

"Not my job", or is it: School Counselor's Perceptions of Collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

Elizabeth S. G. Dimond- Utah State University

Michelle McKnight¹- Utah State University

Trenton J. Landon- Utah State University

Jarhed Peña- Michigan State University

Kayla R. Currier Kipping- Utah State University

Abstract

Students with disabilities (SWD) face obstacles in completing their high school education and deciding on their next steps, such as college or careers. This qualitative study used inductive thematic analysis to explore the perspectives of secondary school counselors on their experiences collaborating with vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and their knowledge of the services they provide. Study participants were identified through national and state-level professional school counselor associations and included 159 secondary school counselors. Participants answered five open-ended questions regarding their beliefs and collaborative practices with VR counselors. Results indicated that many school counselors are aware of VR services but lack the basic information needed to collaborate effectively and have experienced barriers to collaboration with their local VR system. There is a need for additional training and knowledge to enable school counselors to engage in the postsecondary transition process for SWD. Recommendations for future practice were provided.

Keywords: *Students with Disabilities, Transition, Collaboration, Vocational Rehabilitation, School Counselors*

"Not my job," or is it: School Counselor's Perceptions of Collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

The transition from secondary education into adulthood is a recognized developmental milestone but can also be a time fraught with uncertainty and stress for all students. Students with disabilities (SWD) face additional obstacles in completing their high school education and deciding on their next steps, such as college or careers. In the 2018-2019 academic year, 7.1 million SWD in the United States were receiving Special Education services; this is about 14.1% of the population of US school children (Hussar et al., 2020). Students with disabilities have lower participation rates in post-secondary education and employment (Prince et al., 2018), and the transition from secondary education into adulthood is even more complicated for SWD.

School counselors have a unique and vital role in assisting all students in preparing for and transitioning to life after high school; this includes SWD (ASCA, 2016). SWD enroll in and graduate from postsecondary education at rates much lower than their peers without disabilities (Prince et al., 2018). School counselors play an essential role in the secondary education system as they prepare students for life following high school. They are mandated to support all students in their educational process, social/emotional experiences, and career planning (ASCA, 2016a). The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Code of Ethics states that school counselors should "Provide a list of resources for outside agencies and resources in their community to student(s) and parents/guardians when students need or request additional support." and "Connect students with services provided through the local school district and community agencies." (2016a). Additionally, school counselors have an ethical responsibility to prepare and educate all students on their college, career, and post-secondary opportunities (ASCA, 2016a, 2017).

However, research indicates that school counselors report feeling unprepared to serve SWD (Alvarez et al., 2020; Romano et al., 2009). While the literature has demonstrated the evolving role of school counselors in the special education and transition process, research continues to document a lack of inclusion of special education material and disability-specific education in school counselor graduate programs (McEachern, 2003; Milsom, 2002;

¹ michelle.lizotte@usu.edu

Romano et al., 2009). One study found that disability was only mentioned in multicultural courses for school counselors-in-training (Alvarez et al., 2020). Another study indicated that school counselors were not enthusiastic or optimistic about their role in the federally mandated rehabilitation services of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Goodman-Scott & Boulden, 2020). The lack of disability-related training and education school counseling students receive is incongruent with the ASCA Code of Ethics, which states that school counselors must “Recognize the strengths of students with disabilities as well as their challenges and provide best practices and current research in supporting their academic, career and social/emotional needs.” (ASCA, 2016a, A.10.g).

Research demonstrates that a school counselor’s role and responsibilities vary greatly depending on the school they work in, the community they operate in, and the administration’s perspective on professional school counseling (Ameta& Clark, 2005). While school counselors are ethically mandated to participate in college and career planning for all students, the task of career development and transition planning often falls to special educators.

The ASCA National Model explains how high school counselors contribute to students' academic, college, and career readiness and social/emotional development through direct and indirect student services (ASCA, 2019). Direct student services include instruction, counseling, and advisement. In contrast, indirect student services are related to community partnerships, consulting with community organizations, and making student referrals to community resources for additional information and assistance (ASCA, 2019). Additionally, the ASCA Model states that “advocating for students at individual education plan meetings” is an appropriate school counselor activity (2019).

Collaboration in Transition Planning

The transition planning process for SWD requires the resources and input of professionals and organizations both within the school system and the community. Collaboration among interdisciplinary transition team members is essential for SWD to complete secondary education and continue to post-secondary education or employment (Test et al., 2009). Collaboration between transition stakeholders has been a critical factor in improving post-school outcomes for SWD (Kline & Kurz, 2014). However, research specific to collaboration in the transition of SWD has focused on one type of school professional, special education teachers (Plotner et al., 2017; Riesen et al., 2014).

Typically, special education teachers lead transition planning efforts for SWD, which is appropriate since the special educator has the most information regarding the SWD’s strengths, interests, and needs (Frazier et al., 2020). However, as part of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors also assist SWDs in transition (ASCA, 2019). The need for collaboration with outside agencies in the post-school transition process is also not new to school counseling literature (Milsom, 2007; Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006). Effective collaboration between special educators, VR counselors, and school counselors is vital to providing SWD with high-quality, evidence-based transition services.

What is Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling

Like school counselors, rehabilitation counselors in a VR setting are master’s level professionals who work with SWD to prepare them for life after high school. VR counseling is a subspecialty of counseling that assists people who have disabilities to live and work as independently as possible. VR services aim to assist persons with disabilities through advocacy and empowerment, removing community participation and integration barriers. This goal becomes significant both for VR counselors and school counselors as WIOA legislation expanded the services provided by VR counselors to SWD beginning at age 14. This allows and emphasizes further collaboration between VR and secondary school professionals to assist SWD transition into adulthood.

Study Rationale and Purpose

SWDs face complex educational, socio-emotional, and career barriers. School counselors have been directed to provide comprehensive school counseling services to all students. Thus, to better understand the school counselor's role in the transition process for SWD, we used a qualitative design to answer the following research question:

1. What are the knowledge, perceptions, and practice patterns of school counselors serving transition-age students with disabilities regarding vocational rehabilitation?

Method

This qualitative study used inductive thematic analysis to explore the perspectives of secondary (9th-12th grade) school counselors employed in the United States. The data for this study came from a more extensive study (Currier-Kipping et al., 2021) which used a 20-item Qualtrics questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 12 demographic items, including age, gender, race, level of education, years of practice, familiarity with VR services, and the state or territory where the counselor practiced. Five open-ended questions were included in the survey to elicit information about school counselors' knowledge of VR, barriers they have experienced when collaborating with VR counselors, and what they would like to learn about VR services. The questions asked of participants are included in Appendix A.

Participants

A total of 177 secondary school counselors in the US completed the initial survey. Participants for this study included only those who completed the open-ended questions on the survey (N = 159). The race, level of education, years of practice, and familiarity with VR services are reported in Table 1.

*****Insert Table 1 Here*****

While it is concerning that the participant pool was primarily female (87%) and white (88%), this is not out of line with the demographics of school counselors nationally, a 2020 State-of-the-Profession survey was sent by ASCA to almost 75,000 school counselors. Of those, 7,000 responded and completed the study. Of the 7,000 respondents, 87% identified as female, and 77% were white.

Recruitment

Study participants were recruited using state and national professional school counselor associations such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) and state-level school counseling associations. Additional study recruitment used e-mail to connect with the directors of these associations and request they disseminate our survey to their membership. The invitation to participate through various means includes posting it to the organization's Facebook page, emailing it directly to members, or including a link to the survey in their monthly newsletter. The survey was also shared by the researchers of this study on a national organization representing school counselors' open forum online site. Due to the variations in recruiting methods, it is unclear how many secondary school counselors received an invitation to participate; thus, a response rate cannot be calculated. Inclusion criteria mandated that participants were employed at the time of data collection in a secondary (9th-12th grade) school setting as a school counselor involved in transition planning for SWD in the US.

Data Analysis

A team of four researchers coded the responses to the qualitative survey questions using inductive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted at the latent level to identify and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After becoming familiar with the data, three coders reviewed each qualitative response independently and then met to share codes and come to a consensus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Multiple coders increased credibility through investigator or analyst triangulation (Patton, 2015). Three rounds of coding were used to organize and consolidate themes into categories that best represented the coders' understanding of the data. Finally, a fourth coder was brought in to review and verify the findings. The writing team then defined themes and identified the quotes which best illustrate the results.

Trustworthiness

To increase the credibility of the findings, three authors individually coded participant data and then came together to triangulate the data. Triangulation was utilized to reduce the effect of personal bias in the data analysis process (Patton, 2015). Additionally, a fourth coder served as an outside consultant and joined the coding process to verify the themes identified during the thematic analysis.

Researcher Reflexivity

To address the confirmability of the findings, the researchers each provided a detailed researcher reflexivity statement regarding their experiences, understanding, and biases related to school counselors' involvement with referrals to VR for students with disabilities (McDonald et al., 2019). This is also called "researcher positionality." The team of researchers comes from various disability-related fields, including disability studies, clinical rehabilitation counseling, and special education. A constructivist lens was used in the development of the research questions and throughout the data analysis process. The professional and personal experiences of the researchers influenced the creation of themes and the interpretation of their meaning.

Results

Three primary themes emerged from the data related to school counselors' understanding, perception, and relationship with vocational rehabilitation counselors and services. These themes are: (1) "Not my Job," (2) Knowledge and Benefits of VR services, and (3) Barriers to Collaboration. Subthemes are addressed within each theme, and illustrative participant excerpts will be provided within each subtheme.

"Not my job": Supporting SWD Not Part of School Counselor Job Duties

Many school counselors reported that they are not the primary transition professional responsible for supporting SWD in their schools and often were not involved in the transition planning process. While participants mostly noted special education teachers as the primary providers of transition planning for SWD, other professionals were mentioned, such as transition counselors, caseworkers, social workers, caseload teachers, and transition specialists. This theme was seen in at least one of the responses given to each open-ended question, with 54 occurrences, making it the most prominent theme present in the analysis.

In response to the question, "Please explain what you know about VR (e.g., its purpose; the services provided)." Several participants indicated they knew little about VR. Some stated that they knew little about VR because it was the responsibility of another department. One school counselor stated, "Virtually nothing- it is a function of the sped dept." Another said, "I do not know much about it because it is not part of the counseling duties at my school." When asked about what they would like to know about VR, a few participants mentioned again that other departments were responsible for working with VR. Examples include: "We usually have our special education transition specialist talk about VR with students." and "In my school, this is not my primary role, however, the special education services provide this information."

When asked about barriers to collaborating with VR, participants indicated, "I have not had challenges; my special education dept works with them." and "Our special education department handles it." This theme of "it's not my job/someone else does it" was most prevalent in the responses to the question regarding barriers to making referrals to VR, with thirteen responses indicating that special educators make referrals. Examples include: "None. We have a transition coordinator whose role is to support individuals with this [VR referrals]." and "The only barrier would be that it [VR referrals] is not part of my job; it is the special education teacher's job." Surprisingly, the "Not my job" theme even appeared when participants were asked about the benefits of VR services; one counselor reported: "We have a team that specializes in our special needs population, and they primarily provide this type of referral."

Knowledge and Benefits of Vocational Rehabilitation

Some participants reported not being knowledgeable about VR services or processes because they did not collaborate with VR in transition planning for SWD. However, many school counselors had some existing knowledge about VR. There were three primary subthemes related to VR knowledge held by participants: (a) Existing VR Knowledge, (b) Benefits of VR, and (c) Knowledge Desired.

Existing VR Knowledge

Many participants recognized that the purpose of VR was to assist SWD in obtaining the training and resources necessary to find employment. For example, one participant stated, "VR is available to students with disabilities to help them gain training and job skills to help them be successful in life." While most participants noted that VR's focus was employment, several indicated that VR could provide resources for students with disabilities to assist with post-secondary education. One participant stated,

“VR can pay for college tuition and required equipment (e.g., tools for the auto mech program or knives for the culinary program).” Unfortunately, 19 participants stated that they knew “nothing” or “very little” about VR. One participant explained, “I don’t know much about it [VR] as this is my first year as a school counselor at the high school level.”

Employment Related Services. Participants listed many of the individual services that VR can provide to SWDs to prepare them for employment and help them obtain and maintain employment. The data noted these services: job coaching, tutoring, job placement, job training, job shadows, resume assistance, job interview preparation, vocational evaluations, career counseling, financial aid for college, workplace accommodations, and transportation. One participant noted, “It [VR] is any support, following the student through high school and beyond, providing career exploration, job training, support services, and securing a job, home, etc., with follow up support.”

Student Development. While participant knowledge mainly focused on employment-related activities and employment outcomes, there were comments related to student skill development and independent living. For example, one participant explained, “It is a life changer for a student to have strong individualized support and make a huge difference in their being as independent as their disability will allow.” Participants described SWDs benefiting from VR services’ increased communication and social skills. Also noted was additional access to transition-related resources and more opportunities in the community related to the transition process.

Benefits of the VR Process

Increased Vocational Opportunities. In response to the survey question asking about perceived benefits for SWD in working with VR in the transition process, participants primarily described increased vocational opportunities. Participants detailed specific student situations they were aware of; for example, “our students have received numerous benefits, help with transportation, help with materials to be successful in college, such as laptop and text funds.” School counselors were aware that VR could pay for post-secondary education and other vocational training, leading to more employment opportunities for SWD.

Emotional Benefits. In addition to vocational benefits, participants also described the emotional and quality of life benefits experienced by students participating in transition experiences with VR. Participants noted benefits to students’ self-esteem, confidence, and, most importantly, a purpose for their lives and a place in their community. One participant described the emotional benefits of VR collaboration like this, “to learn and grow in a safe environment allows the student to become independent, courageous, bold, and knowledgeable.”

Desired Information

One of the open-ended questions participants were asked on the survey instrument was, “In the space provided, please explain what you would like to know about VR.” The data regarding information desired by school counselors was coded into three areas, (1) The VR Process, (2) Funding and Eligibility, and (3) Timing.

The VR Process. Participants asked many questions regarding the logistics of the VR process. One stated they would like to know more about “Everything.” Another commented, “The resources available in their areas and the process[s] used in VR to find students employment.” Participants overall described knowing that VR helps people with disabilities find employment but knew little about how VR goes about doing that. One participant asked, “What resources are used when helping students find the best job to fit their personality and ability?”

Beyond procedural questions, participants were also interested in outcome data related to students’ success after receiving VR services. Study participants questioned student commitment to the process, “[I want more information] regarding the percentage of students that start the process and complete it until they are receiving services.” The success rate for students was also a point of interest for participants, “What is the percentage of VR services placed into employment and how many[students] retain their employment status and for how long?”

Funding and Eligibility- Questions regarding who pays for VR services and what kinds of services VR provides were frequently noted by participants. Participants desired more information about the payment process or student cost for VR services. Additionally, participants reported a lack of understanding about which of their SWD would qualify for VR assistance. Participants said things like, “How do they [VR] decide who qualifies?” “What does a student need to qualify [for VR services]?” and “How do they [VR] determine eligibility?” Participants also

questioned if the type of school they worked in would impact their ability to refer students to VR, “I work at a private school, so I am not sure if any of my students would qualify [for VR services].”

Timing. Participants in the study requested more information regarding when they should refer students to VR, how long VR can serve a student and other questions related to timing. For example, one participant stated, “I’d like to know how long after they graduate do students continue to receive help [from VR]?”, and another said, “How long can [VR] services be provided?”. School counselors were curious as to the “right” time to refer students to VR with comments such as, “What is the best age to refer a student [to VR]?”

Barriers to Collaboration

Participants were asked what barriers to effective collaboration they experienced when attempting to collaborate with VR. Within the Collaboration Barriers theme, three subthemes were identified in the data. Subthemes include: (a) Lack of Basic Information, (b) Student and Family Investment, and (c) Local Logistics.

Lack of Basic Information

School Counselors explained that they know who to contact for referrals at their local VR office. One participant stated, “I am not sure who the [VR] counselors are or how to contact them.” Another participant reported that their office is not made aware of when VR staff changes. Participants also stated, “[staff] Changes occur frequently.” and, “Turnover with the VR counselors in our area has made it challenging to sustain cases.” One school counselor described that a lack of knowledge about VR extended to other coworkers, “VR is also not a service many people I’ve worked with know about.”

There is an overall lack of understanding of who qualifies for VR services and eligibility. Participants were unsure how old an SWD needed to be to qualify, if there were only certain types of disabilities that would be eligible for services, and what the process to be determined eligible was. Beyond not being knowledgeable about eligibility, some participants reported misinformation regarding eligibility for VR services. One participant said that students needed to wait until the age of 22 to get VR services, which is untrue.

Student and Family Investment

School Counselors reported a lack of buy-in from parents in supporting their student's participation in VR while in high school as a barrier. Participants said parents might be in denial regarding the impact of their child's disability on their future and about their child's needs and abilities. This can be further complicated by parents' lack of understanding of the VR process and the time commitment to engage their child with the program. For example, “Most of the [collaboration] challenges take place when the parents are involved. They are confused even after we explain the benefits of VR.”

In addition, parents may be unwilling to engage with VR because of the negative social stigma that remains for people with disabilities. One school counselor explained:

Parents and students get offended by us suggesting that their child needs it. Also, they think it doesn't apply to them because they don't think they need rehabilitation or would rather receive guidance and resources. They see “rehabilitation” as a negative term and are insulted or don't feel like we are acknowledging their abilities.

Furthermore, participants reported students' lack of buy-in and follow-up because of disinterest, lack of understanding of long-term goals, and the challenges of going through so much “red tape” to receive services. In addition to a lack of buy-in from parents, some participants reported struggling to get any support from home, “I work with students who come from challenging backgrounds with little to no support from home. It's hard to help bridge the gaps.” When this happens, counselors struggle to keep the students motivated while simultaneously reaching out to the parents to provide them with information and support for their students.

Local Logistics

Participants reported barriers to collaboration that are specific to their setting; while these barriers are essential to note, they are contextual and may not be generalizable. For example, transportation difficulties are a barrier to participating in the VR program in certain areas but not all. Scheduling difficulties were reported when the VR counselor was not always available during the student's availability to discuss participation in the program and planning for services; this is worsened when VR offices experience frequent counselor turnover.

Finding appropriate placement with local businesses to employ and train students with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities, was another reported barrier. Another common barrier reported was the large amount of paperwork associated with the VR process. One participant expressed there are “too many hoops to jump through.”

Discussion

The results of this study provided information about the collaborative practices of school counselors, special educators, and VR counselors. This study gathered information about what school counselors know and what to know about VR agencies. Using the results to inform school counselor curriculum and professional development content can help improve SWD’s quality of transition supports. Service provision to SWD by school counselors is grounded in federal legislation and ethical mandates to hold school counselors responsible for providing preventative and supportive services to SWD while enrolled in school (ASCA, 2016a; Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006). School counselors and VR counselors share similar values and goals for secondary students. Although their training and practice are similar (Scarborough & Gilbride, 2006), their expertise and knowledge related to disability and employment vary based on educational preparation. However, both professionals want SWD to have productive, meaningful adult lives. Our findings that school counselors viewed special education professionals as primarily or solely responsible for transition services for SWD supported the results of previous studies (Goodman –Scott & Boulden, 2020; Nitcher & Edmonson, 2005; Romano et al., 2009) and suggests that the belief that special educators are responsible for supporting SWD through the transition process impacts what school counselors know and want to know about VR.

The barriers to collaboration reported by participants are not new to the literature (Riesen et al., 2014). Systemic barriers such as finding time to meet when multiple schedules must be accommodated, knowing what each stakeholder does and for who, getting student and parent buy-in, navigating staff turnover and navigating through “red tape” are issues that need to be addressed through partnership building, professional development training, and modeled by school and district administrators (Riesen et al., 2014). When professionals work together to support SWD, the students have better post-secondary outcomes, and professionals can be more efficient in using their time and resources (Kline & Kurz, 2014; Test et al., 2009).

Having a basic understanding of what each member of the transition team does is a great place to start and can open the door to clear communication and trust. Data in this study demonstrate that school counselors know little about VR as a resource for SWD. While many participants knew what the general purpose of VR was and the broad categories of services VR provides, most school counselors in this study did not have the knowledge needed to make referrals, nor did they believe it was their responsibility to make such referrals. Special education professionals may indeed be the most qualified to make VR referrals. However, school counselors must know enough about the referral process, eligibility, and services to enable them to support all students in college and career counseling. Regardless of the local district’s school counselor’s specific role statement regarding their contribution to the transition planning process for SWD, as a professional who is considered a community resource expert, school counselors need to be aware of their local VR office and the services provided.

Recommendations

Given the findings of this study and previous research, the following recommendations are offered to improve the collaboration between school counselors and VR counselors. The first recommendation is greater instruction on disability and related topics (e.g., legislation impacting students with disabilities) in school counselor education and training programs. Including topics on adjustment to disability, the stigma associated with disability, and recognizing disability as a marginalized group align with the ASCA Position Statement (2016b) on serving SWD. Designated instruction in pre-practice settings could help overcome misconceptions about the school counselor’s role in the transition process for SWD. For currently practicing school counselors, professional development trainings could empower school counselors to reach out to special educators in their schools to learn more about transition services for SWD and reach out to their local VR agency/office to learn more about potential services and identify the VR counselor designated to their school.

The second recommendation echoes prior research promoting the importance of interagency collaboration. The logistics of interagency collaboration and the lack of established long-term supports upon exiting the school system have been identified as barriers to successful transition (Plotner et al., 2017; Riesen et al., 2014).

In the ASCA statement on the relationship between the school counselor and SWD (2016b), collaboration with other support professionals is listed as a critical element. The list notes school psychologists, physical and occupational therapists, special education staff, and speech and language pathologists. These professionals play a crucial role in supporting SWD, but VR counselors are notably missing from the list. Adding VR counselors to this list may help increase awareness of the services provided and emphasize the need for collaboration and coordination of services between the school counselor and assigned VR counselor.

A strong working relationship with a school's designated VR counselor is imperative. Research indicates that current approaches to the transition process are not benefitting and supporting SWD, particularly those from marginalized populations (Awsumb et al., 2020; Balcazar et al., 2013). The coordination of services between the school and VR agency by the school counselor and VR counselor will help leverage resources on behalf of these students. Transition counselors working in VR settings are guests in schools and typically gain access to students through an invitation process (i.e., an invitation to an IEP meeting), so school counselors may not have opportunities to collaborate with them if they are not invited to the meetings. Special education professionals could extend invitations to school counselors when they invite VR counselors, thus facilitating introductions and supporting more collaboration.

The third recommendation is to improve the dissemination of information about VR and available services to SWDs and their caregivers. School counselors are to encourage family involvement in the transition and educational process (ASCA, 2016b). One way to realize this goal is to provide opportunities for SWDs and families to hear about VR and its services. Research suggests that parental expectations (either too high or too low) create barriers to successful transition outcomes for SWD (Riesen et al., 2014). School counselors could provide direct and indirect support to SWD by first gathering and then providing information about their local VR agency and other disability-specific resources to display in their office. When situations arise that would facilitate a referral to a community or government agency, they already have physical copies of information to send home with students. Additionally, school counselors could invite VR counselors into their schools to explain to potential students and parents about the application process and the type of services provided by VR. Ideally, graduates of the school who were served or are being served by VR agencies could give testimonials on the impact VR supports had on their transition to adulthood and share their successes in these informational seminars. This could help provide peer-based examples of how VR services might benefit the individual.

Limitations

Every research study has limitations, and qualitative studies generally are not considered generalizable. As the survey data was self-reported, there is always the risk of being inaccurate. The participants could have stated something that does not reflect the actual transition practices of their school, state, or region. Given the enormous number of school counselors nationwide, there is concern regarding the sample representation of this population. Specifically, since our participants were primarily white and female, this could undoubtedly influence this study's findings. Furthermore, the qualitative data obtained did not allow for clarification and follow-up questions regarding participant answers to the questions or allow for member checking in the analysis process. This may have hindered our ability to assess participants' knowledge and experiences honestly.

Future Research

The results of this study may help conduct a large-scale quantitative survey regarding school counselors' involvement in various aspects of the transition process for SWD. Researchers may also be interested in exploring the impact that disability-specific training for school counselors and participation in the transition process has on the collaborative practices of school counselors. The data from this study suggested multiple areas of knowledge that need to be filled in before school counselors feel qualified to support SWD effectively and engage in meaningful collaboration with transition team members. Future studies must confirm and add to these knowledge areas to ensure that training materials address areas of need and are relevant to the work settings school counselors find themselves.

Conclusion

In the past few years, there has been national attention paid to the post-school outcomes of SWD. School counselors have a unique combination of education, skills, and knowledge of resources that would benefit SWD in their transition to college or career. The results of this study indicate that school counselors are aware of VR services in general. Still, they have limited knowledge of how VR works and experience barriers to collaboration with their local VR counselors. The goal is not to have school counselors take over the role of working with VR offices but instead for them to be informed about the services and the role VR counselors play in the transition process. Hence, being comfortable supporting all students and have the information and connections they need to make appropriate referrals when necessary. School counselors are to be part of the transition teams for all students in their schools, including SWD; therefore, school counselors must have the support, training, resources, and collaborative partnerships to feel confident in their role on the transition team.

References

- Alvarez, J. M., Bhat, C. S., & Landmark, L. J. (2020). Are school counselors sufficiently prepared to serve students with disabilities? *Journal of School Counseling*, 18 (19/20), 1- 25.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1258666.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2016a). *Ethical standards for school counselors*.
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Ethics/EthicalStandards2016.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2016b). The School Counselor and Students with Disabilities. *ASCA Position Statements*. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-Students-with-Disabilitie>
- American School Counselor Association. (2017). The school counselor and individual student planning for post-secondary preparation. *ASCA Position Statements* <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-Individual-Student-Planning>
- American School Counselor Association. (2019). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.).
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 USC 12101 et seq. (PL 101-336)
- Awsumb, J. M., Balcazar, F. E., & Keel, J. M. (2020). Youth with disabilities: Are vocational rehabilitation services improving employment outcomes? *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 52(1), 61-73.<https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-191060>
- Balcazar, F. E., Oberoi, A., & Keel, J. M. (2013). Predictors of employment and college attendance outcomes for youth in transition: Implications for policy and practice. *Journal of Rehabilitation Counseling*, 44(1), 38-45.<https://doi.org/10.1891/0047-2220.44.1.38>
- Currier-Kipping, K., McKnight-Lizotte, M., Phillips, B. N., Landon, T., & Whicker, J. (2021). Exploring the knowledge, perceptions, and practice patterns of school counselors regarding vocational rehabilitation for transition-age youth with disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 87(4), 38-47.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Frazier, K. F., Perryman, K., & Kucharczyk, S. (2020). Transition Services: Building Successful Collaborations among School Professionals. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, 2(2), 131-141.
<https://doi.org/10.25774/80b3-kc43>
- Goodman-Scott, E., & Boulden, R. (2020). School counselors' experiences with the Section 504 process: "I want to be a strong team member... [not] a case manager". *Professional School Counseling*, 23(1), 1-9.
<https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1177/2156759X20919378>
- Hall, J. G. (2015). The school counselor and special education: Aligning training with practice. *The Professional Counselor*, 5, 217-224.
- Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

- Kline, K. M., & Kurz, C. A. (2014). Collaboration between rehabilitation counselors and secondary educational institutions to optimize successful outcomes for high school students with disabilities. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*.
- McDonald, N., Schoenebeck, S., & Forte, A. (2019). Reliability and inter-rater reliability in qualitative research: Norms and guidelines for CSCW and HCI practice. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*.<https://doi.org/10.1145/335917>
- McEachern, A. G. (2003). School counselor preparation to meet the guidance needs of exceptional students: A national study. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 42, 314–325.
- Milsom, A. (2002). Students with disabilities: School counselor involvement and preparation. *Professional School Counseling*, 5, 331–338.<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42732373>
- Milson, A. (2007). Interventions to Assist students with disabilities through school transitions. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(3), 273-278.
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Plotner, A., Rose, C., VanHorn Stinnett, C., & Ivester, J. (2017). Professional characteristics that impact perceptions of successful transition collaboration. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 83(2), 43-51.
- Prince, A. M. T., Hodge, J., Bridge, W. C., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). Predictors of postschool education/training and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 41(2), 77-87.
- Riesen, T., Schultz, J., Morgan, R., & Kupferman, S. (2014). School-to-work barriers as identified by special educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and community rehabilitation professionals. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 80(1), 30-44.
- Romano, D. M., Paradise, L. V., & Green, E. J. (2009). School counselors' attitudes towards providing services to students receiving Section 504 classroom accommodations: Implications for school counselor educators. *Journal of School Counseling*, 7, 1–36.
- Scarborough, J. L., & Gilbride, D. D. (2006). Developing relationships with rehabilitation counselors to meet the transition needs of students with disabilities. *Professional School Counseling*, 10 (1), 25-33
<https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1177/2156759X0601001S04>
- Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Fowler, C. H., Korterling, L., & Kohler, P. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32(3), 160-181.
<https://doi-org.dist.lib.usu.edu/10.1177/0885728809346960>

Table 1. Demographic Information

	Mean (SD)	n (%)
Age	39.8 (9.89)	
Years in Practice	8.4 (7.3)	
Gender		M = 20 (12.6) F = 139 (87.4)
Race		White = 140 (88.1) Black or African American=13 (8.2) Asian = 2 (1.3) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander = 2 (1.3) Prefer not to say = 2 (1.3)
Level of Education		Master's degree = 143 (89.9) Ed.S = 8 (5.0) Bachelor's degree = 3 (1.9) Doctorate degree = 1 (0.6)
Familiarity with VR		Yes = 96 (60.4) No = 46 (28.9) Other = 17 (10.7)

Appendix A**Survey Questions**

1. In the space provided, please explain what you know about vocational rehabilitation (e.g., its purpose; the services provided).
2. In the space provided, please explain what you would like to know about vocational rehabilitation.
3. In the space provided, please describe what challenges you have experienced related to collaboration with vocational rehabilitation counselors?
4. In the space provided, please describe what barriers you have experienced in referring students with disabilities to vocational rehabilitation services.
5. In the space provided, please describe what benefits you believe transition-aged students receive from participating in vocational rehabilitation services.