school counseling programs, and an integration of SEL and mental health supports in schools. Additionally, counselors felt more supported and had non-counseling tasks removed from their responsibilities. These findings are discussed below.

Collaborative CSCP Development Process

District-level leadership and staff collaboration were positive themes related to CSCP development. Both counselors and administrators reported that CSCP development was led by district office personnel and involved representatives from schools. This collaborative process allowed for school and district leaders to have a clearer understanding of the school counselor role and have a common language around what school counseling looks like when properly implemented. This invitation to school counseling stakeholders into the development process

allowed school counselors to have buy-in to the CSCPs and share what their nuanced role really looks like schools.

Increased Positive Perceptions of School Counseling Programs

Both school counselors and administrators reported the utility of the collaborative process that took place between school and district administrators and school counselors in developing CSCPs. Through this collaborative process, counselors and administrators were able to develop goals to align their counseling departments with not only the ASCA Model but also school improvement plans (SIPs). The collaborative process also allowed for counselors and administrators to have a common understanding of the professional roles and responsibilities of counselors, the meaning and intent behind CSCPs, and an understanding of common terminology regarding school counseling. These shared understandings also contributed to a shift in mindset of how school counselors impact students and the school system. As a result, counselors reported feeling more supported in their work, as administrators had a clearer understanding of both the ASCA Model and the comprehensive role of school counselors. Additionally, administrators reported that because they had a clearer understanding of the counselor's role, they had more trust in their abilities to work with students and contribute to the overall school culture.

Integration of Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Support

Schools and districts have reported an increase in student mental health needs following the COVID-19 pandemic (Morris et al., 2021) during which many students experienced prolonged isolation and relied on distance learning. For students in grades K–8, this disruption occurred during critical developmental years, significantly impacting their ability to socialize appropriately and engage effectively with both peers and teachers. As a result, the transition back to full-time, in-person learning has been accompanied by an increase in anxiety and depression

among students (Geesa et al., 2023). Many students and teachers were not adequately prepared to manage these challenges, creating additional demands on schools to address both the academic and social-emotional needs of students in this post-pandemic context.

Because of this increase, school counselors were routinely tasked with developing support plans, running small groups and working with students and families on coping strategies. With the transition to the ASCA Model and implementing CSCPs, several participants noted that they have more time to support students with their mental health needs and their social-emotional learning. One elementary school counselor reported, *"I have a lot more time for counseling and classroom presentations; connecting families to resources; helping teachers with behaviors; lots more time to focus on the mental health and social emotional and behavioral need of our students."* When students are receiving the social-emotional and mental health support they need, they can focus more on their academics (Burnham et al., 2024).

In addition, some schools are incorporating the social-emotion learning (SEL) work that school counselors are doing into their school improvement plans (SIPs), highlighting the shift in mindset of administrators regarding the role of counselors and how counselors positively impact student development, academics, behavior and attendance. This work contributes to school-wide planning that is more focused and tailored to the needs of the students to improve academic success, behavior and attendance.

Increase of Direct Student Support and Reduction of Non-Counseling Tasks

Historically, school counseling has often functioned as a "catch-all" role within education. Counselors have frequently been viewed as utility players and, as a result, were assigned a wide range of responsibilities outside their professional scope, including administering state and AP testing, supervising students, substituting in classrooms, and

completing various administrative tasks. When counselors are tasked with duties unrelated to their role, their capacity to provide direct support for students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs is significantly limited (Fye et al., 2018).

With the development and implementation of CSCPs, both school counselors and administrators have gained a clearer understanding of appropriate counselor roles and responsibilities. Through collaborative planning and ongoing communication, Washington state counselors and administrators are increasingly working together to protect counselor time from non-counseling duties. As one middle school administrator noted, *"I think the other benefit is just we know that there are open conversations about the need for direct services for students."*

This collaborative relationship is critical, as it helps ensure that counselors can dedicate more of their time to direct and indirect student services. Those direct and indirect services impact student performance and achievement and can greatly enhance the school climate and culture (Carey et al., 2018). In turn, this not only enhances support for student well-being but also contributes to greater role clarity and increased job satisfaction among school counselors (see Randick et al., 2018).

Barriers to CSCP Implementation

SB 5030 functions as an unfunded mandate, which creates significant challenges for schools and districts during both the development and implementation of CSCPs. Key barriers included staffing limitations, the absence of measurable outcomes, competing priorities, and time constraints, all of which are discussed below. Additionally, not all school counselors and administrators were involved in the development process, which limited stakeholder buy-in and made effective implementation more difficult.

Unfunded Mandates

The lack of specific, allocated funding to implement SB 5030 emerged as a key consideration related to schools' and districts' ability to successfully implement CSCPs. One high school administrator noted, *"It is really odd that the bill did not affect the prototypical funding model or come with funds to train staff. This feels like a classic Olympia unfunded mandate,"* highlighting concerns about accountability and support. For many schools and districts, transitioning to a new service delivery model for school counseling placed considerable strain on existing systems.

In addition to the limited timeline for developing CSCPs, Washington state did not allocate dedicated funding to support their creation and implementation. The ASCA Model requires a significant shift in how school counselors are utilized, including identifying appropriate roles and responsibilities. Without adequate financial resources, this level of systemic change presents a significant challenge, making it difficult for schools and districts to fully reach or sustain effective implementation.

Although districts were provided with limited, short-term funding to support initial program development, these resources were neither sustained nor exclusively designated for CSCP development. At the same time, districts were navigating multiple educational initiatives, for example: shifts in curriculum, requiring leaders to make tough decisions about how to allocate funds across multiple priorities.

Schools and districts also found it challenging that the funding provided was restricted to a single fiscal year, which also limited schools' and districts' ability to fund the long-term infrastructure necessary for successful implementation. Although some schools and districts were able to use these funds to initiate the development of their CSCPs, they lacked ongoing

financial support to sustain implementation, conduct program evaluation, or address any additional needs over time. Structural constraints such as time and funding, gaps in stakeholder understanding may significantly hinder effective CSCP implementation. Addressing these gaps may be critical to strengthening program fidelity and sustainability.

Administrative Support

As with any initiative, CSCPs depends on consistent and coordinated support from all stakeholders. When that support is missing, implementation efforts are often fragmented and less effective. While some survey participants reported strong backing from district leaders and building administrators, others described a lack of support as a significant barrier to both implementation and long-term sustainability. One middle school counselor explained, *"A lack of understanding by admin at building and district level. It's extremely time consuming and stressful to have to constantly advocate and educate about what counselors could and should be doing to support students and the school community."* This disconnect demonstrates how limited understanding at the leadership level can hinder counselors' ability to fully fulfill their roles, and ultimately diminish the program's impact on students.

Turnover

Challenges related to implementation and sustainability were further compounded by staff turnover, a theme that emerged across both focus groups. Participants noted that when knowledgeable and dedicated counselors or administrators leave, momentum around CSCP implementation is often lost. A high school counselor reflected, *"He left the district to go pursue other opportunities, I think in part because it was clear that we were not going to be able to move forward."* Similarly, a middle school administrator shared, *"Particularly in my building, we have had a lot of turnover within our counseling department, so with new hires there has*

been explicit training." Frequent turnover creates additional strain on systems, particularly when incoming staff lack familiarity with the ASCA Model, CSCPs or are not yet invested in the established program structures. As a result, districts must continually rebuild capacity, which can slow progress and threaten the sustainability of CSCPs.

Limited Evidence of Student Outcomes

An effective, fully functioning CSCP should lead to positive student outcomes in academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. As noted in a prior student by Sink and colleagues (2008), students perform higher on state testing when they have a CSCP in their school. However, several participants noted that one reason their CSCP has not continued to progress beyond implementation is the lack of observable evidence of such improvements. During the counselor focus group, when asked whether they had seen any growth in student outcomes since shifting to a CSCP model, a high school counselor responded, *"none that come to mind."* Without clear indicators of positive student impact, school counselors and other stakeholders may find it difficult to sustain the energy and commitment required to fully implement and maintain the CSCP.

Time Constraints and Competing Responsibilities

Time constraints remain a significant challenge for school counselors working to implement and sustain CSCPs. Although the ASCA Model recommends an 80/20 allocation of time toward direct and indirect student services, counselors frequently find themselves balancing an overwhelming number of responsibilities and student needs simultaneously. One elementary school counselor emphasized the importance of protected collaboration time, noting, *"We need time to collaborate with each other to make sure we're doing everything right and support to do that outside of school hours so we can make sure it actually gets done."* In addition to delivering

daily student services, counselors must also coordinate with colleagues, administrators, and families. That work is essential but often difficult to accomplish within existing time constraints. As one middle school counselor reflected in the focus group, *"I would say there's a reality point that has to come into place to say this is how much time we have in a day."* This tension highlights the paradox between the expectations of the CSCP framework and the practical limits of counselors' time, particularly in environments with insufficient staffing or support.

The number of responsibilities assigned to school counselors further highlights these time challenges. Within CSCPs, counselors are expected to deliver classroom lessons, support social-emotional development, connect students to external resources, monitor academic progress, design interventions for attendance and behavior concerns, and collaborate with school staff to coordinate supports. When student needs are high or staffing levels are inadequate, counselors are forced to navigate competing priorities, often at the expense of program fidelity. One elementary school counselor described this challenge, stating, *"There's so much paperwork that it legitimately takes away from my time with the children, which is frustrating at times. We also have other non-counseling tasks that have been assigned to us… like managing the entire 504 process… So when we have to do all of these extra things, we can't run the CSCP as we need to, which IS our actual job."* Such competing demands not only limit counselors' ability to engage in direct student support but also undermine the overall effectiveness of CSCP implementation, leaving critical student needs insufficiently addressed.

Transitioning to a CSCP often required systemic changes, including the hiring of additional personnel to meet recommended student-to-counselor ratios and to ensure regular delivery of direct and indirect services. One high school administrator commented, *"Time and funding are always and issue. Those responsibilities have been pushed to other job categories,"*

and an elementary school administrator stated, *"The 504-plan creation and monitoring has fallen to me as an assistant principal."* In many cases, districts were forced to reallocate funds from other areas of their budgets to support these efforts, potentially creating trade-offs that affected other programs or services.

Continuing Support Needs

To sustain momentum beyond the initial implementation of CSCPs, ongoing support from the state is essential. Research participants identified several key needs that, if addressed, could strengthen and refine existing CSCP efforts. Particularly, they emphasized the importance of reducing or eliminating non-counseling duties, expanding access to targeted professional development on CSCPs, and increasing funding. Participants consistently viewed these supports as critical to maintaining effective implementation and ensuring the long-term success of CSCPs.

Elimination of Non-Counseling Tasks

When asked to identify the ongoing supports needed to strengthen the implementation and sustainability of CSCPs in their schools and districts, counselors frequently mentioned the need to eliminate non-counseling duties from their daily responsibilities. In many districts across Washington state, counselors continue to be tasked with coordinating and managing 504 plans, despite the ASCA Model identifying these responsibilities as inappropriate for the school counseling role. One elementary school counselor emphasized this concern, stating, *"Have counselors stop writing and coordinating 504's! It is a huge amount of work that is not appropriate for us to do."* When counselors are required to take on duties that fall outside the scope of their role, their capacity to deliver direct and indirect services aligned with CSCP goals is significantly reduced. This misallocation of time not only limits their ability to effectively support students but also undermines the integrity and intended impact of comprehensive school

counseling programs. A reduction in non-counseling tasks and responsibilities allows school counselors to have more time to meet with students during the school day. When those non-counseling tasks are eliminated, student support is increased, and there are additional data points that school counselors and administrators can use to determine supports for students and programs and can guide programmatic changes if necessary.

Professional Development

Professional development is critical to the successful implementation of CSCPs because it ensures that school counselors and administrators have the knowledge and skills necessary to apply the model effectively. Because CSCPs involve a systemic approach to supporting students, they require school counselors and administrators to be familiar with program design, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration with school staff. Without targeted professional development, counselors may struggle to translate the framework of CSCPs into practical actions that meet the unique needs of their students and school communities. Additionally, professional development opportunities allow counselors to deepen their understanding of social-emotional learning, equity, and culturally responsive practices, all of which are essential to meeting the diverse needs of students.

Professional development is equally important for administrators, teachers, and other school stakeholders, as their support is necessary to sustaining CSCPs. Most educator preparation programs, whether for teaching or administration, do not provide much information on counselor roles or CSCPs. When administrators understand the purpose, structure, and requirements of comprehensive counseling programs, they can allocate resources, protect counselor time, and advocate for program priorities. Collaborative training sessions that include

both counselors and administrators can foster a shared understanding and commitment, which can help sustain CSCPs in schools and districts.

Continuous professional development is also necessary to the sustainability of CSCPs. When there is turnover amongst school staff, newly hired staff may not be knowledgeable about the roles of a school counselor or the importance of a CSCP. This lack of knowledge can create friction amongst colleagues and hinder collaboration designed to support students. For CSCPs to be effective and sustainable, all stakeholders must be supporting the work of the school counselor.

Additional Funding

Perhaps the most significant theme identified in this research is the need for additional funding to effectively implement and sustain CSCPs in Washington schools. One middle school counselor noted, *"I would say that my concern with it is not funded to the level that counselors need to be funded at to implement it correctly."* Implementing a CSCP with fidelity requires careful planning, resources, and adjustments at multiple levels within schools and districts. Funding is essential not only to support the counselors' responsibilities such as direct and indirect services but also to ensure that staffing, training, and program infrastructure are adequate to meet the requirements of the CSCP. For instance, when counselors are relieved of non-counseling tasks that fall outside their role, those responsibilities must often be reassigned to other staff members, and in some cases, additional personnel must be hired. Similarly, to maintain appropriate student-to-counselor ratios, such as the recommended 250:1 ratio (Donohue et al., 2022), districts may need to hire more counselors to ensure that student needs are adequately met. Without sufficient funding, schools and districts face structural limitations that

directly impede the quality and sustainability of CSCP implementation, leaving counselors unable to fully engage in the work the program was designed to support.

Schools and districts are experiencing the challenge to not enough funding, as the federal government has decreased funding to public schools which places a strain on state funding. In Washington state, most schools and districts rely on local levies to make up for gaps in state funding. If schools do not pass their local levies, initiatives like CSCPs are likely to stall or fall apart. Funding is not simply a matter of providing salaries or resources, it is necessary to creating the conditions required for counselors to operate at full capacity, deliver services, and sustain comprehensive programs that positively impact all students.

Limitations

Although the mixed methods design applied in this study has many strengths, there are several limitations that should be considered. First, participants were recruited to complete the SB 5030 Development and Implementation survey via email using convenience sampling. Because participation was voluntary, the participant sample represents school counselors and administrators who were more engaged, had stronger opinions on the ASCA Model and/or SB 5030, or who had greater availability to participate. The findings of the study may not completely reflect the opinions and experiences of all school counselors and administrators across Washington state or outside state lines.

Both focus groups included participants from the same school district, and in the case of the counselor focus group, all participants were from the same district. Although this focus group had a shared understanding of the development and implementation of the ASCA Model that facilitated a rich discussion of the development and implementation processes, the group's composition did limit the variety of perspectives represented. Some of the experiences described

in the focus groups reflected district-specific policies, resources, or leadership structures that may not be aligned to other schools and districts. Additionally, the fact that all participants in the counselor focus group were from the same district may have impacted their willingness to share conflicting or sensitive perspectives.

The mixed methods research design also introduced certain limitations, particularly within the qualitative component. Although qualitative methods such as focus groups allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, the structure of these methods necessarily limits the number of individuals who can participate. To maintain productive and focused discussions, focus groups were intentionally kept small, which restricted the number of perspectives represented.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

For schools and districts to meet CSCP implementation expectations, several conditions must be addressed. First, legislators must allocate adequate and sustained funding to support effective implementation. Because SB 5030 is state legislation, this funding should be clearly earmarked within the state budget, ensuring that districts are not forced to use resources from other important areas to comply with the mandate. Dedicated funding could support ongoing professional development for school counselors, teachers, and administrators, fostering a shared understanding of CSCPs and their role in improving student outcomes. It could also be used to hire and retain school counselors, helping to protect these positions during periods of budget cuts. Without consistent and sufficient funding, full implementation across schools and districts will remain difficult to achieve.

Second, Washington state should develop a universal assessment tool that allows schools and districts to evaluate the effectiveness of their CSCPs. Such a tool would provide clearer

expectations, support continuous improvement, and ensure greater consistency in how programs are implemented and measured across the state. It would also allow for schools and districts to share common collected data on student outcomes and have collaborative discussions for school improvement.

Third, for CSCPs to be effectively implemented and supported by all stakeholders, colleges and universities must strengthen teacher and administrator preparation programs to include current and comprehensive training on the role of school counselors and the function of CSCPs within schools and districts. Successful implementation depends on administrators entering the field with a clear understanding of CSCP frameworks, as well as the skills needed to support counselors and lead this work within their schools. Similarly, teachers must be equipped with knowledge of school counselors' roles and responsibilities, as effective collaboration between teachers and counselors is essential for addressing student needs and fostering a positive school environment.

Finally, schools and districts must protect the role of school counselors and ensure they are utilized according to the ASCA Model. When counselors are assigned non-counseling duties or competing responsibilities, it limits the time they can devote to providing direct support to students, support that is critical for academic achievement, social-emotional development, mental health, behavior management, and individualized interventions. School counselors are an essential resource for both students and the broader school community, and when their role is not protected, the potential for positive student outcomes is significantly diminished.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to examine the implementation of CSCPs to better understand the factors that support or hinder successful adoption across diverse educational

settings. Additional studies are needed to explore how variations in staffing levels, funding structures, and administrative support impact alignment with the ASCA Model. Future research could also benefit from longitudinal designs that track implementation over time to determine how CSCPs evolve and become sustained within districts.

Additionally, further qualitative inquiry could provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of school counselors, administrators, and district leaders as they navigate implementation challenges. Comparative studies across states or between urban, suburban, and rural districts may also help identify similarities and differences that impact program success. Continued research in these areas would provide valuable guidance for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to strengthen CSCP implementation and improve student outcomes.

Conclusion

The ASCA Model for CSCPs has been implemented nationwide, with many schools reporting meaningful improvements in student outcomes. In Washington state, legislators viewed SB 5030 as an opportunity to strengthen school counseling services and, in turn, enhance student success. Although the legislation was intended to transform school counseling practices across the state, most schools and districts have yet to achieve full implementation of their CSCPs. Consequently, the anticipated gains in student outcomes have not been realized, and any improvements that do occur are often inconsistent and uneven. As one middle school counselor reflected, *"From the beginning, it wasn't set up to be successful for districts to do it. And then they sent down guidance and said make a comprehensive school counseling plan but gave no sort of recommendation on what that was supposed to be and left everyone to flounder and figure it out."* Future efforts should consider allocating funding, a realistic timeline for implementation,

and sufficient professional development and training to ensure successful implementation of educational mandates.

Appendix A
Administrator Focus Group Protocol

Date and Time: January 7, 2026, 4:00pm
Location: Zoom
Focus Group Facilitators: Kelly Torrez
Focus Group Participants: 5 administrators

Focus Group Questions:

1. Tell me about the process for developing your Comprehensive School Counseling Plan.
    - Probe: What did the steps look like?
    - Probe: Who was involved in the process?
    - Probe: What did training look like for staff?
2. Tell me about where your school/district is on the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program.
    - Probe: Did your school district follow the expected timeline for implementation?
    - Probe: Do you have a fully implemented school counseling program as defined by the ASCA Model?
    - Probe: Do counselors push-in to classrooms and provide lessons?
3. Tell me about the challenges you and your school/district have experienced with the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling plan as required by SB 5030.
    - Probe: How did the support from the state impact the implementation of the comprehensive school counseling plan, if at all?
    - Probe: What could the state have done differently to improve the implementation process?
    - Probe: What aspects of the ASCA Model have been the most challenging to implement?

4. What areas of need did you or your school/district experience when implementing SB 5030?
    - Probe: Did the state support you with the needs you experienced?
    - Probe: Do you have ongoing needs that are preventing you from fully implementing a comprehensive school counseling plan?
5. Tell me about specific outcomes you have seen in your school/district due to having a comprehensive school counseling program.
    - Probe: What, if any, differences in student achievement have you seen since the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling plan?
    - Probe: Describe the differences, if any, you are seeing in student attendance and discipline.

Appendix B
Counselor Focus Group Protocol

Date and Time: January 22, 2026, 4:00pm
Location: Zoom
Focus Group Facilitators: Kelly Torrez
Focus Group Participants: 5 school counselors

Focus Group Questions:

1. Tell me about the challenges you and your school/district have experienced with the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling plan as required by SB 5030.
    - Probe: How did the support from the state impact the implementation of the comprehensive school counseling plan, if at all?
    - Probe: What could the state have done differently to improve the implementation process?
2. Tell me about where your school/district is on the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program.
    - Probe: Did your school district follow the expected timeline for implementation?
    - Probe: Do you have a fully implemented school counseling program as defined by the ASCA Model?
    - Probe: What is your school/district's plan to align with the ASCA national model?
3. Describe to me your school/district's process for developing the comprehensive school counseling plan.
    - Probe: Who were the people responsible for drafting the comprehensive school counseling plan?
    - Probe: What was the process used, if any, to align with other schools in the district?

4. What areas of need did you or your school/district experience when implementing SB 5030?
    - Probe: Did the state support you with the needs you experienced?
    - Probe: Do you have ongoing needs that are preventing you from fully implementing a comprehensive school counseling plan?
5. Tell me about specific outcomes you have seen in your school/district due to having a comprehensive school counseling program.
    - Probe: What, if any, differences in student achievement have you seen since the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling plan?
    - Probe: Describe the differences, if any, you are seeing in student attendance and discipline.

Appendix C
SB 5030 Development and Implementation Survey

Thank you for considering participating in our online survey. With the recommendation and encouragement from the Washington School Counselors Association (WSCA), Senate Bill 5030 passed in 2021 requiring schools and districts to adopt a comprehensive school counseling plan that aligns with the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) national model. With this survey, we are collecting information about the implementation process of the comprehensive counseling plan for your school/district. My hope is to document processes, challenges, solutions, and lessons learned to share with the field.

I am asking school counselors and administrators to share: (1) their experiences with the development of their comprehensive school counseling plan; (2) the adherence to the ASCA Model; (3) their beliefs toward the efficacy of the comprehensive school counseling plan; and (4) what, if anything, would have made the process of implementing the comprehensive counseling plan easier/better.

The survey is anonymous. It includes some closed-ended items related to school/district demographics, experience with comprehensive counseling plans and the response of your school/district to Senate Bill 5030 and four open-ended questions. If you would like to think about your responses to the open-ended questions before beginning the survey, these are:

- What have been the impacts, both positive and negative to the implementation of the comprehensive school counseling plan?
- What challenges did you face when developing the comprehensive counseling plan for your school/district?
- What challenges did you face when implementing the comprehensive counseling plan for your school/district?
- What aspects of your comprehensive school counseling plan to you believe are the most important?

To participate in this survey, you must be employed in Washington State as a school counselor or administrator in the public education system.

Section 1

1. What is your role in your school/district?
    a. Elementary school counselor
    b. Middle school counselor
    c. High school counselor
    d. Elementary school administrator
    e. Middle school administrator
    f. High school administrator
    g. District level administrator
2. What part of the state is your district/school located?
    a. Northwest
    b. Southwest
    c. Northeast
    d. Southeast
3. How would you categorize the location of your district/school?
    a. Urban
    b. Suburban
    c. rural
4. What is the student size of your school?
    a. 0-250
    b. 251-500
    c. 501-800
    d. 801-1200
    e. 1201-1600
    f. 1601-2000
    g. Greater than 2000
    h. I work at the district office

Section 2

5. In your school/district, what are the primary responsibilities assigned to school counselors (please check all that apply)?
    a. Academic planning and support
    b. Career counseling
    c. Social/Emotional counseling
    d. Individual and/or small group counseling
    e. Crisis intervention
    f. Classroom guidance lessons
    g. Testing coordination
    h. Lunch/recess/hallway supervision
    i. Classroom coverage

    j. Administrative duties
6. Prior to the implementation of Senate Bill 5030, did your school/district follow a comprehensive counseling plan for school counselors?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
7. How well do you understand the roles and responsibilities of a school counselor in supporting student academic, career and social/emotional development?
    a. Not at all
    b. Slightly well
    c. Moderately well
    d. Very well
    e. Extremely well
8. How valuable do you believe school counselors are to the overall success of students in your school?
    a. Not valuable
    b. Slightly valuable
    c. Moderately valuable
    d. Very valuable
    e. Extremely valuable
9. Prior to the implementation of Senate Bill 5030, to what extent do you feel you understood the aspects of the ASCA National Model for the Comprehensive Counseling Plan?
    a. Not at all
    b. Slightly
    c. Somewhat
    d. Very well
    e. Extremely well
10. Prior to the implementation of Senate Bill 5030, did your school/district assign school counselors to duties outside of their counseling role (i.e. testing coordination, classroom coverage, administrative tasks)?
    a. Never
    b. Sometimes
    c. Most of the time
    d. Always
11. If you answered occasionally or regularly, please list the additional duties assigned to counselors.
12. Prior to the implementation of Senate Bill 5030, the counselor to student ratio was considered when looking at FTE and staffing.
    a. Yes

b. No
c. When funding was available

13. Prior to the implementation of Senate Bill 5030, how would you describe your understanding of the ASCA National Model for comprehensive school counseling?
    a. No understanding
    b. Limited understanding
    c. Moderate understanding
    d. Strong understanding
    e. Extensive understanding

Section 3

14. Has your school/district implemented a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan as required by Senate Bill 5030?
    a. Fully implemented
    b. Partially implemented
    c. The plan is in development
    d. Not at all
15. Was your school/district given training and support for the implementation of Senate Bill 5030?
    a. Yes, we received trainings and support for our school/district
    b. Yes, we received some training but only the basic information
    c. No, we did not receive any training or support.
16. If you answered yes to question 15, do you believe that the training and support was sufficient in helping your school/district develop a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan as required by Senate Bill 5030?
    a. Yes
    b. No
17. Were you involved in the development of the Comprehensive School Counseling Plan your school/district uses?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I am new to my school/district and the plan was already established.
18. Did your school/district meet the required timeline for implementation in the 2022-2023 school year?
    a. Yes, we were able to fully implement our Comprehensive School Program (CSCP) plan by the 2022-2023 school year.
    b. We were able to develop an outline of a plan and implement some components of the CSCP by the required timeline.
    c. We developed the outline of the plan.
    d. No, we did not meet the deadline.

19. Does your school/district adhere to the 80/20 requirements counselors use for their counseling tasks?
    a. Yes, we are able to meet the 80/20 requirements
    b. No, but we are making progress towards meeting the 80/20 requirements
    c. No, we have not been able to meet the 80/20 requirements, and we are not making progress towards meeting them.
    d. Unsure
20. Does your school/district follow the recommended counselor-to-student ratio of 250:1?
    a. Yes
    b. No
21. Do your counselors push into classrooms to deliver lessons to students as part of your Comprehensive School Counseling Plans?
    a. Yes, the counselors are in classrooms presenting lessons on a regular basis.
    b. Yes, the counselors present lessons 1-3 times a year.
    c. Yes, counselors will go into classrooms to present lessons when they can, but we do not have a set schedule.
    d. No
    e. Unsure
22. As a result of Senate Bill 5030, did your school/district need additional funding to transition to a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
23. Do you believe that having a Comprehensive School Counseling Program will positively impact student development in your school district?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Section 4

Please answer the following open-ended questions.

24. How is your school/district assessing the success of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program?

25. What challenges did you face when **developing** the comprehensive counseling plan for your school/district?

26. What challenges did you face when **implementing** the comprehensive counseling plan for your school/district?

27. What successes have been identified as a result of the development and implementation of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program?

28. What continuing support does your school/district need to support the Comprehensive School Counseling Program?

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