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Designing with the Goal in Mind: How Public Charter Schools Are Facilitating a Comprehensive College-going Culture

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ABSTRACT

Charter schools were approved to exist in the U.S. as an alternative form of public education to offer solutions to the challenges of traditional public schools. Learnings from charter schools continue to live in our texts, and minimal efforts have been made to inventory the takeaways from this setting. By examining how seven school counselors representing six Charter Management Organization (CMOs) high schools in Los Angeles have used their school's autonomy to implement a comprehensive college-for-all-all model, this study offers implications for the counselor role and how mission-driven public schools offer comprehensive college counseling. Participants described the goals of the counselor role, systematic components, and supporting factors that allow for a college-for-all model. The study also discusses implications for educational leaders and policymakers on how role clarity and the school mission can influence school outcomes for college acceptance and enrollment.

KEYWORDS: Charter schools, college counselling, school counsellors, college for all, college-going.

Introduction

Charter schools have long been labs of innovation as part of the school choice and reform movement, and were approved when parents, legislators, and educators were discontent with the outcomes of traditional public schools (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Koven, 2009). The original focus of charter schools was to experiment how to offer public education differently by giving schools autonomy in management, design, and scope (California Charter Schools, 2013a; Knaak & Knaak, 2013). This has allowed these public charter schools to rethink how educators create schools for students, and combine some elements from traditional public schools and private schools to develop another form of schooling (Rollins, 2006). Today, the United States is home to 7,700 charter schools and campuses and 3.4 million charter school students across 44 states (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). The research around charter schools has heavily focused on their approach with classroom pedagogy and how this impacts student achievement by measure of test scores and graduation rates. Findings from this study will provide another consideration for the lessons learned from charter schools, addressing the ambiguity of the school counselor role in schools (Rollins, 2006), and comprehensive college counseling. It also offers a potential solution to previous research investigating how the context of the school impacts the effectiveness of the counselor (Rollins, 2006; McKillip, Rawls & Barry, 2012; Blake, 2020).

Outside of the graduation rate and standardized test performance success, many charter schools employed a college-for-all approach and yielded higher results than their traditional public school counterparts in regards to the completion of class requirements, and college admission and enrollment, especially for students from communities not well represented in higher education (California Charter Schools, 2014; Farmer-Hilton & McCullough, 2008; Farmer-Hilton, 2010; The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022; Rollins, 2006). *College for all* refers to the expectation that all students will receive the support to access higher education (McDonough, 2004). While many charter schools have the college-for-all approach, research on charter school college access outcomes and the counselor role remains limited even when studies have shown the powerful impact that school counselors have in improving college readiness results (Rollins, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Gilfillan, 2017). When charter schools first started, they were redesigning the role of adult educators in schools (Rollins, 2006). Thus, the role of the school counselor in charter schools has tended to differ from school to school (Rollins, 2006), and in some cases, they have a college counselor title to emphasize their college for all models. While the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has defined the role of the school counselor in traditional public education settings, it does not account for charter schools as an alternative setting for public education (Rollins, 2006; Blake, 2020; ASCA, 2023). Given their autonomy and the commonality of the expectation for all students to pursue college, charter schools are positioned to inform educators how to develop systems that allow for robust and comprehensive college counseling support, and how a focused position for the counselor may deliver positive student outcomes (Rollins, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2010).

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Literature Review

Charter schools have been an alternative placement for students in public K-12 education since 1992, and on average, receive less funding per pupil than their counterparts in the same geographical area and/or district (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). According to the data from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2022), 58% of charter schools are located in urban communities. Charter schools have been successful in opening doors for students from low-income marginalized backgrounds, such as Latinx and African American populations, to higher education (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). California led the country in the number of charter schools with 1,336 and a student enrollment of 675,791 during the 2019-20 school year (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). Comparing this to overall K-12 enrollment in public schools in the state, 11% of students were enrolled in a charter school during the 2019-20 school year (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022).

Charter schools in California continue to outperform their traditional public school counterparts in college readiness and access, especially when it comes to students from low-income, Latino, and Black/African American backgrounds as these populations represent about 60% of the enrollment (California Charter Schools, 2013a; California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009; The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). California has improved its high school graduation rates and college readiness since 2009, yet there are still equity gaps for low-income students and those of Black/African American and Latino backgrounds (Hill et al., 2021). This places California behind in meeting the expected workforce demands of college graduates in 2030, and overall, in addressing the equity gap in college access (Johnson, Cook, & Jackson, 2019). Meanwhile, California charter schools experience greater success with students' A-G subject requirements completion, which serve as a benchmark for access to the California State University and University of California systems (California Charter Schools, 2014; Koven, 2009). A-G subject requirements have also been used as a threshold for college readiness and serve as a precursor to increasing college access to four-year institutions. In California, 52.1% of high school graduates meet A-G subject requirements (California Department of Education, 2022). When these data are disaggregated to focus on charter school students, the percentage increases to 54.6% at the state level and 74.3% at the county level for Los Angeles for the 2020-21 school year (California Department of Education, 2022).

Los Angeles has the highest number of students in the nation enrolled in charter schools, with the majority centered in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) at 154,006 in 2019-20 (California Charter Schools, 2013b; National, 2022). LAUSD charter schools primarily serve Latinx and Black/African American students from low-income communities. In Los Angeles, students enrolled in charter schools have been shown to quadruple their likelihood of completing A-G subject requirements compared to their peers in non-charter public high schools (California Charter Schools, 2014). Given the higher possibility of students in charter schools completing A-G subject requirements, charter schools in Los Angeles are positioned to yield higher education enrollment rates that outperform their non-charter counterparts. This is not to say that charter schools are better than traditional public schools, but rather that their outcomes merit exploring their practices further.

The Role of the School Counselor

Blake (2020) suggested that the school counselor's role is ambiguous and their respective school settings in which counselors work impact their role. Furthermore, Blake (2020) argued that it is still vague what makes counselors in one setting more effective than in others, and surfaces that clear expectations tied with role responsibilities influence the effectiveness level of counselors. Amidst efforts from the American School Counselor Association (2023) to define and support the role, Dahir et al. (2019) also highlighted the disparities in understanding of the counselor role by administrators and supervisors of school counselors, and how these limit the influence and work of the counselor. Moreover, McKillip et al. (2012) affirmed that the evolution of the high school counselor role has removed the position's focus on college counseling to address administrative and mental health concerns in the schools, thus creating greater ambiguity. Meyer and Rowan (2006) highlighted how context impacts educator outcomes and as institutions like charter schools become institutionalized, there is a call to understand how other settings are rethinking their practices and addressing the role ambiguity of counselors in our schools. Since charter schools function autonomously and are charged to be innovative in their practices (Gross, 2011 as cited by Grabias, 2019; Rollins, 2006), they offer an opportunity to see another way to implement the school counselor role and how the ask for innovation might influence the design of counseling programs (Rollins, 2006). Given so, this paper considers the role of counselors in the public charter school setting and their impact on outcomes that these charter schools value, specifically their college-going culture.

Tenets for Comprehensive College Counseling

McDonough (2004) highlighted that comprehensive college counseling is only possible when four components are in place at the high school level: college-preparatory curriculum, the expectation that all students will attend college and therefore need to know about it, staff members who are proactive in supporting students to achieve their goals, and robust college advising and resources. Comparatively, McKillip et al. (2012), mentioned that the college-going culture impacts the counselor role as this determines the counseling department structure in the school, the offering of early and ongoing college preparation, collaboration with teachers and staff for the culture, and the bringing resources for college-related activities. Additionally, effective college counseling programs offer diverse counseling methods that include large group, small group, one-on-one, and parent/legal guardian and student planning and information sessions (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough,

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2008; Hanselman, 2005; McDonough, 2004). Lastly, strong college counseling programs typically include proactive ways to engage and build relationships with students and families (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008).

College-preparatory Curriculum

In the state of California, a college-preparatory curriculum is interchangeable with A-G subject requirements (University of California, n.d.). A-G requirement are a group of 15 yearlong courses across the following seven subject areas: history/social science, English, mathematics, science, language other than English, visual and performing arts, and college-preparatory electives (University of California, n.d.). These courses reflect students' readiness to access and excel in a four-year university and students must pass these courses with a grade of "C" or better to receive course credit towards eligibility. The California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems both use the A-G subject requirements to determine undergraduate admissions, and hence this being a marker for college readiness in the state (University of California, n.d.).

Early College Opportunities

Having the opportunity to access college courses as high school students and earn college credit strongly benefits the college-going culture in schools (Campaign, 2005, McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). There are several ways in which high school students may be exposed to early college opportunities: dual enrollment courses, concurrent enrollment courses, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate, and specialized early college programs. All aforementioned options allow students to take college-level or equivalent courses during their time in high school and potentially earn college credit.

College for All Culture

The College for All Cultures relies on the college-preparatory curriculum as the foundation for how schools implement this mission (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). To truly have a college for all cultures, students must have access to the courses that will prepare them to apply to four-year universities (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). Hence, detracking in schools remains at the forefront of the education conversation as all students should have the ability to take rigorous courses (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Tracking in schools has been a longtime battle as it pertains to college access, and therefore educators have advocated for detracking or doing away with tracking systems that keep certain students away from opportunities (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Tracking often derails schools from implementing a college for all culture as it might limit the courses students may take, the quality of counseling, and the access to information about college preparation (Perna et al., 2008). McDonough (2004) affirmed that detracting helps increase the number of students from marginalized backgrounds who access higher education.

Part of detracking is developing structures that allow all students to receive the same information, with the benefit of having the individualized support afforded with small student-to-school counselor ratios (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002). Effective college for all models involve all stakeholders in the effort and conversations about college and incorporate a specialized class or curriculum where students learn and apply to college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2010; MacDonald & Dorr, 2006; McClafferty et al., 2002; Rollins, 2006). Some of the efforts in these college advisory classes or alike should be providing students with financial aid information and application support to mitigate a pressing barrier for students from marginalized backgrounds in higher education (Perna et al., 2008). In California, with the passage of AB 469, the FAFSA/CADAA Completion Requirement that amends California Education Code Section 51225.7 and requires that schools support and monitor student completion of a financial aid application unless the student and their parent/legal guardian complete an opt-out form (California Student Aid Commission, 2022). Thus, having a set class makes it easier to ensure students apply for financial aid and that they and their caregivers receive the necessary support in the often complicated form-completion process (California Student Aid Commission, 2022). To have a comprehensive college-going culture, all stakeholders need to be supported and involved in the efforts and conversation.

Student-to-School Counselor Ratio

Given the large student-to-school counselor ratios in public high schools, students often receive little personalized support with their postsecondary plans in traditional public schools (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyan, 2004; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Tierney et al., n.d.). Meanwhile, charter schools often have smaller student populations that allow for student-to-school counselor ratios closer to the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (2019) (Rollins, 2006; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Gawlik, 2012). Depending on the structure and resources, some charter schools have a school counselor work with students into their first year in college to further support the transition (Farmer-Hinton, 2020; Perna et al., 2008). Such a model is of particular importance when working with marginalized students as they more heavily rely on their home schools to provide assistance to transition to higher education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Rodriguez, 2015). Students from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to turn to their schools as their source of capital to navigate their education (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008). Savitz-Romer (2012) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) indicated that students from marginalized backgrounds require more robust assistance in accessing higher education as they might have limited college knowledge, inaccurate information, low expectations, and/or misconceptions about college that stem from their respective families' knowledge about higher education. McKillip et al. (2012) further asserted that with higher education policies being everchanging, students need more personalized college counseling, and this is true for students from marginalized backgrounds who rely on their schools, especially their counselors to select their colleges and universities. Thus, this calls for the opportunity to learn about how charter schools offer another

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alternative to public education that accounts for the tenets of a college-going culture.

Purpose of the Study

The literature provides insight as to why charter schools might experience stronger college application and enrollment rates from implementing a college for all model, however, due to various factors inherent in charter school systems, direct causation or correlation cannot be determined. Compared to their traditional public school counterparts, charter schools have more autonomy to be innovative in hopes of achieving overall stronger student outcomes. Their approach to counseling to support a college for all model requires further investigation. To explore the implementation of a college-for approach in public high school education, the purpose of this study was to examine how counselors in charter high schools in Los Angeles implement a systematic college for all model that may inform and be replicated in non-charter school settings. Los Angeles was selected for this study as it has the highest number of students enrolled in charter schools nationwide (California Charter Schools, 2013b; The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). The research question for this study was "How have school counselors in charter high schools in Los Angeles leveraged their schools' autonomy to implement a systematic college-for model in their school counseling program?"

Methodology

Given the limited data on counseling programs in charter schools, this study uses phenomenology to learn about the work of school counselors in this setting, particularly regarding college counseling approaches and the key components that school counselors identify as being instrumental to provide college access for their students. The researcher selected this qualitative approach due to the exploratory nature of the study, which allows participants to share their experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2007). For this study, phenomenology enables the experiences and perspectives of charter high school counselors to be captured to examine their work of implementing a college-for-all model in Los Angeles (Creswell, 2014; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were used as a form of data collection since they leave space for follow-up questions to clarify responses or gather additional context (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

The researcher interviewed seven school counselors from six different Charter Management Organizations in Los Angeles about their counseling programs. Demographic information about charter schools in California was acquired from the California Charter School Association (CCSA) to identify charter high schools in Los Angeles that had over 60% of students enrolled in the Free Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) and a graduation rate of 70% or higher. These criteria were used based on the list of eligible participants from the list provided by the California Charter School Association (CCSA), and the positive outcomes amidst higher enrollment of students from marginalized backgrounds. The target population consisted of 20 college-preparatory charter high schools from 11 charter organizations in Los Angeles, and ultimately seven participants from six different schools were recruited. All participants had at least two years of experience, worked at a school with at least three graduating classes that used A-G subject requirements as part of their graduation requirements and were responsible for the college-going culture at their school site. Table 1 displays demographic breakdown for the participants' schools. Participants consisted of six females including one Black, one White, one Indian, and three Latinas; and one Latino male.

Table 1: Participants' School Demographics

School	Total enrolment	% of free/reduced lunch	% students with disabilities
1	453	96%	9%
2	483	99%	11%
3	718	84%	5%
4	432	91%	10%
5	458	98%	6%
6	365	68%	10%

Note. This table displays the demographic information of the schools where the participants were employed during the study. Two of the seven participants were from the same school.

Data Collection

To recruit participants, the researcher emailed schools meeting the criteria to invite school counselors to opt into being interviewed about their counseling program. The researcher also posted recruitment messages on Facebook and invited participants to share the study information with other potential study participants. Interested school counselors met with the researcher and reviewed the information about the study, their ability to opt-out at any time, and the interview protocol.

School counselors who opted into the study following informed consent were interviewed using the nine interview questions generated from the literature review. The questions asked participants to describe the goals of their role and program, design, and factors that support their work. The researcher also used two external reviewers with experience in college counseling and charter schools to vet and provide feedback on the semi-structured interview questions (Creswell, 2007) and revised the interview questions based on the feedback. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and the standard human subjects considerations from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed for the study. Interviews were held either in person or over the phone, and recorded with the participants' permission.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the interview recordings upon the completion of all interviews to prepare for the data analysis.

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Once transcribed, the researcher sent the transcripts to the participants for review of accuracy before starting the analysis. Participants were allotted six days to review their transcripts and return with any necessary modifications. Participants only needed to respond if they had modifications. Once the accuracy of the transcripts was confirmed, the researcher read and took notes on each transcript (Creswell, 2007). The researcher then read each of the transcripts twice to identify codes and themes that emerged across them (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, the researcher focused on the themes by interview question responses and narrowed them to no more than six per question. These are the themes that are further highlighted in the findings of this study.

Trustworthiness

Being mindful of the researcher's positionality as a former school counselor in a Los Angeles-based charter high school, the researcher also had two content experts with experience in college counseling and charter schools repeat the same review and coding process of the transcripts. Each of the volunteer researchers had prior data coding experience and analyzed the transcripts independently. Upon completion, the researcher reviewed the coded data from the volunteer researchers to compare the results and negotiate any mismatch in the findings. Finally, the researcher began to interpret the information to identify the findings (Creswell, 2007).

Results

This study explored the perspective of charter high school counselors using a college model. Findings are presented into three categories to address the research questions: (a) goals for the counselor role, (b) systematic components, and (c) supporting factors. Each area of focus comprises several themes that represent integral program attributes to consider for the college for all model. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings.

Table 2: Counsellor Role Goals, Systematic Components, and Supporting Factors

Counsellor Role Goals	Systematic Components	Supporting Factors
• High school graduation • College access and enrolment for all students • College awareness • Parental/ family involvement	• Academic advising • A-G subject requirements as graduation or partial graduation requirements • College advisory classes or alike to provide college knowledge and information • Small student-to-school counsellor ratios	• Ensure students meet A-G course requirements • Provide information on how to access college to both students and families • Individualized college counselling • Teacher involvement • College awareness in middle school for their feeder students

Note. This table displays the key themes for questions that address the goals for the counsellor role, the systematic components, and the supporting factors of the college counselling model.

Goals of the Role of Counselors in Charter Schools

The interviews yielded four primary goals for the school counselors in the charter high schools represented in this study: ensure that they have a high graduation rate, facilitate college awareness, college access and enrollment for all students, and involve parents and families in their work with students. Schools represented in the study had several goals school-wide, however, when it came to the goals of the counselor role, they were all founded by the college for all organization/school-wide mindset. The schools represented in the study had A-G requirements as their graduation or part of their graduation requirements. As one participant indicated,

> *We are a charter school that does not go by credits, we go by classes which are the A-G requirements that the University of California and CSU systems use, so as long as they satisfy the A-G, then they are good with the graduation requirements on top of volunteer hours.*

The schools have set a goal for counselors to ensure that all students graduate and in the process, also gain eligibility to apply for public four-year universities in the state. When students are not on track to meet graduation requirements or are struggling academically, the school counselors help establish a plan with the student. In the case of one participant, this included linking students to tutoring:

> *Also, with our struggling students, this past semester, all students who were struggling, especially in math and science, anything A-G, I will assist you with getting a one-on-one tutor, and this has about 95% that will pass the classes successfully at least with a "C" or better. The outcome has been amazing; it is working. I think students are taking on the one-on-one tutor.*

Regardless of grades or test scores, school counselors are responsible for ensuring that all students make progress toward these goals. As one participant described:

> *Our goal is to get 100% of our students to receive college access information and of course, 100% graduation rate, 100% A-G classes, so 100% to have their A-G classes, and 100% be ready to attend a four-year college or*

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university. Ideally, we shoot for 100% college acceptance rate.

Similar to this participant, other participants echoed a similar insight about their position goals and college awareness:

…to get 100% of the student body to be aware of all related to college; college-bound is what I call it, starting from ninth through twelfth grade. My goal with that is for them to be informed and aware of all that is available to them from the financial aspect to opportunities at the universities, all of the different types of universities to little things as just knowing what's required.

All school counselors in this study shared parallel remarks about parent and family involvement being at the core of their position goals. Parent and family involvement was important for student accountability and partnership in ensuring students pursue their college goals. One participant shared the following:

We reach out to parents a lot and I think anybody having that parental involvement makes the student work a little bit harder and have that extra thing that they need to be able to succeed in school and college because they have someone to push them in that way when they are at home. I think it is great when we have our parents come in and the students that have that parental support, or even if the parent may not know exactly what we are talking about when it comes to financial aid and college terms, if they know that they want their student to go to college they tend to make their student accountable for themselves.

The sentiments from this participant summarize those of the other participants about parental/family involvement being a large goal for their role and programs to reinforce the message about college at home. Parent/family involvement also serves as another layer of accountability for students to perform better in school and feel support from the various adults in their lives.

Systematic Components

To achieve these goals, counselors identified five key systematic components to support the college for all model at their school: academic advising, A-G subject requirements as graduation or partial graduation requirements, college advisory classes or alike as a way to provide college knowledge and information, and small student-to-school counselor ratios. Counselors are charged with developing a comprehensive school counseling program, and they do so by creating a systematic way of delivering services and resources. These schools normalized that all student's complete college entrance requirements and received academic advising as such. Creating a system where all students are deemed college-bound also allows for the opportunity to make college information dissemination a part of the regular school day and onboards teachers in the process. Hence, academic advising and college counseling occur in the school day. One participant indicated that academic advising happens for all at least four times per year:

In individual counseling, I go through all students and have meetings individually with them to let them know that I am here to help them academically or in other aspects so I also give them the individual time throughout the year as our goal is to meet with them four times a year, so it comes out to one time each quarter.

If school counselors have manageable caseloads, they can make the college process personal for each student and steer them along the way through proper academic advising that moves students to and through high school graduation and college. The participant statement below captures a synthesis a similar experience shared by other study participants:

With us, we are a school of about 600 students, and with each counselor being grade-based, you are looking at each counselor having between 100-120 students, which throughout the year with their four years here, you build a relationship that they feel comfortable with and know that you are here in regards to academics or other needs that they may have.

In one of the schools, the participant described how providing college information included involving students:

I work a lot with what I have now, which is the college commissioner, which are students that also go out and give presentations during the advisories and we developed and created surveys so we go in and disseminate that information. Those students are selected because they are student government; student government is broken into groups, into pairs and then they are assigned specific topics and each year is changing.

This also means that all students get to access the information, and not just a few. In another school, they have a grit class where college knowledge is facilitated:

We implemented a grit class into the program where one of the electives is a grit class, which includes college knowledge…Before it was taught by the counselors and we were in the classroom all day, but it was taking a lot of time away from us. Now we put an elective teacher for the class and the counselors support the teacher. The implementation of the grit classes is becoming embedded into the culture of the school.

Another participant's school also implements a class for college knowledge where they and their designated teacher co-create the content. The participant disclosed the following:

Currently, we only have ninth and eleventh graders in the college advisory classes, and those classes do the larger informational pieces…The teachers and I work together to identify what are those missing pieces from our curriculum school-wide that need to be addressed in college advisory classes for the students to be successful later.

In summary, the school counselor participants shared that having small student-to-counselor ratios allows them to develop and manage the systematic components of their school

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counseling program, and have more intentional collaboration with their teachers.

Supporting Factors

Aligned to the systematic factors to be able to meet their position goals, the participants also identified supporting factors that enable them to have a comprehensive program. Supporting factors identified by the participants include: ensuring students meet A-G course requirements, providing information on how to access college to both students and families, facilitating individualized college counseling, involving teachers in the process, and starting college awareness in middle school for their feeder students. It is important to note that not all schools represented in this study had a feeder middle school, but nonetheless, counselors identified this as a tenet to bolster the college for all model.

The participants highlighted that providing parents/legal guardians and students information about the college is central to bolstering a college-going culture.

> *I think that when you put together all three, school's involvement, and the student and the parent involvement, then we get some good outcomes, and I think that is probably the most important, getting parents involved in the college-going process to whatever extent we can get them involved whether it is just having the student research or getting them down here for a discussion about financial aid options for them, I think that is the piece that in my opinion is important.*

Another participant indicated how providing information about college to students and families at the school is especially key for students who will be the first-generation to pursue higher education.

> *We have a small school so that helps; it helps that all of the teachers know their students by name and all of the counselors, we know all of our students by name, we know their families, we have that connection with them. It is the same as "it takes a village to raise a child" That is what it is when it comes to our school; I think it is necessary when it comes to first-generation, low-income students so they can become successful.*

Teacher involvement was another layer captured as a supporting factor. One participant noted, "...another piece is having the whole staff on board and believing that students can go to a four-year school and not counseling them out in private conversations with them, which I saw happen at my previous school very often." This speaks to not only the teachers providing accurate information but also aligning with the mission of college being an option for all students. As all participants shared during their interviews, their work relies on teacher involvement and support. Finally, participants also indicated that college awareness starts in middle school. The following participant spoke about both to the teacher involvement and earlier college awareness:

> *Within the high school level (because we are both middle and high school), we are in a very fortunate position that we get the kids young and families as well, which is a huge component in having buy-in with the community. So when we get the kids in middle school, it is this is what to expect and high school and you should know about it and what it is going to translate to as you get older in each year.*

Overall, from the data gathered, participants shared that if the mindset and goals are in place, it allows for the systems and implementation to follow.

Discussion

The study provides considerations that contribute to existing literature on the role of the counselor in high schools, the impact of a clear school mission on school outcome accountability, comprehensive college counseling, and detracking in schools. The participants in this study highlighted how the counselor role goals, systematic components influenced by the mission of the school, and supporting factors that drive the College for All model, all work together to deliver positive outcomes, especially when supporting students from marginalized backgrounds. All of these schools were grounded on the mission of their organization as college-preparatory which naturally set the college for all mindset in the leaders, teachers, school counselors, students, and families. There were systems set in the schools that facilitated strong outcomes from the counselor and their college counseling programs. This common mission amongst the participants' schools surfaced parallel position goals, systematic components, and implementation factors. The goals of the counselor role gave clarity to how they contributed to the school-wide mission of college for all students, and there were clear systemic components that facilitated the counselor's ability to deliver on their goals. Their work was not siloed and confined to their office, but some systems allowed for counselors to deliver on their charge.

The Counselor's Role in Charter Schools

The school counselors were part of schools where there was a mission that drove their position goals, and therefore also the buy-in into the dedicated systems to build a robust college for model (Rollins, 2006). Counselors had a focused role and clarity on the outcomes they needed to deliver, and fewer non-counseling duties that are often assigned to school counselors in traditional public schools (Rollins, 2006, Blake, 2020). This further responds to the literature about counselors' use of time and depicts how charter schools address these struggles and allow counselors to have a focused scope and spend more of their time on counseling duties. Parallel to this, Shi and Brown (2020) highlighted that when counselors spend more time with students and center their work on activities that promote going to college, it allows them to also influence this outcome of having more students have college as a goal. In schools, the teacher role is so defined, but the counselor role is a catch-all to fill in gaps not already covered, especially when they are trying to be "team players" as often valued in our educational system. Thus, in schools where the counselor role is less defined, they might spend more time appeasing everyone else and therefore less time is spent on direct student services (ASCA, 2023). This also

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makes it so that each stakeholder group has different expectations for the counselors. In these charter schools, the role matches the expectations and therefore drives the actions, and counselors know where they fit in the structure of their school.

Mission-Driven College Counseling

Based on how these schools were established to expect that all students will go to college, it minimized the opportunity for tracking and therefore expanded higher education as an opportunity for all (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). When schools make it a norm to have high school student's complete college entrance requirements, it continues to leave college as a viable option for all students and mitigates tracking that has historically kept many students from accessing higher education (Farmer-Hinton, 2010). Thus, the mission of the schools allows for all stakeholders to connect themselves to the goal of having all students learn, apply and hopefully matriculate to college. This was evident as schools in this study prioritize A-G course access and completion for all students as part of their graduation requirements. Counselors also shared that all students at their school received a form of college advisory classes that were integral to the school community. Similarly, Rollins (2006) highlights the opportunity for charter school counselors to implement lessons in class more regularly and facilitate schoolwide programming. Moreover, participants received support from their administrators and teachers to implement a college-going culture and there was a belief in having families as key stakeholders be part of the education and conversation about college. As a participant shared, "...when you put together all three, school's involvement, and the student and the parent's involvement, then we get some good outcomes." Connected to the tenets of a comprehensive college counseling program (McDonough, 2004), the participants in this study involved teachers to deliver information and resources to students and families. Furthermore, counselors show that college counseling is not only done by counselors, rather it is something that all members of the school community (Farmer-Hinton, 2010; McDonough, 2004; McKillip et al., 2012).

Comprehensive College Counseling

In the case of these counselor participants, they had clarity on the expectations in their role when it came to college counseling. Participants were able to focus on four key areas: high school graduation, college access and enrollment for all students, college awareness, and parental/family involvement. In their planning of how to deliver on these four goals, the context of their schools enabled academic advising as a regular occurrence that the school community valued. Furthermore, graduation requirements mirror or closely mirror college requirements, which interrupts the tracking (Farmer-Hinton, 2010) that may inhibit student access to higher education in other school settings. Hence, this allows college to be an option for all students meeting graduation requirements. Additionally, counselors were given a platform embedded in the way their school functions to raise college awareness through college advisory classes or alike. This also served as another opportunity to collaborate with teachers and engage them in the college-going process and culture. Counselors who spend more time working with students on their college application process are more likely to see more students enrolling in higher education. In this study, counselors in charter schools spent most of their time focused on the college-going culture, and this is a large concentration for them and the entire school, enabling their outcomes (Shi & Brown, 2020). Finally, the small student-to-counselor ratio allows counselors to deepen their work with students who turn to their school educators as a source of social capital in navigating the college process (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McKillip et al., 2012; Rodriguez, 2015). The students served at the participants' respective schools were all students from marginalized backgrounds, and as Savitz-Romer (2012) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) found, they need more comprehensive assistance, and this is possible in the charter schools represented in this study. This further affirms Corwin et al. (2004) about the impact of ratios on the quality of college counseling that students receive. It is important to note that it is not just about the ratio, but also about the time, which in the case of the participants, their time was primarily focused on direct student services around college counseling (McKillip et al., 2012).

Implications

Understanding the experiences of counselors in charter schools and how they are approaching the implementation of a college-going culture in alternative public school settings, surfaces the opportunity to address some of the barriers in traditional public schools. The study offers considerations for the role of the counselor in high schools, the impact of a clear school mission on stakeholder accountability, comprehensive college counseling, and detracking in schools. While the study highlights the learnings from counselors in the context of charter high school in Los Angeles, it still lends takeaways about role specificity, considering how each person and system in our schools leads to the desired outcomes, and how a common mission for all stakeholders mitigates tracking students in ways that limit their opportunities for after high school.

The autonomy that charter schools were given to rethinking their overall systems, approaches, and the roles of the educators in their setting has allowed for the counselor role to have goals that align with the mission and priority of their respective schools. Having clarity on the goals of the counselor role and a focus on the deepening of their work, along with school systems that enable the work necessary to deliver on a college for all approach, addresses the role ambiguity that counselors may experience in traditional school settings (Blake, 2020; Dahir et al., 2019). The participants also affirm that alignment in role perception and role goals enables counselor effectiveness. The streamlining of the counselor role at these public charter schools has allowed them to intensify their ability to monitor student progress towards meeting college requirements, serve as brokers of college information for students and families, provide individual college counseling, involve teachers, and in some instances start the college awareness in their feeder schools. While the goals of the role of the counselor feel narrow in scope,

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the actual systems and supporting factors allow counselors to be efficient, lead others, collaborate in ways that are intentional to meet school-wise goals and bolster their work with students and families. The counseling in these schools further allows counselors to meet students where they are and provide individualized support (Blake, 2020).

Additionally, the role of the counselor in charter schools prompts to consider how alignment in roles in the schools and all educators working towards one common goal increases collaboration and hence overall impact. In the participants' school, they have reimagined their approach to serving students and everyone rallies around one common goal, college for all students. Such focus enables the schools to implement systems that move them toward this goal such as college advisory classes where teachers and counselors collaborate to provide comprehensive college counseling, graduation requirements that mirror college entrance requirements, small counselor-to-student ratios that make individualized counseling manageable, intentional family involvement, and a collective responsibility for college counseling. McKillip et al. (2012) share that high school counselors have the strongest impact in the inequity gap in the U.S. to help students access higher education. Hence, school leaders have to think about who in their building serves as a gatekeeper and influencer of the school's goals, and how they are being positioned for success using the systems, structures, and the goal for their respective roles. In alignment to the recommendation of the delivery of services by counselors, counselors in charter schools and other educators in the building share the goal of supporting all students to pursue higher education (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994, 2006, and 2012 as cited by Dahir et al., 2019). Finally, we are also able to learn about a way to detrack in schools and ensure all students receive equitable services and be met where they are to still pursue high expectations.

The study underscores the importance of universal clarity on the role of the school counselor in schools, and policy implications for the recommendation to make the counselor role mandatory in all schools. It also presents an argument for college advisory classes as a hallmark in public schools to alleviate tracking of student information and services about their postsecondary option. Charter schools came as a way to reform public education, so it is time for us to think about how we revisit their wins and use their promising practices to combat barriers in our public education system. Finally, it highlights the importance of the school mission and/or goals being clear to drive the implementation of systems in the school that lead to the desired outcomes.

Limitations

Five limitations were identified in the study. Given the focus of this study on college counseling efforts from the lens of the counselors, it might overlook other efforts taking place at the sites that also impact a college-going culture. The phenomenological nature of the study also does not account for other environmental or setting factors that may hinder or foster the college-going culture. Moreover, this study does not account for the resources and level of expertise that might be available at the site. Additionally, the study does not factor in the quality of college counseling. Finally, the sample size of the study only represents a small cross-section of the students enrolled in charter schools, and therefore the results may not be generalizable.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study add to the understanding of the implementation of the college for all model in public schools, specifically, public charter schools. However, questions remain about the implementation of this model in larger traditional public schools and online charter high schools, especially any yielding positive outcomes for students who are from marginalized backgrounds in education. It would be of interest to learn more about how school counselors in non-charter school settings have set their college counseling goals and the school-wide systems to bolster their outcomes. Additionally, researchers would benefit from further exploration of how mission-driven schools and educational organizations compare to schools and educational settings that refer less to their mission. Aligned with this, it would contribute to the research to understand how non-counselors in mission-driven organizations see themselves as part of implementation of the comprehensive college for all model. Finally, research is needed on the collaboration across schools between school counselors and other educational partners to understand other promising practices for systematic and comprehensive collaborations.

Conclusion

The school counselors in this study were all part of the decision-making process in their Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and schools about school counseling. While participants did not make mention of the following themselves, one can deduce that the understanding from others about their role and its impact has allowed their organizations and schools to strategically support their work (Gysbers & Stanley, 2014). Test scores and classroom pedagogy are still important to these charter schools, however, they are a byproduct of the College for all mission that creates a common target. In the charter schools represented in this study, teachers were a part of the counseling process, counselors were a part of the teaching process, and administrators rallied behind the goals of the counseling programs because it allows them to work towards the organization's mission of making college possible for all students. Much of the role of the school counselor is often misunderstood because the reportable outcomes for schools are often so "classroom-centered" that it makes it challenging to consider how other stakeholders contribute or can contribute to school- and district-wide priorities (Gysbers & Stanley, 2014). Lastly, despite still having the same accountability outcomes as traditional public schools, the stakeholders at these charter schools were not solely driven by the performance outcomes on standardized test scores, but also by their progress toward their mission.

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