

# Activities and Role of School Counselors in West Virginia: A Comparison to a National Sample

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## Abstract

A national study of school counselor role and professional activities (Fan et al., 2019) was replicated using a West Virginia (WV) school counselor sample to determine if WV's unique context and state policies would reflect a difference in how counselors perceive their roles and conduct professional practices. The comparison between WV sample and its national counterparts showed that school counselors grade level is robustly related to professional practice, with high school counselors demonstrating different levels of work focus than middle and elementary counselors. The WV sample did not demonstrate any practically significant differences from the previously collected national U.S. sample (Fan et al. 2019) on any *ISSCA-US* subsamples or items. While these results add confidence to the generalizability of Fan et al.'s (2019) findings, interestingly, no differences in role or practice were identified given the significant state policy initiatives to tailor school counseling practice towards state needs, models, and approaches.

**Keywords:** school counselor, role, activities, National Sample, WV

With the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) great attempts to build a national model for school counseling professions, the role and practices of school counselors continued to be ambiguous and confusing with little agreement within states or even nations given the fact that the practice of school counselors was a product of unique contextual factors (Martin et al., 2015). In this study, we examined the perceived role and practices of school counselors in West Virginia (WV) compared to a sampling of American Counseling Association (ACA) affiliated school counselors (Fan et al., 2019). Despite that WV is a rural state with limited resources, it was chosen for this comparative study because the extensive efforts that WV have been made to ensure the school counselors and counseling programs to align with national best practices to produce the best student outcomes. The authors in this article endeavored to address the following research questions: (a) are the perceptions and practices of WV school counselors aligned with or different from the national expected roles

and practices of school counselors? (as defined by the 42 indicators), (b) what are the implications of these commonalities and differences? In a nutshell, this article contributed to the understanding of the current perceptions of roles and practices of WV school counselors in a form of comparison with the national perceptions and practices.

## Rationale for the Study

The literature that traces the evolution of school counseling showed that the roles, responsibilities, and duties of school counselors have shifted, changed, and been muddled by many influences since their inception in the early 1900's (Gysbers, 2001; Gysbers, 2005; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Lieberman, 2004; Martin, 2002; Musheno & Talbert, 2002; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Schimmel, 2008). According to Dahir (2004), "The history of school counseling has depicted a profession in search of an identity" (p. 345). Lambie and Williamson (2004) stated that, "School counseling roles have been vast and ever-changing, making it understandable that many school-based counselors struggle with role ambiguity and incongruence while feeling overwhelmed" (p. 127). Although the school counseling profession in the United States has over 100 years of history, the ideal role and role-related activities of school counselors are still matters of debate (Cinotti, 2014).

Since the early 70's there have been attempts to create a unified vision for school counselors and school counseling programs, giving greater clarity and focus for the profession. For example, in February of 1974, the University of Missouri-Columbia, with funding by the U.S. Office of Education, developed the first true organizational structure for comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers, 1990). Then in 1997, ASCA developed the first ever national standards for school counseling and began defining appropriate and inappropriate roles for school counselors (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Most recently, the ASCA developed the first ever national model for school counseling in 2003 (ASCA, 2003) and then published a 4th edition (ASCA, 2019) to continue to define and align the role of the school counselors with the rapid changing educational landscape in the United States.

Martin et al.'s (2015) international grounded theory study of school-based counseling found that the practice of school-based counseling was strongly shaped by specific contextual factors including: culture; identified needs; models of school-based counseling; laws and educational policies; characteristics of the educational system; activities of the counseling profession; research and evaluation; larger societal movements; the actions of related professions; the influences of community and nongovernmental organizations; the perceptions of school-based counseling by local stakeholders; as well as, the knowledge and will of school leaders. Since the practice of school-based counseling is shaped by these and other contextual factors, variability in practice should be expected across different contexts.

Recently, to gain an understanding of the current perception of what school counselors perceive as their roles, their actual practices, and how closely it aligned with the ASCA National Model in the light of recent national efforts, Fan et al. (2019) conducted a study of U.S. school counselors' roles and activities. In this study, a national sample of ACA affiliated school counselors used the *International Survey of School Counselors' Activities-US (ISSCA-US)*; Fan et al., (2019) to indicate (a) how they viewed the level of importance of 42 different activities related to role; (b) whether or not respondents enacted these activities in their work. Since within the United States, states differ markedly and function relatively independently from each other regarding educational policy, variability in school counselor roles and activities should be expected. Therefore, the authors decided to compare one state, WV with the findings of the national study. Would the perceived roles and practices of WV school counselors be the same or different as their national counterparts who are active members of ACA? Most WV school counselors participated in the study were not active ACA or ASCA members, but rather received information and direction related to their roles at the state level. WV was chosen for this comparative study because of the recent advocacy work completed at the state level to boost the role of the school counselors to bring them in closer alignment with national best practices. The recent efforts are outlined below.

### **The Role of School Counselors in West Virginia**

West Virginia (WV) has had a school counseling policy advocacy initiative in place to help define the role and activities of school counselors since 1971 when the West Virginia School Counseling Association (WVSCA) formed a state charter of the ASCA. A WVSCA leadership team has monitored national trends and advocated for state policy changes resulting in the West Virginia Department of Education's (WVDE) development of a policy which required schools to adopt a comprehensive school counseling model.

In 2002, the WVDE revised *Policy 2315: West Virginia Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Policy* (Schimmel, 2008), which requires school counselors to align their role and practices with the ASCA's National

Model. The Policy was revised again in 2017 to be consistent with the revised ASCA and WV Models (WVDE, 2017b). It was hoped that the implementation of this policy would provide continuity and consistency to the role of school counselors in WV as well as contribute to the academic success of students (Schimmel, 2008). The development of the ASCA National Model encouraged the WVDE to strengthen its existing Comprehensive School Counseling Policy and (in 2007) to employ a State School Counseling Coordinator to implement state efforts to improve school counseling programs and practices.

In 2008, Schimmel conducted a study to determine where WV school counselors were in their attempts to engage in practice outlined by the ASCA's National Model and reflected in WV Policy 2315. There were 450 out of 753 WV school counselors participated in the study. Findings concluded that over 60% of WV school counselors were regularly assigned of non-counseling duties as defined by ASCA, including test coordination, record keeping, scheduling, student placement and registrar responsibilities, while many reported not being able to fully align their practice due to the lack of understanding of their roles in schools.

To address this role ambiguity, the State School Counseling Coordinator established initiatives to develop state foundational resources to guide school counseling practice and program development, including an inaugural state model, rubric-based school counselor performance standards, and a standard-based school counselor evaluation system. Policy changes were made requiring school counselors to develop and implement comprehensive school counseling programs that were aligned with the foundational guiding documents and policy.

**The West Virginia school counseling model (WVSCM).** This model was finalized by the WVDE in 2012 (WVDE, 2014). While it was closely aligned with the ASCA National Model, the WVSCM had its own nuances especially in regard with its delivery system. This delivery system was based on a three-tier model consisting of prevention, intervention, and treatment activities that aligned with other student support systems in WV schools. In addition, the elements of the delivery system were redefined in ways to make them more consistent with the needs of WV students and to more clearly describe the role ensuring school leadership understood the roles and practices of school counselors, and at the same time limiting misconceptions that have traditionally led to role ambiguity. The WVDE developed and funded local, regional, and statewide training opportunities that were attended by most school counselors and some school leaders, although voluntary. The WVDE also developed a suite of tools to support schools in aligning with the model.

**West Virginia school counselor performance standards (WVSCPSs).** In 2010, the WVDE convened a statewide task force, and for the first time in the state's history developed a common language that described what school counselors need to know and do in order to fully implement an effective school counseling program in WV schools. The resulting, rubrics based, WVSCPSs defined the

role of the school counselor and described role variables that are consistent with Distinguished, Accomplished, Emerging, and Unsatisfactory counselors (WVDE, 2016). To be consistent with these performance standards, state policy related to licensure and training program accreditation was revised to require universities to align preparation programs with these performance standards (WVDE, 2017a). Because of the differences between the ASCA Model and the WVSCM (upon which the WVSCPSs were based), state accredited training programs had to teach according to two sets of standards (the WVSCPSs and ASCA) to ensure that school counselors who intended to practice in-state and out of state both receive adequate training.

#### **Performance evaluation of school counselors in WV.**

Until 2012, there was no personnel evaluation system in WV that was specific to the role of school counselors. Rather, school counselors participated in a generic student support professional evaluation, administered within their local districts, that had very little to do with their role and consequently could not effectively contributed to increased competence of school counseling. In 2011, the WVDE, in response to federal educational policy requirements began a statewide educator personnel evaluation overhaul. Initially, the focus was on teacher performance evaluation. However, the State School Counseling Coordinator successfully advocated for the inclusion of school counselors. Using the recently developed WVSCPSs as a foundation; a comprehensive, standard-based, online school counselor evaluation system was developed which required a data-driven, goal-setting based approach to promote the continuing development of the competence of school counselors (WVDE, 2015). During the initial implementation of this system, funding was provided for training, support materials, website development, evaluation of the new system, and technical assistance to support schools with implementation. Once the system was fully implemented statewide, resources for ongoing training and support diminished significantly, however ongoing systematic training for new principals is required to enhance their competence in staff evaluation, including school counselors. Relatedly, at present, there is no systemic approach for providing ongoing training or technical assistance for low performing school counselors who are struggling to align their practices with state policies and the WVSCM. Any training and support is at the discretion of county systems (districts).

In summary, the WVSCA and the WVDE have advocated for and implemented policies and systems intended to reduce inconsistency, ambiguity, and confusion regarding the appropriate role and function of the school counselor and the implementation of the Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCPs). School counseling in WV has been influenced by national trends in how the role and practices of school counselors are defined. At the same time, WV has developed a state model that differs from the predominant national model in terms of service delivery. The state model was used to guide the development of the state department of education's performance standards for

school counselors. The performance standards, in turn are reflected in licensure requirements, pre-service training program accreditation requirements, ongoing training efforts and professional evaluation of school counselors. Consequently, it is likely that some distinct differences will be seen related to how WV school counselors define their roles and enact their practices than that of their national counterparts.

As WV's advocacy efforts led to more clearly defined CSCPs and the role of the school counselors, WV saw a 12% increase in the number of counselors employed (WVDE, 2017b). The student-to-counselor ratio decreased over a ten-year span from 416:1 in 2004-05 to 373:1 in 2014-15 (NACAC & ASCA, 2018). While this is still well above the ASCA recommended ratio of 250:1, WV has seen marked improvement in graduation rates. Since 2002 graduation rates have steadily climbed from 74% in 2001-02, to 76.9% in 2005-06 (Cataldi et al., 2009), and to nearly 90% for the 2016-17 school year (Ginder et al., 2017). While it does not show causation, it is interesting to note that these marked improvements in graduation rates occurred simultaneously as the student-to-counselor ratio decreased and the role of the school counselor was more clearly defined, along with increased advocacy, resources, and professional development efforts to promote and enhance the role of the school counselor to support student success.

#### **The Present Study**

The present study was conducted to replicate Fan et al. (2019) within the State of WV and to compare the WV results with the previously reported national sample results. Recently, Fan et al. (2019) reported the results of a study of U.S. school counselors' role and activities. In this study, a national sample of ACA affiliated school counselors took the *International Survey of School Counselors' Activities-US (ISSCA-US)*; Fan et al., 2019) to indicate (a) how they viewed the level of importance of 42 different activities related to role; (b) whether or not respondents enacted these activities in their work. The results indicated that U.S. school counselors have a very broad definition of their roles and that there is generally a good deal of consensus among school counselors regarding the levels of enactment of various activities. Very few differences related to demographic factors were found. Demographic differences among the counselors were not found to be related at practically significant level to how they viewed the appropriateness of different activities to role. The only practically significant differences in related to enactment were that counselors working at different grade levels reported different levels of implementation of group counseling and college and career focused counseling. In this present study, we sought to determine if WV's particular contexts and state policies would reflect a difference in how school counselors perceive their roles and conduct their professional practices compared to their national counterparts.

## Method

### Participants and Sampling

Of the 730 professional school counselors then employed in WV, 598 had voluntarily subscribed to the state's school counseling list serve. All the list serve subscribers were requested to participate in the present study. An overall of 198 participants completed all the items and returned the survey, which reflected a return rate of 33%.

Among the 198 respondents, 13% were male and 87% were female. Regarding work setting, 68.2% participants reported working in rural area, 22.7% reported working in suburban area, 6.6% reported working in urban area, and 2.5% reported working in inner city. Considering years of experience, 15.6% of participants reported had been working as a school counselor for less than four years, 28.1% reported worked as a school counselor for four to eight years, 23.4% claimed worked as a school counselor for nine to 14 years, 17.2% reported years of experience as 15 to 19 years, and 15.6% participants reported years of experience as equal or more than 20 years. In terms of grade level, 33.8% participants reported working in elementary school, 17.2% reported working in middle school, 32.8% reported working in high school, 9.1% participants reported working in both elementary and middle school, 4.0% claimed working in both middle and high school, and 2.5% claimed working in all three levels of elementary, middle, and high school.

An online survey *ISSCA-US-West Virginia* was built in SurveyMonkey to differentiate the WV data from the national data, and no changes were made regarding the survey items. All research material and procedures were reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The Survey included an informed consent page, six demographic items, and the 42-item *ISSCA-US*. In February 2017, the first email was sent to a WV DOE Personnel who later shared this email with the WV school counselors who were on the list serve. This email included a link to the online survey and a brief letter from the author informing the potential participants the purpose of the research, the nature of the *ISSCA-US*, a description of the impact their active participation could have on policy development, and a statement about the confidentiality of their responses. The WV DOE personnel sent out two reminders at one-week interval after the initial request for people who had not yet responded to increase the response rate.

### Measures

**International Survey of School Counselors' Activities, United States.** The online survey *ISSCA-US* was built and utilized in this study to measure school-based counselors' perceptions of the appropriateness of various activities for the school counselor role and whether school counselors engaged in these role related activities. Fan et al. (2018) described the development, factor structure, and subscale composition of this instrument.

*ISSCA* items were drawn from a wide range of United States and international sources related to the role and activities of school counselors. Sources included: the ASCA (1999) role statement; the current ASCA statements on appropriate and inappropriate school-based counselor duties (ASCA, n.d.a), school-based counselor competencies (ASCA, n.d.b), and the role of the school-based counselor (ASCA, n.d.c); the ASCA National Model (2012); the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2016) Standards; the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005); recent United States-based research that used researcher-developed surveys or lists of school-based counselor activities (Agresta, 2004; Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009; Dodson, 2009; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Fitch et al., 2001; Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, 2011; Nelson et al., 2008; Reiner et al., 2009); and 26 articles reflecting international research and scholarship on the role and activities of school-based counselors (see Fan et al., 2018).

There were 42 items and two response formats being selected for the *ISSCA-US*. School counselors were asked to "Respond to each item based on your opinion on the appropriateness of each activity for the role of a school-based counselor in (your country)" using a 4-point Likert scale of: "Very Inappropriate", "Inappropriate", "Appropriate", and "Very Appropriate" as response categories. Participants were also asked to respond to the question, "Do you do this activity in your present position?" for each item using dichotomous (i.e., "Yes" or "No") response categories.

Fan et al. (2018) reported that the exploratory factor analyses (EFA) of the *ISSCA-US* items using the Likert and dichotomous (yes/no) formats differed slightly. The Likert response format's EFA yielded six factors corresponding to different domains of practice: Leadership, Program Management, and Evaluation (LPME, 13 items); Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers (ISPT, 8 items); Individual and Group Counseling with Students (IGCS, 10 items); Prevention Work (PW, 5 items); College and Career Counseling with Students (CCCS, 4 items); and Administrator Role (AR, 2 items). The following Cronbach alpha reliability estimates for the resulting 6 subscales were found: LPME ( $\alpha = .91$ ), ISPT ( $\alpha = .79$ ), IGCS ( $\alpha = .92$ ), PW ( $\alpha = .87$ ), CCCS ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and AR ( $\alpha = .62$ ). Small to moderate scale inter-correlations were found, ranging between  $-.01$  (IGCS and AR) and  $.65$  (IGCS and LMPE).

Fan et al. (2018) reported that the dichotomous response format EFA also yielded six factors. Four of the six dichotomous EFA factors corresponded almost exactly with the Likert EFA factors: LPME, ISPT, PW, and CCCS. However, instead of a single factor corresponding to individual and group counseling with students (as was found in the Likert EFA), the dichotomous EFA yielded two distinct factors corresponding to Individual Work with Students (IWS) and Group Work with Students (GWS). A factor related to administrator's role was not found in the dichotomous EFA. The subscales were formed on the basis

of this EFA. Subscale scores were determined by summing the scores of the items belonging to each subscale. The subscales showed adequate reliability with Cronbach alpha estimates ranging between .65 (ISPT) and .79 (CCCS). Small to moderate scale inter-correlations were found ranging between -.07 (CCCS and GWS) and .43 (IWS and LMPE).

**Demographic items.** Demographic data were collected through six survey items. Participants were asked to identify their gender (female or male), experience (i.e., years employed as a school-based counselor), work setting (rural, suburban, urban, or inner city), the level(s) at which they were working (elementary, middle, and/or high school), ASCA membership, and professional identity (i.e., whether they considered themselves primarily as a counselor working in a school or an educator who does counseling). In deference to the opinion of the IRB regarding the collection of non-essential, potentially sensitive information, demographic data on participants' racial/ethnic group membership, sexual orientation, and age were not collected as was originally planned and proposed.

## Analyses

Data were analyzed in three phases. First, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the demographic factors used as independent variable and the *ISSCA-US* subscale scores (computed as suggested by Fan et al., 2018) used as the dependent variable. To determine the practical significance of the finding,  $\eta^2$  effect size estimates were computed for all statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) findings to

help determine the practical significance of the differences, and the Cohen's effect sizes of the survey items were not directly related to the effect sizes of the intervention evaluation work. Tukey HSD post hoc tests were conducted for all ANOVA findings where there proved to be a moderate or large effect size (see Cohen, 1988).

Second, independent t-tests were conducted to compare the *ISSCA-US* subscale scores of the current WV sample with the previously reported U.S. national sample (Fan et al., 2019). Cohen  $d$  effect size estimates were computed for all statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) findings to help determine the practical significance of the differences.

Third, One-way ANOVAs and  $\chi^2$  tests were conducted to compare ratings on the individual items of the *ISSCA-US* between the WV sample and the previously reported U.S. national sample (Fan et al., 2019). Effect size estimates ( $\eta^2$  for the Likert format items and Cramer's  $V$  for the dichotomous format items) were computed for all statistically significant findings ( $p < .05$ ) to help determine the practical significance of the differences.

Rather than controlling for experiment-wise alpha inflation by setting a more conservative alpha level in these analyses, we chose to report the exact probabilities for all statistical findings with an alpha less than .05. We reasoned that, at this exploratory stage of the investigations of the variability in role and activities, it was appropriate to minimize the probability of a beta error—failing to identify a real and potentially important difference.

We chose to use parametric analyses as described above. Before conducting these analyses, we examined the histogram plots of all scores and determined the distributions' approximated normality. The absence of statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between using Levene's tests indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption of these parametric analyses was not violated.

## Results

### Participant Characteristics

Among 598 West Virginia school counselors on the list serve, there were 198 participants completed the entire survey. This reflected a 33% return rate which is higher than that typically seen in prior online survey research involving school counselor populations (see Limberg et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2015). Online survey response rates for studies of this type typically fall between 10-15% (Fan & Yan, 2010). Fan et al.'s (2019) obtained a 12% return rate with a similar online version of the *ISSCA-US*.

Table 1 contains a comparison of the current WV sample with the national U.S. sample collected by (Fan et al., 2019). Overall, the two samples were similar in terms of their demographic characteristics given the fact that the demographic characteristics in Fan et al.'s study a better representative of the school counselor population in the United States in general. The largest differences between the samples were that the WV sample evidenced: a higher percentage of school counselors working in rural settings (and correspondingly lower percentages of school

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of the sample size and demographic characteristics of the West Virginia (n = 198) and the United States (n = 249) samples**

Variable	Level	WV	U.S.
Gender	Female	87.0%	79.0%
	Male	13.0%	21.0%
Setting	Rural	68.2%	23.5%
	Suburban	22.7%	44.6%
	Urban	6.6%	24.5%
	Inner City	2.5%	6.8%
	Less than 4 years	15.6%	17.8%
Experience	4-8 years	28.1%	19.5%
	9-14 years	23.4%	20.7%
	15-19 years	17.2%	21.6%
	20 or more years	15.6%	20.3%
	Elementary School	33.8%	19.7%
Grade Level	Middle School	17.2%	17.7%
	High School	32.8%	38.6%
	Elementary & Middle	9.6%	6.4%
	Middle & High	4.0%	9.2%
	All Three Levels	2.5%	7.2%
ASCA Member	Yes	44.9%	60.6%
Professional Identity	Counselor	78.3%	77.5%
	Educator	21.7%	22.5%

Note. The U.S. sample was collected and reported by Fan et al. (2019).

**Table 2**  
**Size of Effect and  $\eta^2$  for significant statistically One-Way Analyses of Variance ( $p < .05$ ) results:**  
**Demographic Variables and ISSCA-US subscales**

ISSCA-US Likert item subscales					
Independent Variable	Dependent Measure	SS Between	SS Total	$\eta^2$	Size of Effect
Grade Level	CCCS	8.77	53.22	.17	medium
Grade Level	AR	6.25	61.45	.10	small
ASCA	IGCS	0.68	17.32	.04	small
PI	IGCS	2.92	43.95	.07	small
PI	AR	1.44	61.72	.02	small
PI	PW	1.61	50.29	.03	small
ISSCA-US Dichotomous item subscales					
Independent Variable	Dependent Measure	SS Between	SS Total	$\eta^2$	Size of Effect*
Setting	PW	.89	22.16	.04	small
Setting	ISPT	.44	9.30	.05	small
Experience	CCCS	1.33	22.39	.06	small
Grade	GWS	5.01	30.14	.17	medium
Grade	CCCS	14.44	22.78	.63	large
Grade	PW	3.02	21.50	.14	medium

*Note.* For ISSCA-US Likert item subscales: CCCS = College and Career Counseling with Students; AR = Administrator Role; IGCS = Individual and Group Counseling with Students; PW = Prevention Work. For ISSCA-US Dichotomous item subscales: PW = Prevention Work; ISPT = Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers; CCCS = College and Career Counseling with Students; GWS = Group Work with Students.

counselors working in suburban and urban settings); a higher percentage of school counselors working in elementary schools; and a lower percentage of school counselors were members of ASCA.

### ***ISSCA-US Likert Item Subscales and Demographics***

Table 2 contains a summary of the  $\eta^2$  effect size estimates for all the significant One-way ANOVA ( $p < .05$ ) findings for demographic item-related differences on the ISSCA-US Likert response format subscales. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were noted for: professional identity and the *Individual and Group Counseling with Students* subscale ( $F = 13.94$ ,  $df = 1/196$ ,  $p < .001$ ); professional identity and the *Prevention Work* subscale ( $F = 6.47$ ,  $df = 1/196$ ,  $p < .012$ ); professional identity and the *Administrator Role* subscale ( $F = 4.68$ ,  $df = 1/196$ ,  $p < .032$ ); ASCA membership and *Individual and Group Counseling with Students* subscale ( $F = 3.93$ ,  $df = 1/196$ ,  $p < .050$ ); grade level and *Administrator Role* subscale ( $F = 4.32$ ,  $df = 5/191$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and, grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* subscale ( $F = 7.53$ ,  $df = 5/191$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The  $\eta^2$  estimates indicated that with the exception of a moderate effect size for the relationship between grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* ( $\eta^2 = .17$ ), only small effect sizes were noted suggested that these findings had little practical significance.

Posthoc Tukey HSD analysis of the relationship between grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* found that WV Counselors who worked at the high school level ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .33$ ) rated activities with respect to the *College and Career Counseling with Students* as more central to the school-based counselor role than counselors

who worked at the elementary ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .63$ ) and middle school ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .41$ ) levels.

### ***ISSCA-US Dichotomous Item Subscales and Demographics***

Table 2 also contains a summary of the  $\eta^2$  effect size estimates for all the significant One-way ANOVA ( $p < .05$ ) findings for demographic item-related differences on the ISSCA-US Dichotomous response format subscales. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were noted for: grade level and *Group Work with Students* ( $F = 7.57$ ,  $df = 5/190$ ,  $p < .001$ ); grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* ( $F = 65.72$ ,  $df = 5/190$ ,  $p < .001$ ); grade level and *Prevention Work* ( $F = 6.22$ ,  $df = 5/190$ ,  $p < .001$ ); setting and *Prevention Work* ( $F = 2.71$ ,  $df = 3/194$ ,  $p < .046$ ); setting and *Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers* ( $F = 3.21$ ,  $df = 3/194$ ,  $p < .024$ ); and, experience and *College and Career Counseling with Students* ( $F = 2.96$ ,  $df = 4/187$ ,  $p < .021$ ).

A large effect size was noted for the relationship between grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* ( $\eta^2 = .63$ ). Moderate effect sizes were noted for the relationships between grade level and *Group Work with Students* ( $\eta^2 = .17$ ), and between grade level and *Prevention Work* ( $\eta^2 = .14$ ). Only small  $\eta^2$  effect sizes were noted for all the other statistically significant findings, suggesting limited practical significance for these differences.

Posthoc Tukey HSD analysis of the relationship between grade level and *Group Work with Students* found that WV counselors conducted significantly less group work in high school ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .43$ ) than did in both elementary school ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .29$ ) and middle school levels ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = .43$ ). Posthoc Tukey HSD analysis of the

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of WV and US samples on the ISSCA-US subscales**

ISSCA-US Likert item subscales								
Subscale	WV N = 198		US N = 249		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen <i>d</i>	Size of effect
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
AR	1.51	.56	1.64	.63	2.30	.026	.22	small
CCCS	3.44	.52	3.53	.49	1.89	.477	.18	-----
IGCS	3.58	.47	3.65	.45	1.56	.718	.15	-----
ISPT	2.69	.49	2.90	.49	4.44	.530	.42	small
LPME	3.49	.40	3.60	.39	2.94	.844	.28	small
PW	3.41	.52	3.50	.50	1.77	.574	.17	-----

  

ISSCA-US Dichotomous item subscales								
Subscale	WV N = 198		US N = 249		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen <i>d</i>	Size of effect
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
CCCS	1.57	.34	1.55	.35	0.74	.458	.07	-----
GWS	1.66	.40	1.67	.39	0.18	.855	.03	-----
ISPT	1.36	.22	1.44	.24	3.64	.001	.35	small
IWS	1.97	.10	1.94	.15	2.45	.014	.23	small
LPME	1.84	.18	1.83	.21	0.91	.361	.05	-----
PW	1.78	.34	1.71	.35	2.18	.030	.21	small

*Note.* For ISSCA-US Likert item subscales: AR = Administrator Role; CCCS = College and Career Counseling with Students; IGCS = Individual and Group Counseling with Students; ISPT = Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers; LPME = Leadership, Program Management, and Evaluation; PW = Prevention Work; 1 = "Very Inappropriate", 2 = "Inappropriate", 3 = "Appropriate", and 4 = "Very Appropriate". For ISSCA-US Dichotomous item subscales: CCCS = College and Career Counseling with Students; GWS = Group Work with Students; ISPT = Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers; IWS = Individual Work with Students; LPME = Leadership, Program Management, and Evaluation; PW = Prevention Work; 1 = "No", 2 = "Yes". Cohen *d* Size of Effect criteria from Cohen (1988): .20 = small; .50 = medium; .80 = large, only the ones with a size effect of .20 or greater were reported.

relationship between grade level and *Prevention Work* found that WV high school counselors ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = .38$ ) reported lower levels of engagement in *Prevention Work* than elementary ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = .22$ ) and middle ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = .33$ ) school counselors. Posthoc Tukey HSD analysis of the relationship between grade level and *College and Career Counseling with Students* found that WV counselors who worked in elementary school ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = .25$ ) were significantly less involved in college and career counseling activities than did counselors who worked in the other levels respectively- middle school ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .28$ ) and high school ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = .12$ ) and the other levels combined- elementary and middle school level ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = .22$ ), middle and high school level ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = .15$ ), and all levels ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = .10$ ); WV middle school counselors ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .28$ ) also reported engaging in significantly fewer college and career counseling activities than high school counselors ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = .12$ ).

#### ISSA-US Subscales: West Virginia vs. US

Table 3 summarized the comparisons between the WV and US samples on the ISSCA-US subscales. For the Likert response format subscales, a significant difference between the two samples was noted for the *Administrator Role* subscale ( $t = 2.30$ ,  $df = 445$ ,  $p < .026$ ). This finding, however, showed only a small Cohen *d* effect size ( $d = .22$ ) suggesting that the difference between the WV and U.S. samples have very little practical significance.

For the dichotomous response format subscales, significant differences between the two samples were noted for the *Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers* subscale ( $t = 3.64$ ,  $df = 445$ ,  $p < .001$ ); the *Individual Work with Students* subscale ( $t = 2.46$ ,  $df = 445$ ,  $p < .014$ ), and the *Prevention Work* subscale ( $t = 2.18$ ,  $df = 445$ ,  $p < .030$ ). Again, all of these findings showed only small Cohen *d* effect sizes ( $d = .35$ ,  $.23$ , and  $.21$  respectively) suggesting that these differences between the WV and U.S. samples had very little practical significance.

#### ISSCA-US Item Comparisons: West Virginia vs. United States

Table 4 lists all the ISSCA-US Likert response format items where a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference was noted between the WV and U.S. samples. Statistically significant differences between the WV and U.S. samples were noted for 16 items, however, the small effect size estimates ( $\eta^2$  range between .010 and .036) associated with all these differences suggest that there is little practical significance.

Table 5 lists all the ISSCA-US Dichotomous response format items where a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference was noted between the WV and U.S. samples. Statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between the WV and U.S. samples were noted for nine items, however, the small effect size estimates (Cramer's *V* estimates range between .10 and .20) associated with all these differences suggest that there is little practical significance.

**Table 4**  
**Statistically Significant WV-US differences on 42 items: Likert response format.**

Item #	Item Content	<i>M</i> National	<i>M</i> West Virginia	<i>F</i>	Sig	$\eta^2$	Effect Size
8	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in group counseling in order to support their mental health.	3.49	3.30	8.46	.004	.02	small
15	The School Counselor determines the appropriate disciplinary sanctions for students who have misbehaved.	1.61	1.44	6.12	.014	.01	small
20	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective parent education programs for parents/guardians to help them develop more effective parenting skills and more productive relationships with their children.	3.24	3.02	12.40	.001	.03	small
21	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective professional development programs for teachers to help them develop more productive relationships with students and manage a broad range of discipline and classroom management issues.	3.12	2.86	14.13	.001	.03	small
22	The School Counselor provides family therapy services to help trouble families develop effective communication patters and boundaries.	2.28	1.98	16.67	.001	.04	small
24	The School Counselor consults with parents regarding problems they are experiencing to enable them to have more constructive relationship with their children and be more effective in parenting them.	3.21	2.99	9.52	.002	.02	small
25	The School Counselor consults with teachers regarding problems they are experiencing to enable them to have more constructive relationships with their students and be more effective in teaching them.	3.33	3.11	10.38	.001	.02	small
27	The School Counselor consults with school administrators to help ensure that school policies and procedures create a climate that is conducive to the education and wellbeing of all students.	3.54	3.37	9.91	.002	.02	small
29	The School Counselor advocates for children with special needs and ensure they receive the accommodations that are necessary for them to be successful in school.	3.57	3.45	4.51	.034	.01	small
32	The School Counselor advocates for improvements in school policies and procedures so that the school is an equitable institution that is able to effectively educate all its students.	3.55	3.38	8.74	.003	.02	small
35	The School Counselor uses psychological assessments effectively to facilitate progress in counseling and to promote students' mental health, academic development, career development and personal/social development.	2.88	2.66	8.19	.004	.02	small
37	The School Counselor leads a data team to analyze school data and determine directions for school improvement initiatives.	2.93	2.73	6.45	.011	.02	small
38	The School Counselor documents their work and the impact it has on students, families and the school community.	3.53	3.38	7.49	.006	.02	small
39	The School Counselor monitors the efficacy of their work and uses this information to improve practice.	3.60	3.45	7.62	.006	.02	small
40	The School Counselor continuously improves their practice through personal reflection, seeking consultation and developmental supervision.	3.74	3.61	7.38	.007	.02	small
42	The School Counselors help students choose a college that fits their interests and abilities.	3.41	3.27	5.22	.023	.01	small

Note. 1 = "Very Inappropriate", 2 = "Inappropriate", 3 = "Appropriate", and 4 = "Very Appropriate."  $\eta^2$  = Size of Effect criteria from Cohen (1988): .02 = small; .13 = medium; .26 = large.



## Discussion

West Virginia School Counselors showed a great deal of consistency in their view on the role-appropriateness of the activities included in the *ISSCA-US*. The only practically important demographic-related difference was related to grade level. High school counselors rated college and career counseling activities as more central to the school counselor role than did elementary and middle school counselors. This difference most likely reflects the importance of college and career counseling in high schools.

Similarly, the only practically important demographic-related difference in WV school counselors' reports of their enactment of *ISSCA-US* activities was related to grade level. High school counselors reported higher levels of involvement in college and career counseling as compared to counselors at other levels. Elementary and middle school counselors reported engaging in more group works with students as compared to high school counselors.

Correspondingly, elementary and middle school counselors reported engaging in more prevention programming with students as compared to high school counselors.

These results closely parallel those of Fan et al. (2019). While Fan et al. (2019) failed to find any practically significant demographic differences on any of the *ISSCA-US* Likert item-format subscales, they did find differences in reported enactment (dichotomous item format subscales) related to level. In comparison to elementary and middle school counselors, high school counselors reported higher levels of enactment of college and career counseling and lower levels of enactment of prevention programming. These differences in practice across grade levels probably reflect different demands placed upon counselors working in different levels, the developmental needs of students, the practical limitations placed upon counseling practice, and the models of counseling that suggest different emphases on career counseling, curriculum-based work, and responsive services at different grade levels (see Gysbers & Henderson,

**Table 5**  
**Statistically Significant WV-US differences on 42 items: Dichotomous response format.**

Item #	Item Content	% Yes US	% Yes WV	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i>	Effect Size
2	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counseling in order to facilitate their academic development (e.g., developing self-motivation; engagement with school)	95.1%	99.0%	5.25	.022	.11	Small
3	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counseling in order to facilitate their career development (e.g., dealing with career indecision)	73.9%	82.1%	4.27	.039	.10	Small
4	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counseling in order to deal with personal issues (e.g., self-esteem, identity crisis)	94.0%	99.0%	7.57	.006	.13	Small
17	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective classroom-based primary prevention programs for children and adolescents to facilitate academic development (e.g., time management, study skills)	67.3%	77.7%	5.80	.016	.11	Small
18	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective classroom-based primary prevention programs for children and adolescents to promote career development (career interest identification; college choice)	70.0%	85.9%	15.56	.001	.19	Small
20	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective parent education programs for parents/guardians to help them develop more effective parenting skills and more productive relationships with their children.	35.7%	17.9%	17.20	.001	.20	Small
21	The School Counselor plans and delivers effective professional development programs for teachers to help them develop more productive relationships with students and manage a broad range of discipline and classroom management issues.	42.2%	28.2%	9.25	.002	.14	Small
22	The School Counselor provides family therapy services to help trouble families develop effective communication patterns and boundaries.	20.2%	7.6%	13.98 <sub>a</sub>	.001	.18	Small
33	The School Counselor provides consultation to the school administration on how an effective school counseling program should be designed and implemented.	79.1%	87.7%	5.67 <sup>a</sup>	.017	.11	Small

*Note.* Standards for Interpreting Cramer's *V* effect size criteria when *df* = 1 from Cohen (1988): 0.1 = small, 0.3 = medium, and 0.5 = large.

2012). It is interesting that grade level differences appear to be the most robust demographic variables affecting differences in school counselors' role perceptions and activities.

Given the salience accorded to professional identity in the literature on the role of school counselors in the United States (see Kaplan & Gladding, 2011), it is important to note that neither the present study nor Fan et al. (2019) found that counselors' professional identity had a strong influence on ratings of the role-importance of activities or on participants' reports of levels of activity enactment. Participants who saw themselves as "educators" and participants who saw themselves as "counselors" did not differ in any important ways in terms of either role perception or activity enactment. Regarding the direct comparisons between the WV sample and the National U.S. sample of school counselors (Fan et al., 2019), no practically important differences were noted on any measure. No practically important differences were found on any of the *ISSCA-US* subscales or any individual *ISSCA-US* items.

In short, the present study replicated almost exactly the results of Fan et al. (2019), which adds confidence to the generalizability of their findings. It is somewhat surprising, however, that counselors in a state with policy initiatives rooted in a state model and in state role descriptions reflecting state priorities, demonstrate essentially the views on role and the same level of enactment of different types of activities. It may be that, as Fan et al. (2019) have suggested, due to the maturity of the school counseling profession in the United States, a high level of consensus regarding role and practice now exists. This consensus may be reflected in and reinforced by training program curricula, textbooks, accreditation standards, licensure requirements, and role statements of professional associations. Any local attempts to redefine role and practice to align with local conditions in the United States may be swamped by the weight of this national consensus. While fewer participants of the WV sample were ACA or ASCA members, receiving direct information about their roles from the national level, it is apparent that the work at the state level is keeping the work of the school counselor in WV aligned with national expectations.

### Limitations and Recommendations

The primary limitation of this study is related to sampling. While the return rate is consistent with or little higher than similar investigation, the representativeness of the sample cannot be assured. It should also be noted that the *ISSCA-US* based reports of enactment are self-report measures of school counselor activities. Self-report measures have its own disadvantages that maybe affected by various biases, like social desirability bias, thus need to be validated by additional measures of that activity. Finally, the present study did not measure counselors' conceptions of role or enactment of activities over time, so it is impossible to know whether these were influenced by state policy initiatives. It could be that state policy initiatives "moved" counselors' role conceptions and practice towards the national average.

### Suggestions for Future Research

This study should be replicated with other additional samples of counselors in the United States to further examine the generalizability of its results. Given the present study's replication of Fan et al.'s (2019) findings a lack of effect of professional identity on either conceptualization of role or professional activities, additional research on the relationship between school counselors' professional identity and their professional practices are warranted. Since much of the work by counseling associations in the United States to promote the development of the profession is predicated on the assumption that professional identity is a very salient factor affecting practice, such follow up research is very important.

It is also important to study school counselors' role conceptions and professional activities over time concurrent with policy initiatives to improve professional practice to determine if role conceptions and professional activities can be altered significantly by policy initiatives examining which policy levers are most effective. Schimmel's (2008) study related to the role and perceptions of school counseling in WV examined specific beliefs and practices of WV school counselors back in 2008. These 2008 results should be compared with those of a contemporary sample to determine if role conceptions and professional activities have changed over time (i.e., before and after the implementation of the aforementioned state policies). This would show differences and similarities in role and practices of WV school counselors within the 10-year timeframe, before and after the WVDE's efforts to improve the role and function of school counselors.

It would also be interesting to examine how state advocacy and policy efforts impact on the perceptions and practices of school counselors. State with high advocacy and policy efforts like WV showed a great consistency of school counselor's role and activities compared to a national model in this study, however states with low advocacy and policy efforts, who have not, as actively supported the role of the school counselors as has WV need to be studied to determine the impact of minimal efforts at the state level on role perceptions and practices.

In addition, it would be helpful to discover how school counselor education programs should be delivered to best prepare school counselors to meet the needs of the state and the United States in general. The relationship between different approaches of delivering school counseling programs based on vary standards and the effectiveness of such school counselor education program still need to be further examined. For example, each state has its unique situation and state policy. Given ASCA's great effort to build a common standard for school counseling professions, what is the most efficient way to deliver school counselor education programs in a state level: follow only the national standard, teach two sets of trainings that aligned with both national and state standards, or some other combined ways of delivery? The differences between these teaching approaches needs to be further discussed as well.

Finally, cross-national comparisons of school-based counselors' role and activities using a quantitative instrument such as the *ISSCA-US* should also be conducted to obtain a more precise description of how school-based counseling is similar and different across national contexts that differ in factors such as: culture, national needs, laws and educational policies, characteristics of the educational system, and activities of the counseling profession.

## Conclusion

To compare the perception and enactment of school counselor role and activities between the state and the national, the current study based on a WV school counselor sample showed a great consistency of school counselor roles and activities compared with a national sample. This role consistency not only implicated the impact of national policies and standards on the development of WV school counselors' roles and activities, but also WV's great efforts of building school counseling programs aligned with national standards. Even though a high consensus regarding school counselor roles and practices now exists, further research is needed to generalize this study's outcome and explore the change and development of school counselor roles and activities over time given the limitations of this study: sampling and self-reported measurement. Further discoveries of the relationship between school counselors' professional identities and their counseling practices, the impact of the school counselor educational program training on the perception and enactment of school counseling practices, and how the effort level of state advocacy and policies influence school counselor's roles and activities are well needed.

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