

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE SELF-EFFICACY OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN  
THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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With a

Major in Educational Leadership in the

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by

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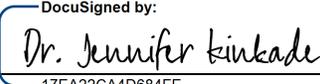
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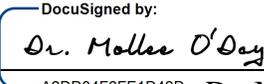
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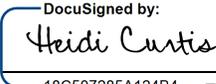
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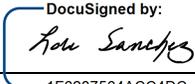
This dissertation of Jade Joie, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Educational Leadership and titled “A Qualitative Study on the Self-Efficacy of School Counselors in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends, who have always been there for me every step of the way. You supported my dream and never doubted me. When I had my own doubts, you reaffirmed that I could do it and should let the fear go and trust in God. That is just what I did. I am a firm believer that anybody can further their education at any age, and I am proof of just that. Mom, you were my best friend and the hardest worker I know—this is for you!

## ABSTRACT

COVID-19 brought many changes to the world of education. It took a toll on schools, staff, students, parents and many others. The goal of this study was to discover what stressors lessen a school counselor's self-efficacy as measured through a demographic survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews using a sample of five counselors from different states. School counselor stressors have the ability to lead to lower self-efficacy, which can then lead to burnout and a lack of school counselor retention. This study fills a gap in the literature by examining whether any post-COVID-19 stressors impact the self-efficacy of a school counselor in the present day. Qualitative research, using a narrative inquiry, was used to gain insight into what school counselors may be feeling and thinking about their role in the job. This research investigates the problems or issues that school counselors face on a day-to-day basis.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

In recent years, an increased need for school support staff, particularly school counselors, in K–12 education has become a timely and necessary area of focus (Lewis et al., 2020). School counselors, whose work is typically conducted on a school campus, provide a number of valuable services centered on supporting students' transitions to university, career decisions, and personal, academic, and social-emotional growth (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2022; Corey & Corey, 2020). These services might include, group and individual counseling, the development and implementation of school counseling programs, and consultation with school leaders, teachers, and parents. Overall, since they are explicitly trained in their field, school counselors are able to meet the developmental requirements of their students and have a promising influence on their conduct, attendance, and academic performance (ASCA, 2022).

The responsibilities of school counselors should encompass instruction, counseling, evaluation and advice, consultation, teamwork, and referrals, according to Levy and Lemberger-Truelove (2021). These responsibilities are closely related to one another and frequently overlap. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), which collaborates with school counselors, state and district officials, school counselor educators, and school counselor organizations nationwide to clarify the norms, values, and beliefs of the school counseling profession, has proposed a National Model that aligns with this understanding of the role of the school counselor (ASCA, 2022). According to ASCA's National Model, school counselors must include their responsibilities as leaders, advocates, collaborators, and agents of systemic change into every facet of their work (ASCA, 2022). Additionally, according to the National Model, school counselors should devote 80% of their time to providing direct and indirect services. It describes inappropriate responsibilities that others with less specialized training can supervise (e.g., testing coordination, disciplinary action, covering classes, bus or

cafeteria duty, and data entry; ASCA, 2022). It also includes appropriate school counselor activities meant to improve student achievement, attendance, and discipline.

Regarding their roles and responsibilities, school counselors frequently encounter conflicting expectations from students, parents, school principals, teachers, and even other counselors. (Baker et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2020; Zyromski et al., 2018). ASCA recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor (ASCA, 2022). (USDE, 2024). Additionally, a number of studies have found that school counselors are often tasked with a number of non-counseling assignments (Blake, 2020; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Randick et al., 2018; Shi & Brown, 2020; Wilder, 2018). Multiple points of view regarding the responsibilities of school counselors can result in inappropriate assignment of jobs, mismanagement of time, and heightened demands for school counselors to advocate for themselves (Perry et al., 2020).

Additionally, the misconception of school counselor roles is a liability to students. School counselors at schools are essential in helping students with their mental health, although they may encounter several problems that might heighten their susceptibility to experiencing burnout. School counselors are susceptible to experiencing burnout and it has been suggested that assessing work overload might be a useful tool in identifying those who are more likely to be at risk (King et al., 2018). Additional help for kids who need care outside of school hours may also be advantageous for school counselors. Enhanced recognition of the hazards associated with burnout, in conjunction with endeavors to enhance the distribution of resources within the educational environment (Kim & Lambie, 2018) and has the potential to maximize the delivery of mental healthcare services to students and to also improve the efficacy of school counselors in the long run.

Positive outcomes have been found in previous research that been done on school counselors providing assistance to students. Overall, students' ability to solve problems and their behavior in the classroom are improved by school counseling services (Mullen et al.,

2021). Moreover, in educational institutions where school counselors have undertaken advanced training in student services aimed at enhancing academic achievement, students have reported a number of positive results, including career and college readiness, as well as personal and social improvement. (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). These include a heightened sense of belonging, improved attendance rates, reduced interpersonal conflicts, and decreased incidents of bullying. Furthermore, scholarly investigations have shown that an increased prevalence of school counselor-facilitated services has advantageous effects on students' educational experience and academic achievements (Mullen et al., 2021).

School counselors have the opportunity to positively impact the academics of a student, as well as being able to increase their social and emotional well-being. Therefore, conducting a study on the characteristics associated with an increased occurrence of direct student services provided by school counselors might provide substantial educational advantages for educational institutions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In addition to compromising physical immunity, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed people to diseases and deaths while also impairing their mental well-being and, thus, their capacity to survive (Satici, 2023). At the start of COVID-19, concerns in reference to the pandemic's impact on students' academic achievement, mental health, and social-emotional well-being began to rise (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021; Strear et al., 2021). During this time, school counselors were sometimes the only resource available to students for mental health counseling (ASCA, 2022; Springer et al., 2020). Many counselors also became "comforters-in-chief", to many members of the school staff, including student, teachers and parents, especially during the pandemic's early years (Meyers, 2020).

After COVID-19, the presence of interconnected school settings and effective school counseling programs emerged as the most influential protective elements in promoting

favorable outcomes among young individuals. These results include enhanced academic performance, regular attendance, improved test scores, as well as mitigated adverse consequences associated with risk factors (Pincus et al., 2020). Considering the increase of challenges faced by students, such as problems, trauma, crisis, and violence, it is imperative that educational institutions prioritize the establishment of a safe and secure environment (Pincus et al., 2020). Oftentimes, some of the first people that students encounter in helping them address their mental health concerns within educational settings are school counselors. This occurs through the facilitation of talks aimed at enhancing awareness and fostering empathy. These interventions have the potential to mitigate adverse experiences and promote a more favorable school atmosphere. School counselor education programs include crisis training that is specifically applicable to the tasks and responsibilities of school counselors (Springer et al., 2020). This helps to provide school counselors with the necessary tools and knowledge to handle unforeseen circumstances (Springer et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the lives of students, presenting schools with unprecedented obstacles in their efforts to provide education and cater to the unique requirements of their pupils. According to Hamilton and Gross (2021), students encountered several challenges such as social exclusion, food difficulties, parental unemployment, fear of illness, and grief over lives lost to the virus. These factors had a detrimental impact on both their academic performance and overall well-being. This pandemic has caused a high rate of anxiety and depression among young individuals, as supported by the findings of Singh et al. (2020). This has raised considerable concerns for the mental well-being of students. Burnout may have resulted from the interruptions in education caused by COVID-19, which may have decreased students' motivation in their classes. Such fatigue may have therefore caused students to lose motivation and become less aware. (Satici, 2023) .

However, COVID-19 had a big impact on school counselors themselves. Several recent articles have shown the numerous difficulties school counselors encountered when trying to assist students academically and socially and during COVID-19. (Morton, 2020; Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Numerous people found it difficult to offer the same amount of time to talking with kids about college plans, career development, and social-emotional concerns throughout COVID-19 (Melia, 2021). Logistical obstacles to counseling included things like restricted privacy, less time allotted in the schedule for kids to meet with counselors, and lost chances to establish a connection with students who were difficult to contact. School counselors' inability to meet with students and offer guidance and resources because of the additional responsibilities they were assigned, which included locating students who had missed class, assisted staff, and provided information about technology and social services for families (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Additionally, many counselors have reported an increased sense of fear and hopelessness due to the pandemic, with novice counselors experiencing even greater psychological difficulties (Han et al., 2020; Kwon et al., 2022).

Consequently, many of the challenges faced by school counselors throughout COVID-19, counseling research has begun to pay increased attention to the phenomenon of school counselor burnout. Research on counseling has recently focused more on school counselor burnout and the damaging consequences it has on their personal and professional well-being. The findings indicate that school counselors are more vulnerable to stress and burnout at work because of the unique issues they face (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Gnilka et al., 2015; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). Burnout from COVID-19 has been brought on by a number of factors, including an increase in workload, family difficulties, poor preparation for this new virus, and feelings of inadequacy (Cotel et al., 2021).

Counselors themselves can be considered the most essential asset within the counseling process, and their energy and ability to face reality can be powerful techniques that lead to the

successful provision of counseling services (Corey & Corey, 2020). For school counselors to be successful in their profession, they need to take care of themselves (Mullen et al., 2018; Randick et al., 2018). However, many school counselors still suffer from increased responsibilities and other lingering issues, leaving less time for direct student interaction and worsening the existing problem of burnout (Erford, 2019; Parikh-Foxx et al., 2020).

According to ASCA, during the return from COVID-19, schools must organize their responses in coordination with school counselors and administrators to guarantee that the mental health needs of students are taken into consideration (ASCA, 2022). Today, school counselors continue to be on the front lines of caring for children in settings ranging from kindergarten to grade twelve and assessing their needs. To make sure that these students have the ability to access counseling and social emotional resources, it will be necessary for school counselors to embrace new technological strategies and push for increased standards and role clarity (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). However, it is essential for school administrators to realize that school counselors are essential to the creation of a comprehensive method of teaching and supporting students when schools get back to business as usual (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021).

## **Background**

Recent research on employee burnout has shown that while burnout may occur in any field, helping professions like education, nursing, and social and health services have higher rates of burnout (Avanzi et al., 2018). In education in particular, it has been shown than previously believed, higher levels of stress connected to one's profession are more prevalent and, according to a 2018 study, may even affect student outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). These issues have been further exacerbated by the rapid and unprecedented nature of COVID-19, it has led to serious mental health issues among school staff (Torales et al., 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic has caused society to re-evaluate their perceived importance of many jobs and professions, including those within education (Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

If education is to be maintained at a high standard, then it is imperative that the psychological well-being of employees within the education system is protected. It is essential for states to look at the well-being of their employees to make sure they have the abilities needed to assist their challenging students with a variety of needs. School counselors need to understand the importance of acknowledging the negative consequences of stress on their health and take appropriate action to prevent long-term issues in their personal and professional life (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Maintaining mental health at work may have a lot of beneficial effects (Capone & Petrillo, 2018).

Self-efficacy is essential for school counselors to effectively be able to do their job well, which includes their relevant job tasks in their role (Tang, 2019). Self-efficacy among school counselors is distinct because research indicates that school settings, including staff relationships, administrative supports, and resources, influence school counselors in a reciprocal manner (Parikh-Fox et al., 2020). It is important for people to know that school counselors are important to both students and staff. School counselors may be able to support school personnel in working together to create a better and safer school environment. For students' academic, professional, social, and personal development, counseling may be an invaluable resource (Cook et al., 2019). The self-efficacy of school counselors is linked to student progress, bullying prevention, and overall well-being (Kozan, 2020). In times of crisis, this is especially true, such as COVID-19 (Kozan, 2020). Jackson-Cherry & Erford (2018) study found the following:

During times of crisis, the role of the professional counselor is critical. Counselors are expected to provide counseling for students, coordinate all counseling activities, communicate with faculty and parents, seek support from the crisis team, and contact neighboring schools. Counselors provide direct counseling services during intervention and postvention phases of the crisis. They are expected to serve students and personnel during times of crisis by providing

individual and group interventions; to consult with administrators, faculty, parents, and professionals; and to coordinate services with the school and the community. (p. 409)

According to ASCA (2022), school counselors should be primarily focused on developing and implementing comprehensive programs that assist each student's academic, professional, and social-emotional growth (see Table 1). While implementing a comprehensive program, it is crucial that administrators at schools keep in mind that there are specific responsibilities that school counselors should fulfill, as well as duties that they should not be responsible for, as noted in the following table from ASCA:

**Table 1**

*Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors*

<b><i>Appropriate Activities for School Counselors</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisement and appraisal for academic planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building the master schedule</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation, coordination, and academic advising for new students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating paperwork and data entry for all new students</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement testing programs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing disciplinary actions or disciplinary consequences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computing grade point averages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting student records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining student records</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting with teachers about building classroom connections, effective classroom management, and the role of noncognitive factors in student success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervising classrooms or common areas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting student records and information per state and federal regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping clerical records</li> </ul>

**Table 1**  
*Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors*

<i>Appropriate Activities for School Counselors</i>	<i>Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards, as necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS(multi-tiered system of support) and school attendance review boards</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing disaggregated schoolwide and school counseling program data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serving as a data entry clerk</li> </ul>

*Note.* From American School Counselor Association (2017).

## Research Questions

This qualitative study examines the role and efficacy of school counselors. It also analyzes the extent to which these factors are affected by school counselors and leads to motivation (or lack thereof) in their role. In doing so, this study aims to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?
2. What types of challenges and supports have school counselors encountered post-covid to enhance self-efficacy in their role?

## Description of Terms

Programs for school counseling that enhance student outcomes are created and implemented by school counselors. Through the integration of their school counseling program with the academic goal and school development plan of the school, they take the lead, advocate, and work together to support equity and access for all children. They support the creation of the school counseling program based on the following components of the ASCA National Model: define, deliver, manage, and assess. They also preserve the ethical and professional standards of ASCA (ASCA, 2022). The following terms are words that the

researcher will use throughout the study. The following terms play a crucial part in the job role of school counselors.

**Advocacy.** Advocacy makes sure all stakeholders are aware of the role of the school counselor. Engaging stakeholders in conversation about the comprehensive school counseling program's benefits and how it impacts every student's academic achievement (ASCA, 2022).

**ASCA.** The American School Counselor Association is an association that describes the elements of a school counseling program that is essential to the academic purpose of the school and is designed to significantly improve student performance, attendance, and behavior (ASCA, 2022).

**Burnout.** A mental health condition often linked to stress at work. A condition of physical and mental tiredness brought on by a diminished capacity to deal with one's daily surroundings is often indicative of it (Maslach, 2017).

**Caseload:** The volume of cases (students) a school counselor handles at any one moment, measured in terms of workload. ASCA recommends one school counselor for every 250 students (ASCA, 2022).

**Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP):** In order to guarantee that students obtain a high-quality educational experience, university programs voluntarily submit a self-study that is evaluated against the CACREP Standards by counselors and counselor educators (CACREP, 2023).

**Compassion fatigue.** Stress that comes from being around someone who has experienced trauma, as opposed to actually experiencing the trauma itself. When a person experiences secondary traumatic apprehension due to an often-extreme state of stress with the mental or physical suffering of people they are helping, it may also result in compassion fatigue (Lluch et al., 2022).

**Compassion satisfaction.** This includes the joy and gratifying sense that results from lending a helpful hand to others. Many individuals choose careers in helping other people because they have a deep desire to help others overcome their challenges and an empathy for their struggles (Dehlin & Lundh, 2018).

**Counseling self-efficacy.** The self-assurance that school counselors have to be able to complete their job well (Sanders et al., 2017).

**COVID-19.** The SARS-CoV-2 virus is the infectious agent that causes coronavirus illness. COVID-19 may infect anybody at any age, cause significant illness, or even result in death (World Health Organization, 2019).

**Depression.** A prevalent and dangerous medical condition that has a detrimental impact on a person's emotions, thoughts, and behavior. It may result in depressive symptoms or a decline in interest in previously loved activities. It can impair a person's capacity to accomplish things at home and at work and cause a range of emotional and physical issues (World Health Organization, 2019).

**Emotional stress.** A state of psychological tension and unease brought on by internal conflicts, disappointments, loss of self-worth, and sadness, as well as circumstances involving danger, threat, and loss of personal security (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022).

**Job satisfaction.** It is generally understood to be a pleasant or upbeat emotional state brought on by an assessment of one's work or experiences at work (Ćulibrk, 2018).

**Job stress.** Describes the detrimental reactions that arise when an employee's demands, resources, or talents do not align with the requirements of their job (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

**Mental health.** Marked by emotional stability, appropriate behavioral adjustment, substantial escape from anxiety and debilitating symptoms, and the ability to build positive

relationships and manage day-to-day demands and stressors (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022).

**Pandemic.** An infectious illness epidemic that is widespread, highly prevalent, and usually affects a sizable section of the global population over the period of many months (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

**School counselor.** People who have the proper schooling, certification, and experience necessary to assist and foster the academic, professional, and social and emotional growth of their students (ASCA, 2022).

**School counselor self-efficacy.** Relates to the principles of a school counselor on their ability to succeed despite obstacles (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

**School counseling.** Guidance that focuses on students' academic, personal, social, and career-related adjustment, growth, and accomplishment and is provided to them at school or in other settings for parents, students, and other caregivers. At all educational levels, from kindergarten through college and professional school, counseling is provided by qualified and licensed specialists (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022).

**School employee wellness.** The welfare of educators, administrators, and mental health professionals working in schools (Lever et al., 2017).

**SCSE.** The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE) was developed by Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) to connect personal qualities to the professional success of school counselors (Appendix F).

**Self-advocacy.** The ability of school counselors to effectively and appropriately communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert information about their ideal roles to those with the ability to change the circumstances that contribute to a given problem or inequity (Perry et al., 2020).

**Self-care.** Attending to one's own holistic well-being (Posluns & Gall, 2020).

**Self-efficacy.** A person's confidence in their capacity to finish a job or reach a goal is known as self-efficacy. It includes a person's self-assurance in their ability to manage their demeanor, have an impact on their surroundings, and maintain motivation while working toward their purpose. People may be self-sufficient in a variety of contexts and areas, including relationships, the workplace, education, and other crucial areas (Cherry, 2023).

**Self-esteem.** Both the social and personal natures contribute to one's sense of self-worth. The notion of one's own self is based on the distinctive qualities and characteristics that set them apart from other people (Du et al., 2017).

**Stress.** The body's or mind's reaction to stressors from the outside or within. Stress causes changes to almost every bodily system, which have an impact on how individuals feel and act (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022).

**Trauma.** An incident, sequence of events, or collection of situations that a person perceives as damaging to their body, mind, or life and that has long-lasting negative repercussions (Gaffney, 2019).

### **Significance of the Study**

Teachers' experiences during the epidemic have been documented by emerging research (Kraft & Simon, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on school counselors and their ability to help children, however, has not been thoroughly studied (ASCA, 2022; Strear et al., 2021). Since the beginning of COVID-19, school counselors have usually been at the heart of the problem-solving process safeguarding kids' mental, emotional, and physical well-being is the main part of their job (Meyers, 2020). The purpose of this narrative, qualitative study is to investigate a sample of school counselors' self-efficacy in the United States in the aftermath of COVID-19. School counselors need to be equipped with the resources that will enable them to help children with a variety of mental health issues which resulted from social isolation and COVID-19. School counselors should have the necessary tools for quick assistance to a large

number of students with considerable needs in both in-person and remote settings (Warren et al., 2020).

Additionally, this study may produce valuable outcomes because of its qualitative research design. There is a need for a qualitative study to help determine what factors are causing school counselor burnout. This research will be able to provide school counselors a better understanding of the issues that might lead to low self-efficacy and burnout. due to the amount of stress, they face on the job. It will also help to identify the predictive power of factors that contribute to or impede counselors' mental health. Finally, it will explore school counselors' views regarding the findings in more depth.

### **Overview of Research Methods**

This study used a qualitative methodology with a narrative inquiry design. This method was best suited for this research because it relies on the experiences of the research participants by collecting narrative fragments, enacting them in storied moments of space and time, and considering and comprehending them in terms of narrative continuity and discontinuity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2014). In narrative inquiry, researchers strive to collect data to describe individuals' lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The participants' voices and experiences were also crucial to understanding the phenomenon in this research study. A narrative inquiry design was used because it allowed the research participants' experiences to be shared and the data to be gathered through the process of living, telling, and retelling (Clandinin, 2013). Research using narrative inquiry aims to explain what transpired, why it happened, how it happened, and what the outcome was (Bernard, 2016).

The narrative inquiry design can also be applied to semi-structured interviews. The primary objective of the narrative inquiry is to provide thorough narratives on the participants' experiences rather than brief responses or generalizations (Riessman, 2018). This design allowed participants the freedom and flexibility to share their own experiences in their own

words. Additionally, because some questions that were asked to the participants in this study may be sensitive, the semi-structured approach helped them to more freely discuss these sensitive topics (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Narrative inquiry was chosen for this research study to help the researcher to investigate the self-efficacy of school counselors. Through this narrative inquiry, the participants' personal experience could be understood within the context of Bandura's self-efficacy model.

Data was collected first through a demographic survey, which was emailed to interested participants via the Facebook group Elementary School Counselors Exchange (Appendix C). Through convenience sampling, five school counselors were chosen. Each school counselor completed an informed consent form and a demographic survey (via google surveys) and returned them to the researcher. The researcher then scheduled an interview via Zoom with each participant. During the interview, the researcher recorded the proceedings and took notes. The researcher's goal of this study was to review the participants answers from the interview questions that were asked during the recorded zoom interview.

Chapter 2 reviews the current research pertaining to the gap in the literature regarding school counselors self-efficacy after Covid-19. Bandura's self-efficacy, which falls under the umbrella of social cognitive theory is described in detail, as this theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this study on school counselor's self-efficacy.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

In the last couple of years, there has been a large focus on the mental health needs of students. There has been an increase for student services staff, especially school counselors and has therefore become a timely and necessary focus (Lewis et al., 2020). Lack of validated tools to assess this assumption in school counselors in a way that is representative of their professional position is another issue that has been highlighted. In addition to the lack of research on the subject is meeting the requirements of every student in terms of their academic, professional, and social and emotional growth (ASCA, 2017).

Based on earlier studies investigating the impact of COVID-19 on school counseling use, fewer people are utilizing these services, and fewer sessions are being offered (O'Connor, 2020). The purpose of this present qualitative study is to investigate those items related to professional school counselors who are actively employed in a school setting and if their self-efficacy has improved or been hindered post-COVID-19. This literature review examines various factors related to the practice and well-being of school counselors, including the context and impacts of COVID-19 as well as counselor self-efficacy and burnout.

It has been thought that this abrupt and unexpected shift presents a chance for various kinds of discussions (Greenhalgh et al., 2020). This led to a change in how school counseling services were provided in response to the population's and society's shifting requirements (Vostanis & Bell, 2020). Since school counseling is still a relatively new subject of study, it does not yet have the same history of practice informed by research as other related fields (Burkard et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is scarcity of research on the profiles of school counselors. There was only one journal article at the time that was found while searching for studies on school counselor practitioner profiles (Villares et al., 2022). More recent research has started looking into burnout, PTSD symptoms, counselor wellbeing, and the causes of

these problems (Can & Watson, 2019; Cook et al., 2021; Lanier & Carney, 2019).

Additionally, role ambiguity, role conflict, and occupational stress are important variables that may affect school counselor performance, work satisfaction, and burnout, according to studies on school counseling (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018).

Griffith and Altinay (2020) emphasized how important it is to have a balanced workload in order to prevent faculty burnout, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and adjustments to academic environments. Over the course of the pandemic, school counselors were forced to conduct their regular counseling duties online using synchronous and asynchronous technology-based media (Supriyanto et al., 2020). It is also important to keep in mind that COVID-19 has greatly changed the role of the school counselor. Since the job role of the school counselor since COVID-19 is still emerging, these factors have not been well studied to date. The delivery of school counseling using an online model, which has been necessary during COVID-19 school closures, has not received much research. The present literature in in this area investigates the ways in which youth interaction with online counseling services offered by various mental health providers (O'Connor, 2020). Additionally, while the literature has demonstrated the misuse of school counselors by principals based on the ASCA standards, it should also be noted that the job roles of the school counselor has changed over time and they have gained more recognition and greater respect of their influence on student achievement and well-being (Lauterbach et al., 2018; Mau et al., 2016).

According to ASCA, (2022) school counselors are required by ethical standards to keep an eye out for signs of self-burnout and to take appropriate action when these feelings could impair their ability to offer students quality service. It is crucial that counselors comprehend the numerous causes of burnout because of the negative consequences it has on their health and well-being as well as the reduction in empathy that frequently follows

(Can & Watson, 2019; Cook et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In the role of the school counselors, there are many various types of issues, such as heavy caseloads, the challenges that came with the shift to distant learning (online), and unclear expectations on job related tasks, all of which can contribute to burnout among school counselors. The consequences that COVID-19 had on educational disruption of school counselors' personal and professional lives have not yet been studied by researchers, particularly elementary school counselors (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Mullen et al., 2021; Pincus et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of a school counselor, including their competency and application of successful counseling techniques, is correlated with their self-efficacy in counseling (Butts & Gutierrez, 2018). The confidence that counselors have in their ability to bring about positive change through counseling, education, and experience has been linked in research on counselor self-efficacy (Morrison & Lent, 2018). In addition, research indicates that there are ways to improve counselor self-efficacy, particularly in counseling training programs in which one of the most important sources and indicators of self-efficacy is supervisory feedback. These strategies include self-development, counseling practice, a revision of the undergraduate curriculum, and a strong supervisory relationship (Kozan, 2020).

Although self-efficacy has been a focus of literature on counseling in general, it has not been extensively explored in relation to school counselors, especially in the context of COVID-19. Additionally, while the literature has explored school counseling services, counselor responsibilities, and ethical dilemmas, not much is known about school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs and potential improvement strategies (Kozan, 2020). Scholarship that focuses on counselors' pre-COVID work conditions have identified constraints on counselors' efficacy as a result of heavy caseloads, ill-defined roles, weak accountability frameworks, little opportunity for professional development, and scant federal and state oversight (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021; Warren et al., 2020). Additionally, limitations within the organization, such as

unclear job roles (Blake, 2020) and increased administrative duties (Chandler et al., 2018) can prevent students from accessing counseling services. In a recent study by Ellis (2019), research examined the relationship between burnout and school counselors' self-efficacy, but it did not take work satisfaction into account. The findings suggest that counselors' self-efficacy does not play a mediating role in the relationship. By utilizing a qualitative approach to uncover school counselors' perspectives on their counseling self-efficacy and exploring avenues for improvement, this study has the opportunity to fill existing gaps in the literature (Kozan, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

One occupation that self-efficacy is particularly important is in the counseling profession. It is important for counselors to have a belief in their ability to complete the responsibilities of their job, which has been referred to as their counselor self-efficacy (Oh et al., 2019). In most cases, the way that counseling theorizes burnout is consistent with the helping professions' framework of depersonalization, weariness, and personal accomplishment. (Bardhoshi et al., 2019). When examining the theoretical framework in this study, it is important to examine Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which is a subset of Bandura's social cognitive theory.

### ***Social Cognitive Theory***

Albert Bandura, a well-known psychology professor at Stanford University, created the social cognitive theory (1973). According to social cognitive theory, a person's behavior is learned through their social contexts, particularly through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 1986). Triadic reciprocal determinism, the theory's underlying premise, holds that behavioral (B), personal (P), and environmental (E) factors shape human performance (Bandura, 1989). These three elements differ in intensity and do not appear one after the other; rather, one element may have an impact on the others. A framework

for comprehending how individuals actively shape their surroundings and are shaped by them is offered by the social cognitive theory. A framework for comprehending how school counselors' personal traits and the school environment may affect partnerships with families is offered in the context of the current study by the social cognitive perspective.. It also covers the methods of modeling and observational learning as well as the impact of self-efficacy on behavior production (Bandura, 1986).

Cognitive, affective, and biological factors make up the first domain of social cognitive theory: personal factors. Influential cognitive capacities in people allow them to develop internal experience models, grow complex action sequences, theoretically test complex action sequences by projecting outcomes, and communicate complex concepts and understandings to others (Bandura, 1986). Individuals also engage in self-reflection, analyzing their behavior, opinions, and emotions. These techniques for introspection set the standard for self-control (Romeo et al., 2021). According to social cognitive theory, continuous self-regulation practice greatly influences and controls an individual's behavior (Gomez et al., 2021). Environmental factors make up the social cognitive theory's second domain. Interactions between internal and external elements, including conduct factors, thoughts, feelings, and biological processes, can have an impact on an individual (Bandura, 1986). A person can influence their behavior, which affects their surroundings as well as their thoughts, feelings, and bodily functions, by using their cognitive processes (Bandura, 2001). Behaviors make up the third domain of the social cognitive theory. This domain describes a person's actual capacity to carry out a behavior using essential skills and abilities (Bandura, 2001).

According to Bandura's theory, almost every learning phenomenon can be explained by looking at the actions of others and the results that they produce (Bandura, 1986). This process is governed by four items: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

Retention involves “transforming and restructuring information in the form of rules and conceptions” (p. 362). Acting out the observed behavior in its actual form is called reproduction. Ultimately, motivation drives the student toward focus, repetition, and retention (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

It is also critical to remember that individuals are only partially products of their surroundings. They are capable of creating beneficial environments and exercising control over them. By selecting environments carefully, people can influence who they become. Therefore, choices are influenced by beliefs, as well as capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Social Cognitive Theory explains this through five simple human capabilities: (1) symbolizing, (2) forethought, (3) vicarious learning, (4) self-regulation, and (5) self-reflection. Workers self-influence themselves to start, stop, and maintain their own behavior using these fundamental skills. These five areas are particularly useful in helping understand why people may behave differently in the same organizational circumstances.

### **Bandura’s Self-Efficacy.**

Self-efficacy theory assumes that psychological processes generate and reinforce expectations of perceived personal efficacy, or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Bandura defined this as

“The conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the desired outcomes” (p. 193). Bandura (1977) suggested that self-efficacy can determine how much effort individuals expend and how they will persist in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences.

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is determinant upon several factors. These factors are complex and, with the right support, can also function as helpful strategies to increase a person’s sense of self-efficacy.

**Personal mastery experiences:** Bandura’s (1977) theory posits that authentic

experiences that gradually increase in intensity provide the most impact on an individual's levels of efficacy. If individuals have successful experiences, their level of self-efficacy is likely to be high, leading to more successful experiences. On the other hand, repeated struggles or perceived failures are likely to lower an individual's efficacy levels.

**Vicarious experiences:** Vicarious experiences include seeing others perform a threatening activity without adverse consequences (Bandura, 1977). Ultimately, when individuals observe others performing a threatening activity, they are likely to convince themselves that if others can do it, they should be able to improve their outcome.

**Verbal persuasion:** Verbal persuasion, in the form of encouragement, has the chance of convincing individuals that they have the skills necessary to complete a task. When individuals receive encouragement through coaching or administrative support, their levels of self-efficacy tend to improve.

**Physiological state:** Bandura (1977) posits that activities that cause a stressed or emotional state can directly impact an individual's efficacy. Individuals who are less stressed or emotionally aroused are more likely to achieve success.

A person's attempt at a task can be hindered by a lack of confidence in their own skills, but their efforts can be reinforced and sustained by a higher level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1994). The ability to carry out difficult tasks and activities requires self-efficacy. People who have low self-efficacy may underestimate their ability to complete tasks, while those who have high self-efficacy may take on more difficult tasks and activities, put more effort into them, and cope better with the process of carrying out these tasks and any negative outcomes that are encountered along the way (Chae & Park, 2020). An important

part of developing the self-efficacy of counselors-in-training during their counselor education program is counseling supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

Self-efficacy is linked to the accomplishment of objectives that are impacted by cognitive processing in both professional and personal development (Bandura, 1977, 1994; Ooi et al., 2017). Strong links between task performance, motivation, and self-efficacy have been demonstrated by a wealth of empirical evidence, which also supports the validity and applicability of social learning theory (Iroegbu, 2015). Self-efficacy has been demonstrated to be a strong predictor of motivation and task performance, as well as having an impact on personal goal setting. This is because self-efficacy is a type of social learning that specifically relates to a person's self-belief in their ability to perform specific tasks (Iroegbu, 2015).

It is important to note that this theory applies to all tasks, even though it is based on conquering obstacles and fear (Bandura, 1977, 1994). A person can be self-sufficient and believe in their capacity to learn. It is characterized by a person's belief that they will succeed in the future by carrying out a specific series of actions or tasks, despite facing social pressures (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1999; Gündüz, 2012; Holden et al., 2017; Mullen et al., 2018).

The belief system that an individual has that determines how well they can carry out a plan of action in potential scenarios is another definition of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Bandura describes this as how people think, behave, and feel. Motivation, well-being, and individual success can all result from a person's sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). It may be more challenging for someone to maintain a healthy degree of well-being if they are dealing with depression or anxiety (Bandura, 1982). When one is well and feeling good, it is much easier to increase self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). The important thing is not how strong the emotional and physical reactions are, but rather how they are interpreted

and perceived. People with high self-efficacy are more likely to see their affective arousal as a motivating tool for performance, while people with self-doubt tend to see it as a hinderance (Bandura, 1982).

The regulation of emotional states is largely dependent on self-efficacy, according to Bandura. When faced with potentially stressful expectations, people who believe in their own abilities are more likely to interpret them as manageable and experience less stress (Bandura, 1982). When people see someone who is similar to them complete a task successfully, they experience vicarious learning, which increases their self-efficacy and empowers them to make informed decisions based on the costs and consequences involved (Morris et al., 2017). When others who possess comparable abilities and skills complete a task successfully, one's own self-efficacy is further heightened (Bandura, 1986). A person might be cautious about repeating another person's behavior if that person's character and competency. When people are encouraged and reassured that they have the abilities, motivation, and tactics to complete tasks through verbal and social persuasion, their self-efficacy tends to grow. A lower self-efficacy occurs because a person might lack support and feel disheartened (Snyder & Fisk, 2016).

Building self-efficacy in the workplace is not an easy task (Bandura, 1977). Peer modeling is a strategy that Bandura believes works well in helping to build a person's self-efficacy. Some other helpful strategies to increase a person's self-efficacy are seeking feedback, encouraging participation, and allowing people to make their own choices. Bandura believes that mastery experiences are the most effective way to help build a person's self-efficacy. Easy success, along with little to no effort often leads people in experience discouraged failure (Bandura, 2008).

It is harder for a person to trust that that they are able to succeed when they are in a bad mood or tired (Bandura, 1977). This is particularly true if individuals believe these

physiological and mental states to be signs of their weakness, incapacity, or incapacity to accomplish a goal. When looking at self-efficacy and achievement of goals, having a negative attitude can really affect the ability to achieve these goals or even setting those goals up in the first place. To increase self-efficacy, one must try and fix negative misconceptions about physical and emotional states (Bandura, 2008).

Self-efficacy allows one to make conscious decisions and take purposeful actions to place oneself in situations that will best support their own personal development (Bandura, 2008). According to Bandura, resilient self-efficacy can help prevent people from becoming overwhelmed by personal hardship, which can overburden human abilities while trying to better the lives of others. Instead, an individual possessing a high level of self-efficacy will be more equipped to handle their personal responsibilities and subsequently assist others (Bandura, 2008). In the context of counseling, self-efficacy is defined as a counselor's perceived principle in their skills, development, and the ability to finish their work (Oh et al., 2019).

Bandura states that a person's perceived self-efficacy affects the coping mechanisms they use in response to the stress and difficulties they face, as well as the amount of effort and duration of time they devote to achieving their intentions (Bandura, 1999). In order to regulate human behavior, Bandura believes that the expectations of self-efficacy are one of the most important factors (Bandura, 1997).

Perceived self-efficacy influences how effectively a person handles stress and problems. It also looks at how much work and time they put into reaching their goals, as well as what coping methods they use (Bandura 1997). These people tend to concentrate more on the challenges, the repercussions of failing, and their own shortcomings when given challenging responsibilities. They become less confident in themselves when they fail because they believe their ineptitude is the basis of the problem (Bandura, 1997). These people often

surrender to stress and sadness because they get complacent or give up when faced with difficulties or carefully retreat from challenges. Additionally, according to Bandura, these people have easily attained goals and show little dedication to achieving them. Therefore, this might explain why people with poor self-efficacy are less committed to engaging in healthy habits (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura believes that a person's ability to maintain composure, divert their focus, and obtain support from friends and significant others is influenced by their level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy perception is an emotional mediator of self-efficacy belief and plays a critical role in the self-regulation of motivation (Bandura 1994). Controlling stressors that cause anxiety is mostly dependent on perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). A harmful thinking pattern cannot be imagined by those who feel they may control dangers, while those who feel the opposite are more likely to be exposed to stimuli that cause worry (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1977) proclaimed that a person's degree of success is determined by their efficacy beliefs, rather than their true abilities. According to Bandura's theory, an individual's decision on how to remain in order to get a specific conclusion is greatly influenced by the belief that a particular behavior would lead to those outcomes. More efforts correspond with greater efficacy. If people have concerns about their ability to carry out the required tasks, they will be significantly less successful in reaching their goals. People will even go so far as to stay clear of circumstances that they feel are beyond their ability to control. Unlike concepts of personal competence, which are central to other theories, self-efficacy beliefs are focused on an individual's perceived capacity to create results with recommended sorts of performance. Just as assessments of one's own self-efficacy are task- and situation-specific (contextual), so are school counselors' activities. This highlights once more how important and relevant social cognitive theory of self-efficacy is. People then use these evaluations to achieve a goal (Ooi et al., 2021).

### **Poor Self-Efficacy of the School Counselor**

Poor school counselor self-efficacy can most definitely lead to school counselor burnout, which is prevalent in the literature. Stress, a high degree of demands from many different angles, and conflicting signals about expectations are all factors in school counselor burnout in their daily job roles (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Holman et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). Research on educators who experienced principals undercutting their authority both during and after COVID-19 support this sense of burnout, or emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021). Counselors who experience burnout are more susceptible to long-term tiredness, emotional weariness, apathy, a feeling that their profession has no purpose, skepticism, a decline in interest and focus on their client work, anxiety, low self-esteem, and identity uncertainty (Ko & Kim, 2021; Oh & Choi, 2020).

While many studies have looked at burnout and self-efficacy in school counselors in relation to various organizational, interpersonal, and demographic variables, few have done so in the context of a complex and structural framework that includes (a) recognized occupational stressors that make up job demands, (b) organizational supports that make up job resources, and (c) the distinct but interconnected personal resource of self-efficacy (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). Extra clerical duties that are added onto the role of the school counselor can lead to counselor burnout (Hamelin et al., 2022). In order to minimize counselor burnout, counseling organizations should identify and take into consideration lowering non-counseling administrative activities. This may be done by assigning this work to administrative personnel, automating processes with technology, and simplifying administrative procedures (Kim & Lambie, 2018).

Previous research studies have not focused on the relationship between burnout and school counselors' service delivery. However, burnout may have detrimental effects on school counselors' job and lead to a reduction in services provided (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016).

Burnout is a common occurrence for school counselors, which may have an impact on their capacity to offer their students, both morally and professionally (Kim & Lambie, 2018).

In the school under investigation, role duality seems to be a pervasive and ingrained aspect of counseling. The Code of Ethics of the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (Gumapac, 2021) stated that counselors should avoid dual relationships, defined as a 'second, significantly different relationship with their client/counselee' (p.18). Previous small-scale research have shown the multiple roles that Filipino guidance facilitators endure, and the counselors thought that this job duality caused them to overlook crucial counseling responsibilities (Cervantes et al., 2019). This may have an adverse effect on the services that counselors offer (Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; Harrison, 2022). These results imply that the dual duties of school counselors in the Philippines and a lack of role definition are strongly related and hinder their self-efficacy (Harrison et al., 2022).

Fye et al. (2022) examined the relationship between the implementation of the ASCA National Model, supervisor satisfaction, and counselor burnout. The results of the study indicated that school counselors who were satisfied with their counseling supervision experienced less burnout. An additional finding was that as school counselors became more confident in their implementation of the ASCA National Model, their burnout decreased (Fye et al., 2022). Researcher Browning et al. (2019) studied by understanding these dynamics it can help avoid counselor burnout and promote compassion satisfaction. Targeted treatments can increase these unmatched constructs of hope, everyday spiritual experiences, and appreciation.

Burnout researchers have argued in favor of organizational changes that reduce workloads or foster more social support from peers (Maslach, 2017). A dynamic push in the literature on burnout is to identify solutions. Lately, efforts to address burnout have been focused on what other people may do to support the individual, such as re-engaging workers, offering social support, enhancing their working environment, or imparting coping skills

(Maslach, 2017). By utilizing screening tools to include preventative and early intervention such as the ACE (adverse Childhood Experience); Generalized Anxiety Disorder-Seven Item Scale (GAD-7); Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT); and School Refusal Assessment Scale, school counselors may be able to prevent or lessen early substance use, as well as symptoms of depression and anxiety (Venta et al., 2019).

Employees in people-oriented fields, like mental health professionals, are more vulnerable to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Cook et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study with 246 new counselors to investigate burnout signs that could not be shown in standard assessments. The researcher discovered a number of recurring themes, including unpleasant emotional experiences including sadness, anxiety, sobbing fits, exhaustion, and a lack of purpose at work. In addition, participants disclosed medical ailments, changes in weight, a belief in their own inadequacy as counselors, and cognitive decline. Almost ten percent of the participants said that their experience of burnout was aggravated by an unpleasant work environment. The researchers didn't ask about any past experiences that could have potentially contributed to the burnout symptoms (Cook et al. 2021).

Mullen et al. (2018) expanded upon these findings by examining the construction of counselor burnout or “the failure to perform clinical tasks appropriately because of personal discouragement, apathy to symptom stress, and emotional/physical harm” (p. 143). Within their model, Mullen et al. discovered counselor burnout includes exhaustion, a negative work environment, devaluing of clients, incompetence, and deterioration of one's personal life. The Job Demands-Resources paradigm states that professionals who experience burnout do so as a result of an imbalance between the resources that they have access to and the demands of their employment. According to this model, a high level of environmental resources counteracts the negative effects of environmental demands, facilitating the achievement of job goals (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

While self-efficacy has been previously studied (Lin et al., 2020) and has generally been seen as enhancing the level of work satisfaction among educators (Buric & Moe, 2020; Demir, 2020), counseling self-efficacy is understudied. There are a limited number of studies on school counselor self-efficacy. In Malaysia, where the changing function of school counselors has presented difficulties in handling present-day circumstances (Ooi et al., 2017). Most notably, before COVID-19, the role of school counselors in Malaysia was solely that of a guidance and counseling service provider, but during COVID-19, the school counselors also supported students' mental health concerns, disruptions, and virtual learning environments (Mahomed et al., 2019; Ku Johari et al., 2020; Tan, 2021).

A study on school counseling in Asia shows that a prevalent factor impeding school counselors' success in the classroom is a systemic and systematic lack of empowerment. Counselors often struggle to establish an identity that acknowledges the dual nature of their roles and have difficulty when it comes to self-advocacy since they do not have a pivotal position (Sandhu & Singh, 2021). Due in large part to the inadequate development and public perception of counseling, there is a tendency to view counseling as coming under the view of teachers due to the traditional role that school counselors play in the holistic development of children in the Philippines (Harrison et al., 2022).

### **The School Counselor and COVID-19**

During COVID-19, up to one third of educators exhibited some type of stress, exhaustion, or teacher burnout (Eyal et al., 2019). This is consistent with the fact that educators often show a high degree of unhealthy work-related behaviors and experiences, especially when compared to other professions (Hoffman et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that COVID-19 related educational interruptions also influenced the social, emotional, psychological, and educational development of young people as well as the delivery of necessary mental health services provided in schools (Pincus et al., 2020; Golberstein et al.,

2020). Zhang et al. (2020) discovered a link between possible pediatric mental health problems and COVID-related social isolation by investigating the psychological symptoms that Chinese children experienced before and after the shutdown of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is imperative that school districts fully embrace ASCA's approach for the role of school counselors, particularly in light of the expected increase in family trauma due to COVID-19 (Greenbaum, 2020). The CACREP (2023) promotes school counselors' understanding of their roles and duties in emergency response teams. It is important for school counselors to realize what might happen in the event of catastrophes, tragedies, and traumatic experiences. They also need to evaluate and handle students' suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Lambie et al., 2019; Wachter-Morris et al., 2021). In order to properly handle the new realities of COVID-19, school counselors must also accept their nondual identities and modify their roles and programs to meet the requirements of every student in terms of their academic performance, social and emotional development, and profession (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021). It is also ethically required of school counselors to take care of their personal and professional needs in these trying circumstances (ASCA, 2022). A wave of school closures caused by the COVID-19 outbreak in the US forced millions of students out of their regular learning contexts (Burbio, 2020). Both teachers and students rapidly became used to working remotely, and they continued to participate in virtual learning environments until the start of the 2020–2021 school year. Approximately half of K–12 public school pupils are thought to have begun the academic year remotely (Burbio, 2020).

Crisis training that is pertinent to school counselors' roles and responsibilities is part of school counselor education programs, helping them get ready for unthinkable scenarios like the COVID-19 epidemic (Springer et al., 2020). Counselors voiced worries about higher than normal "summer melt" rates and found it difficult to assist children in navigating the

complicated college application process despite the fact that many schools were closed (Belsha, 2020) and possible changes to postsecondary plans (Quilantan, 2020). The summertime “melting” of prospective college students’ excitement is a phenomenon that occurs between high school graduation and college admission. Despite their hard effort and inventiveness, school counselors have supported students through remote learning; yet these developing issues have prompted inquiries regarding the counselors’ distinct professional experiences (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021).

While COVID-19 has persisted in endangering children’ academic development, new findings have also highlighted concerns over the mental health of these pupils. Young people’s trauma and stress levels are already high, and they are becoming more so due to fear, loss, and the worry that comes with uncertainty (Prothero, 2020). In a study conducted by YoungMinds (2020), 83% of young participants reported that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, their prior mental health issues had gotten worse because of school closures, a lack of regularity, and minimal social relationships. According to Cifci and Demir (2020), it is believed that although COVID-19 had a detrimental effect on the world and that it could be able to be overcome another future pandemic (or major stressor) through some type of exercise.

School counselors had several challenges during COVID-19 in order to carry out their professional tasks, such as an overload of administrative work and a lack of direction on how to carry out their functions from a distance. By shifting the importance of their job role, preventing barriers, and embracing their autonomy, school counselors were able to adequately adjust to these new problems. This suggests that in order to lessen the impact of COVID-19 on students, structural support for school counselors has to be carefully examined (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021).

Evidence shows that school counseling techniques support students’ social-emotional growth and may be found in pre-COVID-19 literature (Lambie et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2019),

academic achievement (Shi & Brown, 2020), and postsecondary outcomes (McMahon et al., 2017; Mulhern, 2020). Research studies reveal that pre-COVID-19 work settings for school counselors had a tendency to limit their self-efficacy due to a lack of federal and state regulations, a high workload, vague job role, poor accountability systems and not very many opportunities for professional growth (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021; Warren et al., 2020). Moreover, organizational constraints such as role ambiguity (Blake, 2020) and an influx of responsibilities that focus on paperwork (Chandler et al., 2018) often obstruct students from connecting with counseling support. There is a substantial correlation between high workload and physical and emotional exhaustion (Avanzi et al., 2018).

Due to COVID-19, schools around the country were forced to close, which required teachers and students to adopt a variety of imbalanced teaching philosophies. As a result, school counselors kept customizing their all-inclusive counseling programs to help meet the needs of their students (Limberg et al., 2021). By doing this, school counselors created and implemented programs that enhanced a variety of behavioral and academic outcomes for their students (Dimmitt et al., 2023). However, according to ASCA (2022), school counselors also noted a number of obstacles brought about by COVID-19, including challenges in reaching kids in a virtual setting and delivering counseling sessions to them online on a daily basis. The day-to-day obstacles highlighted by school counselors were managing heavy caseloads, attempting to bridge achievement and opportunity disparities, and being assigned unsuitable assignments (ASCA, 2022).

From a survey of 948 school counselors, Savitz-Romer et al. (2021) discovered that counselors' time spent directly assisting students with their postsecondary and career preparation, as well as their social and emotional health, was impacted by school closures. Counselors said that they were not informed on COVID-related school planning, frequently performed administrative and logistical duties, and did not get clear direction from school and

district administrators. Other difficulties that counselors faced were concerns about privacy and involvement that arose when school counselor-led support groups were transferred online (Strear et al., 2021).

### **Mental Health of School Counselors**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), mental health involves individuals' emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and can predict one's coping mechanisms, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. Numerous earlier research have documented that school counselors' involvement in a wide range of service-oriented jobs puts them at risk for mental health issues (e.g., professional burnout) (Huang, 2020). There is a significant need to examine and address school counselors' problems, analyze where these problems come from, and learn how to effectively solve them (Huang, 2020).

A strong mental state is crucial for anticipating the resolution of anxiety disorders and depression (Teismann et al., 2018). Considering the intense external demands (Holman et al., 2019) and the need for school counselors to meet the needs of all students (ASCA, 2019), it's critical to comprehend how role stress could influence the link between school counselors' work happiness and putting ASCA's National Model into practice. Recent research highlights the significant benefits that counseling self-efficacy and trait hope have on counselor well-being (Aydın et al., 2017; Aydın & Odaci, 2020). Counselors with high counseling self-efficacy view themselves as experts capable of carrying out their job to assist others, productive, and beneficial to those in need (Aydın & Odaci, 2020). Therefore, mental health professionals' life may have more significance, purpose, and worth as a result of these pleasurable observations.

Mental health was given priority during COVID-19 and school counselors were acknowledged for their skill set in the mental health field (Villares et al., 2022). However, in

the research on school counselor impairment from excessive stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma, individual counselor well-being has received a lot of attention (Kim & Lambie, 2018), which is common in helping professions (Gogo et al., 2019). School counselors in particular may encounter a variety of pressures, including school emergencies, worries about meeting every student's needs, exposure to emotionally taxing situations, and maybe even feelings of loneliness if they are the only counselor in the building (Zeller, 2018).

School counselors are left to shoulder the emotional weight as the pandemic's effects on mental health affect the students that they help. The isolation that results from bearing the weight of students' well-being must be lessened, therefore it is crucial that schools offer chances for professionals to get assistance and interact with others (De Diego et al., 2023). Professional well-being among school counselors includes burnout and job stress, which may be connected to their feelings of job satisfaction (Mullen et al., 2018). ASCA's (2022) In order to guarantee that their work is effective, school counselors are held accountable by ethical standards for preserving their physical and mental well-being. The standards also specify that school counselors have an ethical duty to keep an eye out for signs of burnout and take appropriate action when these views can impair their capacity to offer their students high-quality services (ASCA, 2022).

To help with school counselor burnout, school counselors need to understand what the symptoms of burnout are in order to prevent it from happening, along with maintaining their psychological well-being (ASCA, 2022). When burnout is about to occur, school counselors should recognize it and take action to safeguard their own well-being (Randolph & Wirth, 2022). McIntyre and Lee (2020) advocated for implementing "individual resilience strategies" to encourage mental wellness and commitment as barriers to suicide thoughts. These strategies include fundamental wellness practices, including regular exercise, healthy eating, regular sleep patterns, and regimented daily regimens. In a study of 86 counselors-in-training, Can and

Watson (2019) discovered that while empathy and a supervisory working partnership did not predict burnout, a trainee's level of resilience and well-being did.

The more frequent the available positive interventions are the healthier the well-being of the person becomes (Hoffmann et al., 2020). In a recent study on well-being guided by Kannampallil, participating educators stated that there were some mental health resources that were available to them as employees. They were offered free psychiatric services, mindfulness training, and some assistance with childcare and housing services (Kannampallil et al., 2020). However, there is a low utilization of these resources, which may be caused by trainees feeling unwilling to admit their weakness to peers and superiors. Waiting until burnout becomes an issue is preferable to prevention; the optimal care involves not just treating the patient but also the work that caused the burnout in the first place (Maslach, 2017). School counselors are essential leaders with regard to their students' social and emotional development on various levels. In order to prevent mental health crises following life-altering events, such as returning to school after a pandemic, school counselors should work pro-actively, rather than reactively, with children to build confidence and solidarity (Pincus et al., 2020).

Studies show that school counselors have the opportunity to increase their strength in their role (Meyers, 2018) by being intentional about their practices. School counselors should prioritize work-life balance since it enhances motivation, reduces stress, and enhances both mental and physical health (Falco, 2018). Although health practices are necessary for school counselors, they seldom get the chance to spend alone time rejuvenating (Sanders, 2021). Additionally, even though work-related stress affects school staff nationwide, they frequently lack the programs, resources, and tools necessary to manage their stress and advance general well-being (Lever et al., 2017). School counselors need to devote time to developing and sustaining their own resilience, in addition to helping that of their students (Meyers, 2018). Resilience is influenced by several key psychological elements, such as optimism and happy

feelings, a robust social network, and the capacity to see the bright side of adversity (Meyers, 2018).

The existing literature mentions a wide range of unique self-care behaviors and aspects (Corey & Corey, 2020; Guler & Ceyhan, 2021). For instance, Butler et al. (2019) propose six interrelated self-care dimensions: physical, relational, professional, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Furthermore, Posluns and Gall (2020) state that the development of several aspects of self-care is necessary, which include awareness, balance, flexibility, and physical health. Guler and Ceyhan (2021) additionally developed a multifaceted framework for counselor self-care that includes aspects related to the physical, relational, professional, cognitive-emotional, and spiritual domains. Another suggested practice is cognitive behavior therapy, coping statements and practical techniques are the main tools of this well-known therapy technique, which helps reduce toxic attitudes and promote good thinking and behaviors. These strategies may be used for individual, small-group, and occasionally classroom training, and they are all intended to guarantee counselors' optimal and successful performance.

Especially when development programs are intended to influence well-being, they should be planned more carefully and effectively to take into account elements like self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and work satisfaction perception (Capone & Petrillo, 2018; Ortan et al., 2021). It may be useful for school counselors to adapt their informal mindfulness strategies to their everyday lives and enrich their internal coping resources (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Ender et al., 2019). Progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, guided imagery, mindfulness, yoga, and other therapeutic modalities are all included in the mind-body group stress intervention, which is another significant intervention (Eyal et al., 2019).

Despite challenging circumstances, counselors who are early in their career can prevent burnout by strengthening their cognitive emotion regulation capacities. Enrolling in specific

programs such as mindfulness training and life skills training would prove beneficial in this regard. Restive periods and affiliation with professional communities that can offer experienced insights will also help early-in-career counselors prevent burnout during the pandemic (Sandhu & Singh, 2021).

According to school administrators, school counselors are required to spend more time on administrative duties like scheduling and test coordination, which are not within the scope of the school counselor's job role, as outlined in the ASCA (2017) National Model, as stated by Blake's (2020) research on high school counselors. Before the start of COVID-19, due to school personnel shortages and resource limitations, administrators frequently delegated these responsibilities to counselors (Lowery et al., 2018), however, these extra duties took away from school counselors' time to carry out thorough school counseling programs and as a result (Fye et al., 2017; Hilts et al., 2019) added to poor job satisfaction and occupational burnout (Holman et al., 2019). Fye et al. (2017) found a statistically significant and negative relationship between engagement in non-counseling duties and ASCA National Model implementation. As school counselors worked with other school staff members more frequently, they developed the knowledge and skills necessary to encourage them to allocate more time to counseling-related tasks and less time to unrelated tasks like proctoring exams (Havlik et al., 2019).

ASCA (2017) recommends that school counselors create and implement a thorough program that takes into account each student's developmental requirements. Additionally, the ASCA advises that a school counselor should devote 80% of their time to provide students both direct and indirect assistance. Individual and group counseling, as well as the creation and delivery of classroom instruction, are provided by school counseling programs that adhere to the ASCA model (Randick et al., 2018) while focusing on students' mental health and academic success, particularly following a pandemic or crisis. In addition to COVID-19,

school communities have faced a number of different crises, which cause school counselors to face a variety of different student challenges. All of these factors helps lead to an increase in school counselor stressors. School counselors must continue to innovate in order to support students' social, emotional, professional, and academic development as a result of the ASCA National Model's adoption through remote learning and technological use (Sanders, 2021).

Apart from providing students with direct services like educational referrals, school counselors also assist students with their academic, career, and social-emotional development, and consultation that are primarily focused on enhancing the school environment, which ultimately benefits students' development (ASCA, 2017). In the classroom, schools counselors are able to provide "consultation on issues of curriculum development, classroom management, and classroom assessment and competence in these skill areas, applied through consultation services, delivers direct service to teachers and indirect service to students" (Erford, 2019).

### **School Counselor Relationships**

Different role expectations between principals and school counselors may be the cause of school counselors who spend a significant amount of time in the classroom substituting and varying class schedules (Fye et al., 2017). School administrators can act as advocates to help lower school counselors' caseloads and ensuring that counselors carry out tasks that are appropriate for their positions and areas of competence (Mullen et al., 2018). School leaders can also assist them by promoting school-wide initiatives to support them by being able to increase their retention within the field of education. This increases more opportunities for school counselors to help students. On the other hand, school counselors may experience increased occupational stress as a result of inadequate administrator support and a lack of professional supervision (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Moyer, 2011).

Together school administrators and principals have the opportunity to have a cohesive working relationship, by providing the appropriate tools and assistance which enables students

and families to fairly access efficient school counseling services and interventions (Mullen et al., 2021). School counselors' commitment to the modern duties and responsibilities specified by the ASCA National Model might receive special attention from principals (ASCA, 2017). Parts of the role of the school counselor include academic advisement; counseling services for concerning students; teachers, staff and administration collaboration to be able to assist with students' academic progress and student advocacy for all (ASCA, 2017).

### **School Counselor Self-Advocacy**

Goodman-Scott et al., (2022), states that elementary school counselors are essential in helping elementary-aged pupils with their academics and mental health. The job description of an elementary school counselor encompasses a range of duties, obligations, and expectations. All of these items may look differently at each school, because each school has a wide array of different wants and needs. In order to effectively carry out their professional duties, elementary school counselors must be able to advocate for others and raise awareness of the significance of implementing a complete, well-rounded program for school counseling. There needs to be a clear vision and mission of the school which should be implemented within this program for success of the entire child, both social emotionally and academically.

One of the parts of the job role as a school counselor consists of advocacy for all students, but school counselors also need to be able to advocate for themselves (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021). Advocacy should allow them to have appropriate delegations of tasks (even during a crisis) and being able to have enough time to complete these tasks both effectively and efficiently. School counselors should also be able to advocate for their reasonable caseloads to increase job satisfaction (Mullen et al., 2021). Numerous scholars have discussed the importance of advocacy in school counseling (Beck & Lane, 2019; Havlik et al., 2019; Holman et al., 2019). Relationship building, communication skills, and data use are particularly important to professional advocacy (Milsom et al., 2020).

Speaking out for what school counselors do and their areas of expertise is only one aspect of advocating. Another involves communicating with all relevant parties. Working diligently with principals facilitates the true explanation of school counselor duties and responsibilities (Cholewa et al., 2018; Fye et al., 2017; Waalkes et al., 2019). The efforts of advocacy can also help build and increase more cohesive relationships with teachers. The ability to work well with classroom teachers in addressing student issues is crucial for school counselors. When students have a good rapport with teachers, the student may be more willing to participate in class and the teacher may be able to offer assistance or comments (Milsom et al., 2020). Lastly, school counselors and district personnel can work together to help develop common verbiage that will address the challenges of improving services for students and educators who continue to confront obstacles when working in traditional classroom settings and online learning locations stemming from COVID-19 (Villares et al., 2022). In order for school counselors to effectively advocate for ideal school counseling interventions outlined in the ASCA National Model, it is imperative that school counseling literature be up to date (ASCA, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

The profession of the school counselor still needs to prioritize quality research that informs practice (Mason & Trezek, 2020; McMahon et al., 2017). Understanding what school counselors went through during COVID-19 will enable them to develop preventive measures that will lessen the impact of inequities caused by the pandemic and provide them a foundation for what students could have missed (Villares et al., 2022). It is a chance for school counselors to reconsider their duties and obligations within the school (Lambie et al., 2019). Immediately after COVID-19, administrators have voiced to school counselors that there were certain responsibilities that they should have prioritized, but other responsibilities got in the way of that. Administrators and colleagues gained an increased awareness of school counselors'

expertise in meeting the social, emotional, and mental health requirements of students (Limberg et al., 2021; Strear et al., 2021).

The well-being of the school counselor is very important but has been on the sidelines. This causes a big impact on student growth and success. Students', families', and workplaces' ever-changing needs must be balanced and addressed in a way that benefits the school atmosphere (Mullen et al., 2021). School counselors must have the opportunity to gain some type of help or assistance with being able to work with a high amount of varying different caseloads and challenges in their role. There needs to be resources and guidance to help school stakeholders in dealing with many topics, including implicit bias, anxiety management, academic planning (Belser & Mason, 2021). Studies have also demonstrated the necessity for regular mental health treatment for those students who have experiences trauma, which school counselors can offer assistance on a temporary basis while students are in school (Pincus et al., 2020). According to ASCA, (2017), school counselors are qualified to help students in school and, at the same time, connect them and their families to outside mental health resources (Howell et al., 2019; Lenares-Solomon et al., 2019).

Dealing with the pandemic has been an eye-opener on many fronts for mental health professionals. In particular, a visible shortage of counselors, which created an increased workload for those who were employed, became a primary issue (Sandhu & Singh, 2021). This was followed by a dire need for counselors to constantly adapt to quickly changing professional demands. Maintaining equilibrium between self-care and other care became an endless tussle experienced by all helping professionals, but especially by counselors. Today, counselors must be able to achieve this balance so as to maintain their professional vitality and overcome stress at a personal level (Sandhu & Singh, 2021). Advisement is a key element to make sure that students are on the right path in their academic career. To meet students' social and emotional needs, classroom social emotional learning and counseling will be crucial, post-

COVID-19 (Pincus et al., 2020). Focusing on how a school counselor's self-efficacy plays a significant role in their everyday job role after a worldwide pandemic, this qualitative case study contributes to the body of research.

## Chapter III

### Design and Methodology

Research on school counselors' self-efficacy post-COVID-19 has been limited. The present study addresses this gap in the research by investigating self-efficacy in the role of the school counselor. The results could help increase school counselors' self-efficacy while preventing burnout, and they could also improve the retention of school counselors.

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to determine what factors and stressors current school counselors have been experiencing since the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions helped guide the study:

1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?
2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?

This study used a qualitative narrative approach to explore the lived experiences of school counselors and discover new or unique stressors that occurred in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In qualitative research, narrative inquiry uses stories as the primary data source. This approach is commonly employed in various fields to gain insights into culture, history, identity, and lifestyle (Creswell, 2019). The methodology used to test the study's research questions is presented in this chapter, which is organized into five sections: (a) research design, (b) participants, (c) data collection, (d) analytical methods, and (e) limitations.

#### Research Design

Qualitative research is the process of gaining understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem (Creswell, 2019). Conducting qualitative research in an atmosphere in which participants have a specific

experience allows the researcher to gain insights into those participants' reality; this is a fundamental trait of qualitative research. The researcher conducted an interview with the school counselor to pilot the study so that comfort was maintained (Creswell, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom in the comfort of each participant's home or office. The qualitative design method chosen for this study was a narrative inquiry design, which allowed the participants to relate their own story of their role as a school counselor through their experiences within their school setting.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine school counselors' self-efficacy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research methods enable participants to reveal their authentic, unique voices and experiences (Creswell, 2019). The researcher aimed to examine the participants' perceptions of self-efficacy and the role that these perceptions played in the participants' decision to remain in their role as a school counselor. A qualitative method was used because the researcher sought to understand the participants' perceptions of a specific event utilizing qualitative data collection methods (Rosenthal, 2016).

According to Creswell (2019), qualitative research is a valuable approach because it offers a broad understanding and explanation of participants' first-hand portrayals of certain events. Because qualitative research requires knowledge and comprehension of participant viewpoints, it has the potential to generate in-depth insights through the examination of context.

### **Participants and Settings**

Upon approval from the university institution review board, the researcher began recruiting participants via an online validated demographic survey, which was completed through Google Surveys. The following were criteria for participants' eligibility: (a) a licensed school counselor; (b) a school counselor with 2 or more years of school counseling experience; (c) current employment as a full-time school counselor in a school setting; (d) employment as a

school counselor pre, during, and post the COVID-19 pandemic (specifically, 2019-2021); and (e) not working in the state of Florida, as that is where the researcher is currently employed.

Exclusion criteria were those who were school counselor interns or administrators. The experience of this study's participants ranged widely from 7–22 years of experience.

To conduct participation recruitment, the researcher posted in the following Facebook groups: Elementary School Counselors Exchange, School Counselors Collaboration and School Counselors Connect, and The Elementary School Counselor. School counselors interested in participating in the study were instructed to click on the Google Survey link on the Facebook post. Participants were informed that not everyone would be chosen to participate in the second part of the research study (i.e., the interviews). Once the surveys were completed and reviewed, the researcher used convenience sampling to select five school counselors to participate in the interview process. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the units chosen for the sample are the those that the researcher can access most quickly (Nikolopoulo, 2023).

Participants chosen for the interviews were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B) that followed form structure established by Northwest Nazarene's institutional review board. Research studies must be designed to protect the identity and privacy of the research participants. The researcher and each participant reviewed the informed consent form together. The participants were informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time. Ethical research also requires training and certification for human research through ACRP (Appendix A). This training was completed by the researcher, and certification was obtained before the research began. Permission was also obtained from the administrators of the Elementary School Counselors Exchange, School Counselors Collaboration and School Counselors Connect, and

The Elementary School Counselor Facebook pages to write a post explaining the study on each page, allowing the researcher to distribute surveys to interested participants.

After signing the consent form (Appendix B), the participants were asked to agree to do the interview via email, including their name, email, phone number, and availability for interviewing at three dates and times (Appendix H). The researcher then followed up with each chosen participant to schedule an interview via Zoom (Appendix J). Once all the participants responded “yes” to full participation, the researcher thanked any other participants who were not chosen for the interview process (Appendix I). Furthermore, a deadline was given to those selected for the interview to provide an answer to the researcher regarding their participation. The researcher then emailed the participants who were chosen for the interviews and explained that if they had any questions or concerns, they should contact the researcher (via phone or through email). Five participants were chosen for this study. All replies were saved until the researcher began the data entry process.

For the qualitative component of the study, participants who completed the surveys, indicated interest in participating in an interview, and were chosen by the researcher were emailed an invitation to participate in a semi-structured interview via Zoom (Appendix K). The questions in the interview allowed the school counselors to elaborate upon and explain their answers to help provide a clear picture of their perceptions of self-efficacy (Appendix D). To ensure that the participants were comfortable, the researcher-built rapport with the participants by building trust and finding commonalities with them before the interview started.

The school counselors were assured that the surveys and interviews were confidential, that the semi-structured interview transcripts would not be shared with anyone other than the researcher, and that only the researcher would know the participants’ names. The participants were also assured that no personally identifiable information about individuals, specific information about schools, or other information in the study would be shared beyond what had

already been specified. The researcher informed each participant that if they felt uncomfortable during the interview and did not want to continue participation, that participant should notify the researcher, at which time the participant would be able to exit the interview freely.

Copies of the demographic survey can be found in Appendix C. IRB permission was obtained prior to gathering any data from the participants. A copy of the informed consent can be found in Appendix B. When the data entry process began, each participant's survey instruments were kept confidential, but the researcher was able to identify the answers of each participant. This information was kept confidential on the researcher's password-protected laptop. Table 2 includes information about the school counselors that were recruited in this study.

**Table 2**  
*Recruited School Counselor Participant Information*

<b><i>RECRUITED SCHOOL COUNSELOR</i></b>	<b><i>LOCATION</i></b>	<b><i>EDUCATION</i></b>	<b><i>YEARS OF EXPERIENCE</i></b>
<b><i>PARTICIPANT #1</i></b> FEMALE, W, 34	Arizona	Working on Ph.D.	7–10
<b><i>PARTICIPANT #2</i></b> FEMALE, W, 59	New Hampshire	Master's Degree	19–22
<b><i>PARTICIPANT #3</i></b> FEMALE, W, 37	New York	Master's Degree	11–14
<b><i>PARTICIPANT #4</i></b> FEMALE, W, 35	Colorado	Ed. Specialist Degree	7–10
<b><i>PARTICIPANT #5</i></b> FEMALE, W, 50	Illinois	Master's Degree	7–10

## Data Collection

Data collection is essential to the research process, offering clarification of the theoretical framework (Bernard, 2016). In qualitative research, data can be collected through interviews, observations, or documents (Merriam, 2019). In narrative inquiry, the experiences of people are documented, typically through an interview, which is then recorded and arranged chronologically to reveal the lived experience or specific perspective of that individual. (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Although the data analysis approach was not chosen until the process began, the researcher followed Creswell's (2019) instruction that the data collected during a narrative inquiry "need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (p. 155).

This study used a school counselor demographic survey to collect participant data. The survey, which can be found in Appendix C, comprised 13 items and garnered the following information from participants: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) highest education level, (e) school location, (f) type of school, (g) experience, (h) students or caseload, (i) how many school counselors were employed at the school, (j) anything else the individual would like to add, and (k) if the individual would be willing to participate in an interview via Zoom if chosen. The demographic survey took the participants approximately 5 minutes to complete. Among the participants who were interested, five were chosen to participate in recorded interviews via Zoom. These participants were chosen using convenience sampling, which is a form of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling; school counselors were chosen who met certain criteria, such as being easily accessible, living nearby, being available at a given time, and showing willingness to participate. Additionally, convenience sampling can be used to describe population study subjects that are conveniently located for the researcher (Dörnyei, 2007) and thus select the demographic that is most convenient for the researcher to reach (Given, 2008).

The five selected participants underwent an interview via Zoom that was recorded and transcribed. The researcher created the interview questions by reviewing the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE). The SCSE is an instrument created to investigate the efficacy of school counselors. As of this research study, it is the only instrument with evidence of sufficient validity and reliability to gauge professional school counselors' self-efficacy (Bardhoshi et al., 2019). The SCSE consisted of 43 self-reported items that measure school counselor self-efficacy across five subscales: (a) personal and social development, (b) leadership and assessment, (c) career and academic development, (d) collaboration, and (e) cultural acceptance (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). To determine the reliability and validity of the SCSE, Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) completed four studies: initial item development, item analysis, a validity study, and factor analysis. Completing the SCSE requires about 10–15 minutes (Appendix E).

The SCSE measures school counselors' confidence within five areas of their job roles: personal and social development (12 items), leadership and assessment (nine items), career and academic development (seven items), collaboration (11 items), and cultural acceptance (four items). The SCSE uses a five-point Likert rating scale ranging from (1) not confident, (2) slightly confident, (3) moderately confident, (4) generally confident, and (5) highly confident. A composite mean is then calculated to explain the level of self-efficacy. (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005)

Before the interviews occurred, the researcher conducted a pilot study to review the interview questions with select school counselors. Piloting for interviews is an important part of the research process because it allows the researcher to test the questions and gain interview practice (Majid et al., 2017). The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005) was used by the researcher to draft the interview questions. When drafting interview questions, it is critical to assess the questions' clarity, receive expert

review of the draft questions, select the participants, conduct a pilot interview, and document any changes made (Majid et al., 2017). This process ensures that the interview questions are designed to answer the research questions and provides the opportunity to strengthen the interview questions' efficacy, ensuring that they aid in achieving the study's objectives (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). During the pilot study (which occurred via Zoom), the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The pilot study's objectives were to determine whether the questions were appropriate and to offer the researcher some preliminary recommendations regarding the feasibility of the investigation. It also helped develop rapport with the participants and gave the researcher experience conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Last, this pilot study helped the researcher learn interviewing skills and conversation flow (Majid et al., 2017). Afterward, the researcher met individually with every school counselor participant to discuss each research question in depth. Subsequently, some questions were edited to better reflect the self-efficacy research questions. For example, original question #3 was as follows: "What are some challenges you face as a school counselor on a daily basis?" After the pilot study, it was edited to say, "What are some challenges or obstacles that you face as a school counselor on a daily basis?" The pilot interview participants agreed that the interview questions accurately addressed school counselor self-efficacy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) were conducted in which the researcher asked open-ended questions regarding the job and role of the school counselor. For this study, Bandura's (1977) frameworks of self-efficacy were the main focus of the semi-structured interview questions. During the semi-structured interviews, the participants were able to respond to all of the questions and express their opinions about which items held the greatest influence on their level of self-efficacy. Interview-based data collection did not begin until the researcher acquired each interviewee's signed informed consent form.

The interview questions primarily focused on enabling the participants to share their narratives regarding their school counselor journey and self-efficacy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to express themselves and share their understandings and interpretations of their experiences as they related to individual and environmental factors that influenced their self-efficacy. Thus, the participants could determine what individual and environmental factors were included in their narratives regarding their self-efficacy in the role of a school counselor.

The researcher made a personal connection with each school counselor, thereby building rapport. Additionally, the researcher kept their body language and facial expressions neutral during the interview process did not show their emotions to the participants. All interviews were recorded and were used as the primary source for data analysis.

### **Member Checking**

To address the reliability of the interviews, the collected data were member checked. Member checking (also called responded validation) is the process by which participants are provided with the transcript to review and confirm their narratives and provide feedback about the research results (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Similar to quality control, member checking ensures the findings of a study are accurate, credible, and valid and is the most effective approach to decreasing researcher misinterpretation (Maxwell, 2013). It increases the trustworthiness of the study and is a crucial component of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **Analytical Methods**

To analyze the data, the researcher followed Creswell's (2019) three-stage strategy: 1) prepare and organize the data, 2) reduce the data into themes, and 3) represent the data. To guarantee that the qualitative methodology demonstrated dependability, an audit trail was developed, ensuring that a variety of data sources was used. This included recording via Zoom,

transcribing the data, and completing member checking. An in-depth data collection procedure was utilized to interpret the data. To guarantee the validity of the study, the researcher followed the established protocol for conducting research and documented any errors or deviations.

The researcher transcribed all of the interviews via Zoom and maintained field notes during the interview process and data analysis to document details such as the date and time of the interview and any information from the participants' responses that was challenging to record using Zoom. The digital recordings, transcriptions, and field notes were all kept in a private, locked file on a laptop connected to a thumb drive. Participants were identified by numbers (1–5), which were used for the interviews, transcripts, and field notes. In data analysis, the researcher must be able to account for all documents, interviews, transcripts, observations, and researcher field notes, as well as in vivo coding. The researcher reviewed the transcribed data, highlighting important words and phrases.

The researcher followed in vivo coding guidelines to collect data; identify and name and create preliminary categories and codes from these data. Once divided, the codes were investigated, and the researcher reviewed any categories or themes that emerged. The researcher then compared their notes to the transcripts for accuracy and color-coded any themes or categories using ATLAS.ti software. Precautions were taken to ensure the information gathered from the interviews was examined to create comprehension (Saldaña, 2016).

While examining the themes from the interviews, the researcher revisited Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the four self-efficacy factors: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. A table was created to reference this theory (1977) along with data from all the participants. The columns were divided into high levels of self-efficacy and low levels of self-efficacy. This helped the researcher organize the information into different categories and analyze what components of the school counselor role

contributed to the different levels of self-efficacy. The themes and codes that came from this study are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Themes and Codes*

Theme	Codes
Theme 1: Role complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Outside/extra non-counseling duties as assigned, e.g., burdensome paperwork and meetings</li> <li>○ Managing student behaviors</li> <li>○ Role of the school counselor means different things to different people depending on who is asked</li> </ul>
Theme 2: COVID-19 impact on mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Higher caseloads</li> <li>○ More students experience difficulty self-regulating</li> <li>○ Students have poor communication because of online learning habits</li> </ul>
Theme 3: Counseling students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Negative attitudes</li> <li>○ Emotionally burdensome</li> <li>○ Teaching students the basics of self-control</li> <li>○ Increase in a need to see struggling students</li> </ul>
Theme 4: Advocacy in the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student/parental support</li> <li>○ Lack of self-regulation</li> <li>○ Poor mental health</li> <li>○ Attempting to provide support as best they can</li> </ul>
Theme 5: Work–life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ School counselors feel like they are always working, no on–off switch</li> <li>○ Lack of resources</li> <li>○ Compassion fatigue for school counselors, difficulty for them to self-care</li> </ul>

Given the intimate relationships that often develop between researchers and participants through narrative inquiry, ethical considerations including dignity, privacy, and the participants' well-being were important to the study (Wang & Geale, 2016). The researcher divulged the goal and intentions of the study to every participant and acted in good faith. Informed consent signatures were received from all the necessary people and will be kept on file for 3 years following the research. All confidential data and other important data relevant to this study will be kept secure on the researcher's personal, locked laptop. After 3 years, the data from this study will be destroyed. School counselors who participated in this study were reminded that their information would be kept confidential and that the only person who would know names of the participants of the study would be the researcher.

### **Limitations**

In a qualitative research study with a narrative design, a variety of limitations can impact the data analysis. Replicating the results of qualitative research is frequently challenging because qualitative research occurs in natural environments (Wiersma, 2020). Narrative inquiry approaches also face limitations, as participants may remove or obscure information that could be important to the researcher (Polkinghorne, 2017). Furthermore, there may be limitations regarding a potential difference with a participant's actual experience and the description they provide to convey this experience.

Another important limitation is that the researcher must not to add their own meaning to the participants' experiences when using narrative inquiry. If this occurs, the researcher becomes a limitation to data collection (Polkinghorne, 2017). Further clarification includes any beliefs or assumptions that the researcher may have held before and during the study. During the study, researchers can experience biases with respect to their methodology, data analysis, and recommendations (Galdas, 2017). However, these biases can be controlled through the development of trustworthiness between the researcher and the school counselor participants.

The researcher must remain aware of the possibility that they could select data that confirm their assumptions or beliefs (Galdas, 2017).

Possible drawbacks of this study included the potential that participants misunderstood the interview questions and the inability to ensure that the participants would provide accurate and truthful responses. The participants might have been concerned or nervous to provide an honest answer. If they did not answer honestly, the research study might have limited trustworthiness. Another limitation of this study is that participants might have changed their answers or used answers containing more desirable words. School counselors across the United States have all experienced the COVID-19 pandemic differently, and some have undergone hardships that could have led to skewed results. Additionally, the sample population of five school counselors only completed the interview once. Although measures were taken and rapport was used to help the participants feel comfortable sharing their answers honestly, the participants still may have answered questions in a positive and professional way, but not showing a truthful response.

The majority of school counselors in the United States are female, which limited the genders represented in this study. While examining the self-efficacy of school counselors is important, recruiting study participants was difficult. While replicating the study by recruiting more participants in the future would be beneficial, it could also prove challenging.

The final limitation of this study is that the researcher is currently a school counselor (and was both before and after COVID-19) who may have experienced some of the same emotions conveyed by the research participants. The researcher must avoid bias by not allowing their personal beliefs to affect the research; they must carefully examine and analyze all collected data with an objective mindset.

## **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is critical in any qualitative study, as the researcher is accountable for the entire study process, data collection, and analysis. In this study, several aspects depended solely on the researcher's role. The role included ethical considerations during data collection through the demographic survey and interviews; the researcher had to ensure that ethical principles and guidelines were met throughout the study period. The researcher ensured this by obtaining informed consent, thereby ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, a high level of importance was placed on ethical issues such as dignity, privacy, and the well-being of participants due to the intimate connections that typically form between researchers and participants through narrative inquiry (Wang & Geale, 2016). The researcher ensured complete transparency by fully disclosing the goal and intent of the study to all individuals involved, demonstrating a commitment to ethical conduct.

The role of the researcher was also evident in the data collection process through the demographic survey and semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, the researcher created a nurturing setting for all the school counselors to discuss their experiences and developed rapport to enhance honest and open responses. Qualitative data analysis requires organizing, coding, and interpreting the obtained data. This study employed in vivo coding, which included identifying and naming codes from the categories and themes of the data. The researcher must remain objective and refrain from any act that could introduce bias during the study. The researcher conducted a pilot study of the semi-structured interviews to ensure the validity of the interview questions. To ensure credibility of the results, the researcher also implemented member checking, by which the participants confirmed their transcribed data. Furthermore, the researcher must remain aware of induced biases and refrain from including beliefs or assumptions in the research. It is also the role of the researcher to accept and address all drawbacks of the study. This involves anything that may hinder generalizability of the study

results, potential biases, and any other challenge. Finally, the researcher must ensure transparency during the study period.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Introduction

The purpose of this narrative inquiry qualitative study was to investigate the self-efficacy of school counselors in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As several researchers have noted, semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry work well together to uncover best practices in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). This chapter discusses the results from the qualitative analysis of the individual interviews with the five participants. Additionally, a breakdown of the themes from the participants' answers is provided, along with an evaluation of the findings.

Data for this research were gathered through a demographic survey and interviews with five participants. The following states were represented in the study: Arizona, New Hampshire, New York, Illinois, and Colorado. The participants were all female with at least 7 years of experience or more as a school counselor, and each person participated in a 30–40-minute recorded interview with the researcher via Zoom. The goal of the study was to identify the tools and supports that can help school counselors in their role after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will add to the educational field by elucidating the perceptions of school counselors' self-efficacy.

The researcher used the Zoom transcribing tool to code the transcripts, review the field notes, and develop five themes to address the research questions of the study:

RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?

RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?

## **Participants**

The first interview participant was a 34-year-old white female working in a school in Arizona and currently completing her PhD. She was the only school counselor at a private school with 150 students, mostly comprising the ESE population. This participant (#1) had 7 years of experience as a school counselor. The second interview participant was a 59-year-old white female with 20 years of experience who worked at a school in New Hampshire. This participant (#2) had a master's degree and was the only school counselor at a public school with 275 students. She worked with an on-staff retired therapist, who volunteered at the school, along with a clinical psychologist who worked 10 hours a week at the school. The third interview participant was a 37-year-old white female who had 12 years of experience as a school counselor in New York. This participant (#3) had a master's degree and worked alongside other school counselors (as a team of 10) serving 2,000 students at a public school. The fourth interview participant was a 35-year-old white female who had an Ed. Specialist degree. She worked at a charter school in Illinois with 1,480 students and was one of four school counselors. She had 9 years of experience. The final school counselor, participant #5, was a 50-year-old white female with a master's degree. She was the only school counselor at a public school in Colorado with 800 students and had 8 years of experience.

## **Participant Commonalities**

The participants involved in this study displayed several common themes and trends. They were all women with at least 7 years of experience. The educational background of each school counselor was a master's degree or higher. Four of the five participants worked at a public school, while one worked at a private school. All shared that they were in the profession because they enjoyed working with students and participating in their students' academic career. Four of the counselors stated that they worked on a team with other school counselors—a factor that helped them get through the day.

## **Data Analysis Process**

The interviews were transcribed using the Zoom application, and they were compared to the researcher's field notes. The transcripts were read twice to enable the researcher to gain an overall synopsis to develop the key points. This review was based on the participants' answers, which were member checked by the interviewees to ensure that their ideas were accurately captured. A few days after the scheduled interview, the participants had the opportunity to edit their responses, if needed, after reviewing their entire interview transcript. Each participant (all five) replied that their interview was 100% accurate and reflected their answers correctly.

The researcher used ATLAS.ti software to review each component of the data from the transcripts and organize them into codes, which eventually led to themes. ATLAS.ti software was chosen by the researcher because it is efficient and user friendly, and it aided in the analysis and coding of the interview transcripts. ATLAS.ti uses in vivo coding, and the chosen segment serves as the basis for the new code's name, which is used to generate ideas or labels for each data segment. The first procedure is to open line-by-line coding. Generally, codes are applied in an impromptu, open manner. The labels should be kept brief, clear, and action oriented. Each time the researcher wrote a new code, ATLAS.ti would add comments to clarify it explicitly. The researcher then analyzed the data by choosing the top 5–7 codes to review. In ATLAS.ti, the researcher chose the "Code In Vivo" option from the menu after a certain text segment was highlighted. With this selection, the code is created using the text as its name, and the highlighted piece is quoted once the code has been applied to it. Each participant was referred to by number, ranging in order from 1–5. Throughout the entire coding process, the researcher consistently reviewed the transcripts, which were saved and coded into an MS Word document.

## **Member Checking**

The method of member checking involves presenting interview data transcripts for review to some or all of the participants (Varpio et al., 2017). Member checking helped ensure the credibility, reliability, accuracy, and validity of this study on school counselors' self-efficacy. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher presented a copy to each of the school counselors for review. They were asked to review the transcripts to verify whether the transcription was true to what they had stated during the interview and to identify whether there were any changes or errors. All five of the school counselors agreed that the transcripts accurately represented what they voiced in their interviews. They did not add any new information nor desired to delete anything that was transcribed. They were appreciative of this step and seemed to enjoy the process.

## **Introduction To Results**

The five school counselors that participated in the study had each been in their role for at least 7 years. All of them stated that the best part of the job was the ability to work with and counsel students. The participants enjoyed being able to impact their students' lives and to help the students in whatever capacity they could. The participants all agreed that the issues students face post-COVID-19 are exponentially different from before the pandemic. For instances, school counselors are seeing more students with greater mental health needs, as more students are demonstrating, for example, signs of anxiety and depression than before. The participants reported experiencing stress themselves but had resources in place that could help reduce this stress. None of the participants reported wanting to leave the profession (early retirement) or quitting. Their self-efficacy was good, and they desired to remain in their job role because they loved and thoroughly enjoyed helping their students. The five major themes that emerged from the study were role complexity, the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, counseling students, advocacy in the profession, and work-life balance.

## Results

### *Themes and Coding*

First, all responses from the research participants were classified according to the questions asked by the researcher. They were then identified and categorized into similar patterns and manually coded. Five themes were identified in relation to the research questions. The interview questions explored the participants' thoughts and perceptions regarding (1) role complexity, (2) the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, (3) counseling students, (4) advocacy in the profession, and (5) work-life balance. The interview questions focused on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and examples from the participants' experiences.

Table 4 illustrates the interview questions asked and the interviewees responses in relation to the research questions.

<b>Table 4</b> <b><i>Interview Questions in Relation to the Research Questions</i></b>	
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	1. Describe for me what it is like in the day-to-day life of a school counselor before and after COVID-19. (a) What are some things that have changed in your role?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	2. Talk to me about how you know you have done a good job in your role as a school counselor.
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	3. What are some challenges that you face at your school?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	4. What support do you have for overcoming these challenges?

**Table 4**  
***Interview Questions in Relation to the Research Questions***

RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	5. How does a day in the life of a school counselor affect you after the school day is done?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	6. How do you advocate for yourself as a school counselor and articulate how essential your job is at school?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	7. How do you integrate student academic, career, and personal development into the mission of your school?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	8. If I were to ask your school principal what your role as a school counselor is, what do you think he/she would say?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	9. If I were to ask a teacher at your school this question, what do you think he/she would say?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	10. Do you believe that your school family values what you do each day? Why or why not?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	11. How do you teach, develop, and support students' dealing with crises in their lives (e.g., peer suicide, a parent's death, abuse, etc.).
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	12. Can you share with me something that you do differently in your role as a school counselor pre- and post-COVID-19?

**Table 4**  
***Interview Questions in Relation to the Research Questions***

RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	13. On a scale from 1–10, what would you rate your happiness at work factor, and why? Is there anything that could make it better?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	14. What are some of your strategies you implement to avoid school counselor burnout?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	15. Do you feel gratified in your role as a school counselor? Why or why not?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	16. Tell me about a time that you felt distressed or despair.
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	17. In the last year, have you felt like you might want to quit or leave the profession?
RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?	18. What things could make you enjoy your role as a school counselor more?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	19. What are some responsibilities at your school that might violate the ASCA standards?
RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?	20. Is there anything I missed or that you would like to add?

According to the interview results, the school counselors believed that their self-efficacy was related to their job satisfaction. They found fulfillment in supporting students but

also faced challenges, such as the emotional toll and lack of detachment from work. They rated their happiness at work as 7–8 out of 10 and used coping strategies to avoid burnout. They felt undervalued and misunderstood but believed advocacy and focusing on mental health in schools were necessary. The COVID-19 pandemic had changed their role, with more focus on emotional needs and better student connections. Some of their responsibilities may have violated professional standards. The five themes helped answer the two research questions:

**RQ1: What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?**

**RQ2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?**

### **Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory**

One of the fundamental components of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1995) social cognitive theory is self-efficacy, which is an individual's conviction that they can accomplish desired results in a particular task. It has been demonstrated to play a significant role in effective teaching, counseling, and change management as a crucial aspect of career performance (Bandura, 1995; Larson & Daniels, 1998; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). Answers to these research questions were derived from survey data collection and analysis, as well as semi-structured Zoom interviews. Five themes emerged: (1) role complexity, (2) the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, (3) counseling students, (4) advocacy in the profession, and (5) work-life balance.

### **Emerging Theme 1: Role Complexity**

The first theme that emerged from the data, role complexity, was derived from the comments made by the participants. This theme helped to answer RQ2: What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-

efficacy in their role? The participants conveyed the importance of clarifying the duties of school counselors and discussed the challenges and frustrations of their role as a school counselor. They mentioned the need for a common understanding of their role and the difficulties of balancing various responsibilities, such as paperwork, testing, and non-counselor duties. Districts may not fully understand the role of a school counselor and how their time should be spent. The participants expressed their love for the job but emphasized the need for more support and understanding from their districts. Furthermore, the participants stated that the role of a school counselor is often misunderstood, and more clarification in the job role is needed. The participants also reported that some counselors have a negative attitude or believe that certain issues are not their responsibility.

The goal of the school counselor is to provide support for students and help them prepare for their future. The job often revolves around crises and immediate student and parent needs. The participants felt that measuring the impact of counseling is often difficult, but that there is great value in their work. The role of a school counselor is to support students and families, but it can be emotionally burdensome. The participants also shared some of the difficulties they had faced, such as dealing with disgruntled employees or feeling misunderstood or judged in certain situations. They also mentioned the disheartening experiences of being questioned or judged in their profession, despite their dedication. Overall, the school counselors emphasized the need for improved understanding of and support for their school counselor role and believed that school counselors should play a crucial role in addressing mental health issues and advocating for students.

- “I think our professionalism and our judgment was kind of questioned and just like the understanding of what we should be doing versus what we’re being asked to do has been challenged.” This participant’s statement revealed the need

for a clear job role description with concise job expectations from administrators explaining the responsibilities of the school counselor.

- “I don’t think people who aren’t in the role fully understand everything that school counselors do and the mental and emotional burden it could be at times.” As seen here, job role clarification is required to help clear up this misconception regarding school counselors’ role.
- “I think a big part of it is that we need to step down more on the academic roles when it comes to like, like I said, being a registrar, that is not what we’re trained in doing, and we need to be focusing more on the mental health aspect, and I think if anything needs to change, that’s a big part of it and that’s why they’ve changed the rule and the name to school counselor to be a counselor, not a guidance counselor, and that’s the reason behind it.” It is important for others to comprehend why the term “guidance counselor” was changed to “school counselor.” A school counselor provides more than “guidance,” and the ASCA recognizes this. Thus, people should utilize the proper verbiage.
- “I think that’s the biggest challenge for us when we’re not, like, we’re not necessarily the most attention-seeking or, like, self-advocating people, and we tend to focus more on the kids than ourselves in our own role. But, you know, I do think that there’s a ton of value in our work. I hope that I think that clearer we can make our role kind of universally, the clearer all right, I think that’s it.”- School counselors know the importance of advocating for clarification of their role but do not always feel comfortable explaining the role to others.
- “Communication from administration, I would say it’s inconsistent, and I think specifically the school counselor and understanding of our work is still a challenge.” It is beneficial for there to be a cohesive working relationship with

the understanding of school counselor expectations would help this school counselor comment.

- For the first, well, 10 years of my career, which is 10 of the 11 years I've been doing this, I served on a counseling committee at the district level and helped everyone from our superintendent and assistant superintendent to building principals to teachers better differentiate what a school counselor does versus other support personnel in the district." This worked helped the entire staff understand the specific role of the school counselor.

### **Role Complexity Theme Summary**

Many of the school counselors involved in this study voiced concern over people's not knowing what a school counselor does. However, the issue is complex, as the job role is often confusing and there are unclear expectations from the administrative team. The role of a school counselor at one school could look different from that at another school, although this should not be the case. Clear guidelines on the role of the school counselor are needed, and the role explanation should not contradict the ASCA model. However, administrators often do not understand ASCA's expectations and give school counselors "other duties as assigned" that violate the ASCA model. School counselor participants were disheartened when they spoke about their role and how some people did not deem it as important. If clearer definitions of the role were to exist, they might highlight the need for school counselors.

### **Emerging Theme 2: the Impact of COVID-19 on school counselors' mental health**

The second theme that emerged was the impact that COVID-19 had on school counselors' mental health, as well as that of their students. This theme helped answer RQ2: What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role? Throughout the interviews, the research participants expressed how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them. School counselors had to transition

counseling sessions from in-person to remote, reducing the need to travel to schools. This process diminished students' self-control and ability to communicate with others. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of mental health and the possible need for alternative learning environments, as it caused an increased stress for students and affected their ability to learn.

The participants shared that, since COVID-19, parents may not have the energy to support their children fully. It has been very difficult for families who have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic and the school counselors' challenges in providing students with support that the students needed. The participants also mentioned the exhaustion of parents and the need for teachers to understand what the students experienced during COVID-19 before actually teaching the curriculum. The level of mental health needs and crisis management had increased significantly in the school counselor role since the COVID-19 pandemic. Before, students possessed more self-regulation skills, but after COVID-19, the scope of situations they had to endure was different, and the participants were realized that they had to focus more on the students' self-control. Indeed, they believed that the role of school counselors has shifted to focus more on self-control and less on more serious issues since the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants emphasized the importance of understanding that children may be coming to school extremely worried or stressed due to COVID-19 situations at home. One of the research participants shared that one of her biggest challenges was dealing with affluent parents who would push boundaries and not take responsibility for their children's actions.

Additionally, the participants stated that they enjoyed being a school counselor before the COVID-19 pandemic, but now felt overwhelmed at times with the number of students seeking help from COVID-19 issues. They highlighted the need for flexibility in meeting the changing needs of students post-COVID-19 and how important building student relationships are for students. The school counselors acknowledged the need for more focus on mental

health and basic check-ins, rather than solely on standards and data. Overall, most of the school counselors in this research study agreed that the goal of the school counselor has always been to support the children as best as they can, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- “You know, students are in crisis mode or, you know, they’re recommended for counseling, and they’re being checked in by whether it’s a psychologist, social worker, or counselor. We’re all kind of sharing that piece to help manage, but most of that is more reactionary and based on recommendations or identified need than a consistent curriculum addressing it.” Students are suffering from different ailments due to remaining at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and school counselors need varying resources to help them quickly, without other circumstances preventing this help.
- ”COVID-19 and the way we had to Zoom and the way we had such high anxiety and emotional concerns, I feel, like, has kind of created, not that we didn’t have that before, but creating this awareness of we really need to just say, hey, how are you doing, like, and, like, kind of bring it back to a basic level at times and not worry always so much about, like, know our standards and data.” While remaining at home for the COVID-19 pandemic, students could not interact with their friends like they used to, nor were school counselors able to do their job normally. This created intense hardship when students returned to school, not knowing what to expect.
- “I feel like students and kids in general don’t know how to talk to each other and that worsened with COVID-19. I think focusing on that more, so that the students had that strong foundation to fall back on post-COVID-19.” School counselors had to check in with students to make sure the student’s mental

health was good. They also had to re-teach students social skills since many of the students returned to in-person schooling altered and feeling isolated.

- “I think post COVID-19, a goal should be for, I know teachers have a lot on their plates, but I think they need to understand before they can do the curriculum and teach everything they need to teach, they got to understand where the kids are coming from.” School counselors had to connect with more students (which increased their caseload) before prioritizing any other job duties and responsibilities they also had to finish.
- “I feel as though it’s important that all stakeholders within the school understand that the children are coming to school stressed out due to situations of COVID-19 at home, if that makes sense.” It was important for every level of the school—parents, administrators, district level, teachers, and staff—to understand what the post-COVID-19 situation was for students and for everyone to play a part in helping the students.
- “Before COVID-19, I would say my job was fairly predictably day to day, like, we had certain times a year that, you know, we had routine, like, aspects of our job and our curriculum, and you know, there’s a certain flow to the times of the school year. Since COVID-19, I would say that we operate on a much more reactive basis with the level of mental health needs, and crisis management has increased significantly.” Due to the changes post-COVID-19, school counselors must realize that every day is different and filled with more student needs.
- “And I also think honestly, like, some of the mental health needs of parents directly impact our work, and what our kids are dealing with at home very much carries over into their behavior and their challenges at school.” School counselors had to understand that not only were their students suffering from a

rise in mental health needs, but the parents also were. Mental health needs increased in every part of the population.

- “A lot of these kiddos, this is the only support mental health they’re going to get.” For some students, the only mental health support they receive is from the school counselor. This is an added stress for school counselors who might not feel comfortable with this type of counseling or believe that it was outside their realm of knowledge.
- “And we need to be focusing more on the mental health aspect, and I think if anything needs to change, that’s a big part of it.” School counselors know the importance of the relationship between mental health and how it relates to student ability. However, it is important for teachers and administrators to acknowledge this relationship importance as well.
- “You know, we are the first point of contact when it comes to mental health because we’re directly in the school system itself.” Copious pressure is placed on school counselors to help fix every student problem, which is why it is important for school counselors to gain rapport with teachers so they can work as a team to help the student together,

### **COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health Theme Summary**

The participants voiced concern that, after the COVID-19 pandemic, students came back to school with more serious issues. More students were seeking school counselor services because they were suffering from symptoms of anxiety or depression. Some students suffered from the grief of losing a loved one from the pandemic. Another problem the school counselors faced was the increasing mental health service referrals to outside organizations because these student issues were outside the scope of the school counselor’s job role. The participants had the tools needed to help students with academic issues, as well as a plethora of other issues, but

the students' issues were more severe and more focused around mental health. Often, the outside agencies were booked or did not follow-up with the counselors because of the high demands for mental health services after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Emerging Theme 3: Counseling Students**

The school counselors believed that building relationships with students and witnessing their growth were the most rewarding aspects of their job. This theme helped to answer RQ1: What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?

The participants noticed an increase in the number of students struggling with anxiety, likely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They spent the majority of the interviews discussing their role in supporting students and building relationships. The school counselors found their relationships with students and witnessing the students' growth to be the most rewarding aspects of their job. They prioritized building student relationships and advocating for their students. According to the participants, trust is essential for successful counseling. The school counselors loved working with students, had a strong passion for counseling, and were empathetic.

They worked with entire classes to promote support and understanding for students who might be facing challenges. The participants reported spending large amounts of time working with students who struggle to come to school due to mental health issues or avoidance. School counselors often use a K–12 career program to help students explore different career options, which will help them later in their school career. They also believe that alternative learning environments should be created to help meet the diverse needs of students. The participants emphasized addressing the mental health and emotional well-being of students as being of prime importance. One interviewee shared a personal incident in which she was accused of not fully supporting a student. This situation was beyond her control and

was disheartening for her. The participants highlighted the need for all stakeholders in schools to recognize and address the mental health needs of students. They also discussed their role in supporting students and families, despite the challenges the school counselors face. Overall, their job involves helping students with post-high school plans, addressing mental health issues, and advocating for resources and support.

- “It really comes down to how we feel and, like, the relationships that we have.” School counselors enjoy building relationships with students that will help them grow socially, emotionally and academically.
- “I feel most successful when I see some maturity and growth with my students, and you can kind of, you know, the students that I have closer counseling relationships with that I know I’ve gotten to know on a much more, like, deeper level.” The school counselors reported that they enjoyed seeing their students succeed; it was one of their favorite aspects of their job.
- “I feel I’ve been successful by the relationships I have built with different students and staff on campus, supporting both the school family and their families as well, the best way that I can.” The school counselors agreed that relationship-building among the school staff was important and that their job was made easier when the parties all shared the same understanding.
- “I have a lot of history with the kids now that I’ve worked with them all their years here, and so I have a lot of good relationships with families.” The school counselors often spoke of the importance of relationships; it was referenced many times regarding different situations. The longer the counselors remained at the school, the better their relationships with outside supports.
- “And then definitely the students, the relationships I have with kids, both as a counselor and as a coach is very rewarding to me still.” The school counselors

reported that knowing every student at school was difficult (they divided the caseloads at some schools) but agreed that if the student's assigned school counselor could not see them, they would step in immediately.

- “A lot of what we do is helping students prepare for their future and help assisting them with identifying what those plans are and getting them to a point where they leave here with a next step.” The school counselors enjoyed seeing the growth of their students and knowing that they played some small role in helping their students achieve this growth.
- “My role is to advocate for students' best interests in terms of their academic programming and the supports that they may need, or their families may need.” The job of the school counselor is complex, but the participants emphasized that the students were their top priority.
- “Again, there's days where I've said out loud, it's like, if I could just work with my students one-on-one in my office and not deal with any of the other, I would happily walk in our doors every single day, smile on my face, but it's some of the other extraneous tasks and kind of nonsense that can get in the way of those relationships, but it kind of takes away from that work that we all really want to be doing.” Most of the school counselors in this study agreed that desired to speak with students all day, as it was the most rewarding part of their job.
- “I think knowing that I've made a difference with students. And that can be through, you know, them meeting goals or feedback from parents or students or pre and post in groups that I do.” Knowing that their student had achieved success raised the school counselor's self-efficacy.
- “There's other responsibilities, such as testing, ESOL, scheduling, just different things that are so time consuming that I feel it takes away from the important

counseling role when it comes to being a school counselor.” The school counselors desired to help students and did not want other assigned duties to become an obstacle to this.

### **Counseling Students Theme Summary**

All the school counselors emphasized that their love of the job came from helping students. The participants remained in the profession because they enjoyed the opportunity to talk with students and help them navigate different problems and determine what to do. Knowing that they were helping make a difference in their students’ lives gave the participants a feeling of accomplishment. The school counselors discussed the importance of building rapport with students and forming strong relationships with them. To them, this relationship-building was the most important, and best, part of their job.

### **Emerging Theme 4: Advocacy in the profession**

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews was advocacy. This theme helped to answer RQ2: What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role? The interview participants stated that the need for school counselors is significant and identified a lack of advocacy for their role. The focus lies on advocating for students, rather than themselves. Small changes, like updating job titles, could help advance role clarity conversations. Additionally, mental health should be a greater focus. Advocacy is challenging in the school system, but having support from administrators is helpful.

Advocacy in mental health is challenging because school counselors are often the only ones in their role. Therefore, there is a lack of understanding and support from others. Furthermore, personal advocacy can be a struggle for many school counselors. The participants also identified a lack of advocacy and communication from administration. Despite these challenges, however, the school counselors remained committed to their role and were able to

value the importance of social support. The interviewees communicated that support from administration at times can be inconsistent, and they expected to continue feeling the need to advocate for their role and correct misconceptions.

- “The only thing that I would have to say is that I think advocacy is such a big part ,and it is little to non-existent.” The school counselors reported that they found it difficult to advocate for themselves, even though they realized its importance.
- “Regardless of the matter, advocacy is incredibly challenging because you don’t have many people that are going to advocate for you because most of the time you’re the only counselor, you’re the only mental health specialist that’s there. There’s not really anybody that understands exactly what you’re going through or how to relate towards it.” Some school counselors discussed that they only had one school counselor at their school, so advocacy was nearly non-existent.
- “I would say social support and advocacy is number one. Without that, there’s no way I would continue to work in mental health by any means, whether it’s in a school or whether it’s independently, no way.” One school counselor stated that she had an excellent working relationship with her principal in which she could continually advocate for herself because of the high level of comfort and trust.
- “So advocating through that communication and through, like, that committee work, I would say is one thing I’ve done, but even from, like, my day-to-day relationships with teachers, you know, I still to this day am correcting people about ‘guidance counselor’ versus ‘school counselor,’ and you know, small things they actually are just now implementing, like, that’s finally changing in our contract because that hadn’t been updated, and it’s shocking, but you know,

people don't think anything of it, but it is, you know, those small things that I think can help, you know, open the door for conversation." School counselors emphasized that a level of respect needs to exist in relationships among staff. If the respect does not exist, nothing will be accomplished.

- "Our guidance team actually created an Excel spreadsheet with the students that we see and all the categories in which we see students. So, whether that's individual, whether that's group, whether that is problem-solving team meetings that we have with parents, also document any emergency situations, risk assessments, baker acts, and stuff like that. So we are documenting and definitely show the need for school counselors in general." Teamwork is important for accomplishing everyone's jobs effectively; it is not only the job of the school counselor to help students.
- "I think I do that best through my communication with our staff and with our administrative team." Communication among all stakeholders is important and ensures all parties are aware of current situations.

### **Advocacy in the Profession Theme Summary**

One of the most difficult parts in a school counselor's job role is advocacy. Some participants shared that they have a good relationship with their administrative team, which improves their ability to self-advocate. Their principals understood and respected the importance of their role. Other school counselors stated that they found self-advocacy a difficult part of their job because they did not know how to do it well. These participants simply did what was asked of them, even if it contradicted the ASCA model. A significant issue that they spoke about was being referred to as a "guidance counselor" and how the role includes more than the word "guidance" indicates. According to the participants, being called a

guidance counselor suggests that all they do is make class schedules and perform administrative duties, which is not the case.

### **Emerging Theme 5: Work-Life Balance**

The fifth theme that emerged from the school counselor interviews was work-life balance. This theme helped to answer both research questions. RQ1 states, “What are school counselors’ perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?” RQ2 is as follows: What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role? The participants believed that disconnecting from work is difficult and that many other job responsibilities interrupt their counseling roles. The workload can be overwhelming, especially when dealing with students struggling with mental health issues or school avoidance. The participants also discussed the impact of workload on their personal life and the need for clearer boundaries.

The school counselors agreed that they desire career advancement and better pay. Limited access to therapists and psychologists has increased the burden on school counselors. The participants emphasized the impact of financial struggles and stressors on children’s academic and social–emotional well-being and acknowledged the challenges of balancing workload and personal life, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The school counselors relied on social support from friends and family to help cope with the challenges of their job. They also expressed frustrations about a lack of reinforcement of social–emotional lessons and an overall feeling of being overwhelmed. To the participants, 2023 felt disorganized, and they faced issues with other school employees not fulfilling their responsibilities.

Overall, the situation for all the participants had been challenging. To help prevent school counselor burnout, the participants emphasized the importance of self-care, social support, setting boundaries with work, and focusing on the positive impact of their work. They also emphasized the importance of proactive coping, planning for anticipated stressors, and

accepting things beyond their control as strategies to help prevent burnout. The participants relied on their relationships with their school colleagues to voice their frustrations. They also emphasized the need for advocacy and addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the interviewees engaged in hobbies, such as exercise, to help them de-escalate. According to many of the school counselors, however, achieving work-life balance is challenging. They also mentioned the importance of social support from colleagues and a strong support system outside of work. The school counselors acknowledged that their work situation was imperfect but believed it could be worse elsewhere. They found focusing on their contributions and setting aside time outside of work for decompression to be helpful. Some of these strategies which helped school counselors feel a higher sense of self-efficacy included exercise, going to the spa and meditation.

The school counselors recognized the challenges of burnout and compassion fatigue and the need for better work-life balance. They expressed frustration with being unable to disconnect from work and felt disheartened when their professionalism was questioned. The participants valued social support and venting to cope with the challenges of their role. They believed there is often a lack of understanding and recognition for their work by higher-up administrators. Despite these challenges, however, the research participants were generally happy in their role and believed they made a difference in students' lives. They all agreed that improved workload distribution and understanding of the school counselor role would be beneficial. Overall, the school counselors expressed a strong passion for their work and the impact they were able to make in students' lives. The participants also expressed gratitude for having supportive colleagues to help overcome the challenges of their job.

- “But besides social support, I’d have to say a lot of self-care, like getting a massage, swimming, physical exercise, those are ways to help with burnout.”

School counselors can utilize many different strategies to avoid burnout.

- “I think planning, like, proactive coping, like, planning for what I can anticipate as a stressor is a big part of that too.” Awareness of expectations and job responsibilities is important and helps school counselors know what to expect, including the crises that might occur during the day.
- “I’m constantly checking emails and responding, which I know is my own boundaries I need to set for myself, but sometimes situations that are out of our control with students obviously linger in our heads afterward.” School counselors reported that, at times, they would continue to think of their students’ difficulties after work and that it was difficult to stop these thoughts.
- “Exercise.” Many reported that performing cardio or some type of outdoor activity helped to relieve stress.
- “I work this job, and I have a part-time job, so recognizing, like okay, I’m not 25 anymore; I can’t just work for, like, 15 hours a day and expect that to not drain me.” The school counselors knew what their job entailed, so if they assumed other responsibilities outside of the workplace, they knew that doing so was their decision.
- “Even though I do take it very seriously and personally and care, you know, there are so many things outside of my control that used to be harder for me to move on from.” Some school counselors have learned to separate work from home, although they still think about their students outside of work hours.
- “I think, as I continue to recognize that and focus on what I am contributing to help situations, I think that that can help eliminate some of the burnout and just my own perspective on a situation rather than focusing on all the things that frustrate me and why the situation is driving me crazy, just reminding myself

the good that I'm at least doing in helping it." The participants utilized various strategies, such as focusing on the positives of the job role.

- "Better like work-life balance." With experience, school counselors know how to maintain work-life balance; they leave the workload at their school and have learned to separate the two spheres of their lives.
- "Every Monday, we do staff cases when we have our weekly meeting. I think that's a huge help, and then we also make sure that as a counseling team, we set aside time outside of school to really just decompress." Looking at the workload as a team, the school counselors were able to divide the workload so that everyone had a fair amount of work to do, and one counselor was not overburdened.
- "I would have to say, my principal has been forcing me to take time off that I need, where in the past I would not do that, but I am doing that this year." This specific school counselor had an excellent working relationship with her principal, who enabled her to feel more comfortable taking time off by forcing her to do so.
- "I am shutting my computer off by a certain time at night because a lot's been going on with me personally that I've had to deal with." Realizing how important a work-life balance is, this school counselor chose to decompress and work on her at-home problems.
- "I kind of always prepare myself for the worst in a sense, basically to help with burnout, but I am currently burnt out, and I have compassion fatigue right now." This school counselor was helping many students who were suffering, so she carried many of their worries with her. She still loved her job but did suffer from compassion fatigue.

- “Proactively, I’d have to say a big part is social support. I talk to friends, my husband is a great support system, so I can vent. I know that I have that support.” This school counselor relied on her team of colleagues at school to help her at work. She also stated that she is friends with them outside of school, which strengthens their relationship.
- “Luckily, we have a very supportive guidance team.” These school counselors worked on a team of counselors, which was able to support one another.

### **Work-Life Balance Theme Summary**

The school counselors agreed that having a healthy work-life balance was important. However, they believed that this balance was difficult to achieve at times. The participants reported that not thinking about work after hours was sometimes possible, but at other times, they responded to an email late at night or answered a work call after the school day was done. However, having a supportive team improved their work balance. Many of the participants stated that they will often go out with their colleagues and being able to talk with these colleagues helped ease the participants’ stress. Each participant identified at least one person at work in whom they could confide about frustrations, limitations, and successes.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative research study was to explore the self-efficacy of school counselors in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergent research has captured teachers' experiences during the pandemic (Kraft & Simon, 2020), but research on the impact of COVID-19 on school counselors and their capability to assist students has been lacking (ASCA, 2022; Strear et al., 2021). Therefore, counseling self-efficacy (CSE) is understudied in the field.

Prior to this study, how practicing school counselors described their self-efficacy in their job role during the COVID-19 pandemic was unknown. Previous studies have examined factors that may lead to school counselor burnout, but these did not focus specifically on the counselors' self-efficacy in the role after the pandemic. For the purpose of this current study, self-efficacy was defined using Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Bandura (2005) defined self-efficacy as an "individual's belief in their ability to maintain control over their functioning and events that affect their lives." Lopez-Garrido (2020) stated that "one's sense of self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment." According to Bandura's theory, a person's behavior is learned through their social contexts, particularly through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 1986).

Regarding strong work commitment, motivation, resilience, and perseverance, counselors with higher self-efficacy are able to set higher goals and are more likely to succeed in doing so (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). A school counselor's capacity to overcome adversity and maintain self-efficacy may be impacted by stress, anxiety, emotional intelligence, professional identity, and disregarding their own well-being. Other factors that may contribute to this include demanding counseling and non-counseling duties, inadequate supervision and

professional development opportunities, and unfavorable school environments (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

This study provides several significant key findings and recommendations for future research. The participants of the study reported that they loved their job as school counselors and were primarily in the role because they enjoyed helping students and possessing the opportunity to play a significant role in the student's future through help with goal setting. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared their experiences, opinions, and perceptions on building their self-efficacy and remaining in their role as a school counselor. The findings for the two research questions are presented in this chapter. A summary of the findings is also presented here. The emerging themes from the two questions were (1) role complexity, (2) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, (3) counseling students, (4) advocacy in the profession, and (5) work-life balance. Chapter 5 includes key findings, research study implications, and research study limitations. Further discussion and recommendations for future research are also provided.

### **Summary of the Results**

School counselors completed a demographic survey (that was posted on a few school counselor Facebook groups) to express interest in this study and were advised that not every person interested would be able to participate. Only five participants were involved in the study. These participants completed the survey, signed an informed consent form, and expressed willingness to participate in a recorded 30–45-minute interview along with the researcher via Zoom. Some school counselors expressed interest, filled out the demographic survey and informed consent, but then informed the researcher that they were unable to talk about their school counselor role due to district restraints and union negotiations.

The researcher informed those interested parties that all school counselors would remain anonymous, but these school counselors believed that they should not participate.

Finding five people willing to participate in an interview was difficult, as not everyone who expressed interest responded to the researcher. Thus, the time for recruitment was lengthier than the researcher anticipated, which added an unexpected stressor.

The following research questions helped guide the researcher through the semi-structured interview process:

**RQ1. What are school counselors' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their decision to remain in their profession?**

### **School Counselor Challenges**

The school counselors (who represented five states: Arizona, New York, New Hampshire, Illinois, and Colorado) who participated in the interviews all stated that, for the most part, they were happy in their job role, which they kept because they loved helping their students. None of them desired to leave the profession at the time of the interviews (one was close to retirement but was not yet ready to retire). However, they have faced multiple challenges in the role since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants agreed that their caseload of students was higher after the pandemic and that student demands were stronger. The national average student-to-school-counselor ratio is 465 to 1, and approximately one in five students do not have access to any school counselor (ASCA, 2017). An estimated 35,000 positions for school counselors will become available annually over the next 10 years, many of which will be the consequence of current school counselors' retiring or leaving the field (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

The interview participants agreed that their caseloads were the highest they had ever been and that students were experiencing more mental issues and anxiety than before. According to the school counselors, they need help teaching these students coping and self-regulation skills.

Furthermore, challenging behaviors of students at school (including mental health needs) are increasing, which was causing extra stress in the role of the interviewees.

Every participant agreed that the job role is misunderstood. They stated that administrators and teachers do not understand what a school counselor does, discussing the fact that minimal advocacy exists for school counselors. However, the participants did feel somewhat appreciated and had positive relationships with teachers, parents, administrators, and students. They became frustrated when their job title was not “school counselor” or when people referred to them as guidance counselors. Some participants agreed self-advocacy was difficult when extra duties are assigned that they should not perform. Furthermore, the participants voiced concerns about excessive meetings and paperwork, acting as a testing proctor, being given responsibility for MTSS and ESOL, baker acts, cafeteria duty, arrival and dismissal duties, and acting as a substitute when teachers are absent. Some of the school counselors believed that since these duties were not part of their role, they should not be their issue to address.

**RQ 2. What types of challenges and support have school counselors encountered post-COVID-19 to enhance self-efficacy in their role?**

**School Counselor Supports**

The participants shared some factors that help them in their role: having cohesive colleague relationships and people that would listen to them and help problem solve. The participants enjoyed strong team relationships at work, which helped reduce stress. However, two of the participants were the only school counselors at their school, which caused frustrations for them since they believed that they were not meeting all the needs of the students at their school. They wanted to be able to take care of themselves but voiced that it was not always easy. The participants attempted to separate themselves from work at home, but they were often unable to decompress. While the participants desired to distract themselves from thinking about students at home, they agreed that were suffering from compassion fatigue, which can lead to burnout (Lluch et al., 2022). Burnout can subsequently lead to

school counselors' leaving the profession or changing schools in hope the situation is improved elsewhere.

The school counselors realized that their work-life balance was off and that it was difficult to separate work life from home life. To improve work-life balance, many of the participants used some of the strategies they taught their students. Regarding self-care strategies, the participants identified exercise, spending time with loved ones, and discussing difficult situations with their co-workers, as many of them understand the school counselor experience. Many of the participants voiced that having a strong team of people they could speak with at work was beneficial. Indeed, the school counselors shared the importance of teamwork in multiple interviews. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, school counselors have learned to anticipate the worst, that anything can happen., so preparation is very important. As difficult as achieving work-life balance is, these school counselors had to learn to disconnect from work at home by not checking emails or answering the phone after hours. A principal of one of the participants insisted she take time off as needed when her job draining, so now she has learned to take a personal day when needed. Older participants shared that they realized they no longer had the ability to detach from different situations and could not assume more than they could handle. They realized that many situations are outside their control but that there is always good in helping students.

### **Theoretical Framework Integration**

The purpose of this study was to determine the self-efficacy of school counselors throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bandura, self-efficacy is “an individual’s belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments” (Bandura, 1977). Bandura also identified self-efficacy as “the ability for a person to complete a goal.” If people are motivated to do their jobs well, then their self-efficacy is higher. Self-efficacy also includes the environment of the individual. This research study

included five female participants from different parts of the United States. All reported that they do have stressful days and that there are challenges in their role, but none had negative things to say about the job itself. There were resources in place that helped them maintain higher self-efficacy. For example, if there was a difficult situation at work, the school counselors could rely on their colleagues to listen and, at times, provide advice. Factors like these relationships enabled the participants to move throughout their day in a positive manner. Thus, having a solid support system in place helps the self-efficacy of school counselors.

The participants stated that advocacy in their job role effects their self-efficacy and that it is important for them to tell people (not only students but also teachers) the importance of their role. Additionally, possessing open and cohesive relationships with their administrators helps school counselors' self-efficacy. Clear expectations of the school counselor role reduce miscommunications with administrators and teachers. For example, a school counselor has many expectations of the school day, and using school counselors as substitute teachers is unacceptable. Moreover, school counselors should not be used as testing coordinators, secretaries, or registrars. Their main responsibility is helping students with their academic or mental health needs, and this should be the highest priority in their job.

According to Bandura (1986), "self-efficacy includes experience as a strong predictor of people's capabilities." The participants in this study all had at least 7 years of experience. Since they had been in the field for so long, they displayed higher self-efficacy because they knew how to problem solve various situations. School counselors who have more years of experience also have the tools necessary to multi-task. Additionally, they know how to acquire the necessary resources for their students or themselves. These participants could be considered seasoned school counselors who knew their roles intimately, including how to address questions or uncertainties. Their confidence in completing their job successfully every day maintained a higher self-efficacy than that of an inexperienced school counselor.

The participants also shared that they wanted to remain in the role as a school counselor because they had the opportunity to inspire students daily. They enjoyed seeing their students succeed,—having them set and achieve long-term goals—which also increased their self-efficacy. The participants agreed that the best part of their job is working with students.

The results of this study identified five themes: role complexity, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, counseling students, advocacy in the profession, and work-life balance. The results of this study support Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Four sources of Bandura's theory include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997).

### ***Mastery Experiences***

For school counselors, these experiences included some of the challenges that occurred because of COVID-19. School counselors were forced to overcome such issues as being able to counsel students over Zoom, which was awkward at first. They did not consider themselves experts at talking to students over a computer screen, although they were able to use these different aspects of their skillset successfully. This example demonstrates the ways in which school counselors were able to feel confident and successful while facing the challenges of the pandemic.

Another challenge occurred when they returned to school in a traditional setting (in person) and faced all the student issues caused by being at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, some students lost family members or suffered from depression or anxiety by not being surrounded by their peers at school in a social setting. Students were worried that they might contract COVID-19, which acted as a school distraction. The School counselors believed that students had more severe issues upon returning to school than they had prior to the pandemic. Therefore, school counselors had to use a variety of outside mental health resources to help their students who were suffering, which was challenging.

### ***Vicarious Experiences***

Increasing self-efficacy through vicarious experiences is one of the best ways to increase self-efficacy for school counselors. The five school counselors that participated in this study spoke about the relationships they had with their students and colleagues. Many of them emphasized that they would not be able to do their job efficiently without their team's support. Each of the five school counselors had at least one person they could vent to or gain assistance from, and they all spoke often of teamwork and its importance.

### ***Verbal Persuasion***

The school counselors identified the importance of encouragement from teachers and school administrators in increasing their self-efficacy. The participants emphasized their positive relationship with their administrator, and none of them had a negative relationship with their administrative team. Many had been in their schools for some time and had thus built strong rapport with their teachers. This was important because the trust between the teachers and counselors helped the students trust both sets of people. The school counselors felt solace in the fact that they were often acknowledged by their administrator and told that they were doing their jobs well.

### ***Physiological and affective states***

The school counselors faced numerous stressors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They had to react quickly to the effects of the pandemic using decision-making skills. They were given numerous additional tasks, faced increased student needs and various crises, and felt that others did not understand their job role. They witnessed additional stress with their colleagues and administrators as well. The self-efficacy of the school counselor was tested in these different scenarios, but not impacted.

The researcher used the information gathered and analyzed to answer the study's research questions from the resulting themes. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study

was to explore how school counselors described their self-efficacy after the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the researcher answered the research questions by examining (a) social persuasion, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) imaginal experience, (d) physical and emotional states, and (e) performance experience. The researcher believes that the findings of this study show the connection between school counselor self-efficacy and the theoretical framework. Previously, the researcher identified the statement of the problem and described Bandura's self-efficacy theory, providing an extensive literature review of the current research study on school counselor self-efficacy. Why the theoretical framework was used and what type of study was best suited for the research were discussed. The perceptions derived from the participant responses to the demographic survey and semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to capture themes and answer the research questions based on the Albert Bandura's self-efficacy framework. The study resulted in the following five themes: (1) role complexity, (2) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, (3) counseling students, (4) advocacy in the profession, and (5) work-life balance.

### **Implications for Professional Practice**

The researcher drew meaningful insight from the research data and implications for professional practice based on the study results. Such implications should inform future studies regarding the practices associated with school counselor self-efficacy after the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study have the potential to inform new school counselor educator programs to determine whether a relationship exists between school counselor self-efficacy and burnout. This information could be used to help allocate resources for school counselors, both novice and veterans.

Additionally, this study can be shared at professional development workshops and conferences so that other beginning school counselors can share their thoughts regarding self-

efficacy, school climate, and burnout. The results of this qualitative research study help contribute to the understanding of the self-efficacy of school counselors throughout the United States who have been actively working before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022). The findings from the study support additional research regarding the practices of school counselors, as well as the clarity of job role expectations. The researcher developed two recommendations for support and interventions that can improve a school counselor's self-efficacy and well-being.

The first recommendation to help support a school counselor is setting boundaries at work. This recommendation has the potential to help school counselors maintain work-life balance. Setting boundaries encompasses saying “no” to extracurriculars at school. The school counselor must realize that if the paperwork cannot get done that day, it can get done the next. Discussing expectations and advocating for different issues with the school leadership team is also important. If the caseload of student issues is too high, administration must be informed. When a school counselor leaves the building for the day, then “work mode” should be turned off; emails should not be answered after hours. Not installing the MS Outlook application on a school counselor's phone might help, as the counselor will not receive notifications for new emails.

The second recommendation to help support a school counselor is the support that they often give to their students. This support consists of mindfulness strategies, self-awareness, and effective communication skills. Mental health is important, especially for a school counselor who has expertise in the field but does not always use these skills effectively (e.g., meditation, positive self-talk). Self-care can help school counselors improve both their mental and physical health. For example, getting a massage helps relieve tension and stress and can also help the school counselor's mood. Exercising can also help. Many of the

participants voiced these interventions as helpful for avoiding burnout and maintaining high self-efficacy in the workplace.

### **Study Limitations**

The first limitation in this study was potential differences between a participant's actual experience and the description they provided to convey their experiences. For example, participants may not have voiced concerns about their schools because they did not want to sound negative or worsen their situation. The researcher was able to build rapport with each individual to ensure that they were comfortable in the interview. However, the school counselor might not have wanted to voice complaints. Furthermore, although the researcher told the participants that everything was confidential, they might have been concerned about speaking honestly.

Another important limitation in this study is that the researcher had to make sure not to add their meaning to the school counselor participants' experiences. During the interviews, the researcher was able to avoid bias, even though their current profession is a school counselor. The researcher was able to separate from the participant by not sharing personal opinions or experiences based on the interview questions or the participants' answers. However, some of the interviews flowed so well (almost like speaking with friends) that a high level of comfort and trust was established. The researcher had to restrain from agreeing with the participants by saying "yes" or nodding their head in an agreeable fashion. Instead, the researcher had to carefully examine and analyze all the interviews with a clear and open mind.

Another limitation of this study is that all the school counselors who participated were female, which limited the genders represented in the study. Before the demographic surveys were posted on social media, the researcher was concerned that there would be an influx of participant interest. Exploring the self-efficacy of school counselors is an important topic, however, recruiting participants interested was challenging. The survey was posted on various

school counselor Facebook pages (Appendix G), and not many people responded to it. Some who expressed interest withdrew their participation for various reasons (e.g., their school district would not allow them to speak about their job, even anonymously). Other people who expressed interest were not working as a school counselor or did not fit into the study's demographics.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research should examine male school counselors post-COVID-19. Many male school counselors are employed in the field, and determining the impact of the pandemic on them would be interesting. Another study could investigate males compared to females, asking them the same questions, as each gender might use a different approach to help with self-efficacy. Future researchers interested in replicating this research might also consider administering an interview on school counselor self-efficacy at different times of the year, for example, examining a school counselor's self-efficacy at the beginning of the school year and then comparing it to the end of the school year. A future researcher might want to investigate school counselors' use of various coping and wellness strategies and/or levels of professional development and support at their schools to help avoid burnout. The self-efficacy of school counselors with resources available at their school could be compared to that of counselors who did not have available resources at their school.

Another suggestion for future research is analyzing different demographic subgroup responses in a self-efficacy/burnout study of school counselors to determine whether certain subgroups might be experiencing more or less self-efficacy than others. In this current study, the only demographic group that was represented was white females currently in the profession. Minority groups and males should both be examined. Years of experience in these subgroups could also be studied to determine whether length of experience impacts self-

efficacy. This could help provide insight into what school counselors at different schools need to help prevent burnout.

Another suggestion is researching school counselor experiences using a different methodology. For example, instead of using a semi-structured interview approach, the researcher could use a study utilizing focus groups or case studies. The researcher could also use a quantitative study to gain more school counselor interest since this approach would be quicker for participants. If a questionnaire or another type of qualitative survey instrument were used, more people might choose to participate.

Another suggestion for future research is examining school counselors who left the profession after the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher could investigate the reasons for quitting, retiring early, or leaving the school counselor profession. For such a study, a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews or a quantitative study using Likert scale questions would be useful.

Lastly, a future research study (not using interviews) could explore school counselors' roles globally, comparing their COVID-19 experiences. This study could examine what the school counselor role looked like in each state and, depending on the area, whether that affected the school counselor's self-efficacy. Additionally, the researcher could compare elementary, middle, and high school counselors' experiences during the pandemic.

### **Dissemination Strategies**

This research study should be shared among the various stakeholders. One important group to share this with would be school administrators. Principals should be made aware of what the role of the school counselor entails. They should be familiar with the ASCA model and the standards that go along with it. School counselor research participants voiced that at times they have non-counseling duties, but they want to be a team player, so they don't

complain and just do what their administrator tells them to do. Results from the study show that delegation of non-duties of the school counselors does not support their well-being.

This study could also be shared at conferences or professional development workshops. ASCA discusses the importance of advocacy in the profession. Workshops discussing how to help school counselors self-advocate would be quite beneficial. When school counselors first enter into the profession, there should be more resources to help support them. Additionally, courses embedded into the school counselor degree on advocacy could really help them know what to do in certain situations.

### **Alignment with Professional Standards**

ASCA provides the framework for school counselors. ASCA sets the rules and guidelines so that school counselors can help students in the areas of social emotional needs, as well as educational needs. With the COVID-19 pandemic, students returned to school with a lot more issues than before. Some of these issues were grief from losing a loved one, social issues, lack of a normal routine, depression and anxiety. Students felt disconnected from their peers and a lot of them needed the help of the school counselor. The influx of student problems affected the school counselor even before COVID-19, because they suffered from a high caseload of students and non-counseling duties that took away from meeting with students. According to the school counselors in this study, administrators have them involved in many different tasks, but they feel comfortable reviewing the ASCA guidelines with them and advocating for what needs to be prioritized in their job role. When the researcher asked the participants their views on ASCA violation at their respected school, they all reported that they are not in any violation of any ASCA standards at this time.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study are also intended to increase school leaders' and teachers' awareness of the impact of school counselors' self-efficacy. School administrators and

counselors need tools that enable them to work cohesively on what is best for students. When the job role of the school counselor has a clear definition, school personnel can understand what the school counselor's responsibilities are and are not.

The role of the school counselor should be the same at each school site district wide. School counselors in this study shared that the role could change from school to school, with increased tasks and responsibilities that infringe the ASCA standards (e.g., other duties as assigned, an administrator overstepping and not letting the school counselors advocate for themselves).

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Appendix A

ACRP Certificate



■ FOR LEARNING ■ FOR LISTENING ■ FOR LIFE

Certificate of Completion

*Association of Clinical Research Professionals certifies that*

Jade Joie

*has successfully completed*

Ethics and Human Subject Protection: A Comprehensive

Introduction Version: Jan 2020

**Date of completion:** Jan 19, 2021

A large, bold, black handwritten signature that reads "Jim Kremidas". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid black horizontal line.

Jim Kremidas — Executive Director

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

Jade Joie, a NNU doctorate student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University, is conducting a qualitative research study related to the self-efficacy of school counselors. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of Northwest Nazarene University students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer over the age of 18.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to sign an informed consent form, volunteering to participate in the study.

1. You will answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion on school counselor self-efficacy. This discussion will be recorded and is expected to last approximately 30–45 minutes.
2. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be conducted via Zoom or Skype and will take a total of about 30–45 minutes.

#### **C. RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

1. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participating at any time.
2. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. The researcher will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.
3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audio tapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the department, and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to the data from this study. As researchers, both parties are required to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

#### **D. BENEFITS**

The information you provide may help school counselors better understand what can be put into place to improve their self-efficacy in their job role.

#### **E. PAYMENTS**

There are no payments for this study. I thank you very much for your time.

#### **F. QUESTIONS**

If you have questions or concerns about participating in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Jade Joie can be contacted via email at [jjoie@nnu.edu](mailto:jjoie@nnu.edu), via telephone at [REDACTED]

Should you feel distressed due to your participation in this study, you should contact your own health care provider.

#### **G. CONSENT**

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participation in research is voluntary.** You are free to decline to participate in this study or withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

*I give my consent to participate in this study:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be recorded for this study:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Participant Interest Survey on School-Counselor Self-Efficacy after the Covid-19 Pandemic

Looking for participants:

A. Who is actively working as an elementary school counselor and worked during the following years: 2019-2021

B. Not working in the state of Florida

**1. What is your age?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is your gender?**

Male

Female

**3. What is your racial or ethnic classification?**

White/Caucasian

Black/African American

Hispanic/Latino(a)

Asian American or Pacific Islander

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Multi-ethnic or Multiracial

Other (please fill in the blank) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What is your highest educational level?**

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Ed.S.

Ed.D.

Ph.D.

Other (please fill in the blank) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Where is your school located? Please list the city and state.**

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Is your school public, private, or a charter?**

Public

Private

Charter

Other

**7. How long have you been a school counselor?**

Just Started

1-5 years

- 6–10 years  
 11–15 years  
 16–20 years  
 21–25 years  
 26+ years (please fill in the blank with the number of years)

**8. *Approximately how many students are at your school? Please fill in the blank***

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. *Are you the only school counselor at your school?***

Yes

No

**10. *If you answered no to the above question, how many school counselors are there in total?***

\_\_\_\_\_

**11. *Is there anything else you would like to share?***

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. *What is your non-school email address?***

\_\_\_\_\_

**13. *If chosen, you agree to participate in an interview via Zoom at a time convenient to both you and the researcher.***

*Agree*

*Do not agree*

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Preliminary Script: “This is Jade Joie. Today is \_\_\_\_\_. It is \_\_\_\_\_ o’clock, and I am here in Port St. Lucie with [name of interviewee], via Zoom. Just a friendly reminder that this interview will be recorded.

Today, we will be discussing the self-efficacy of school counselors.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Describe for me what it is like in the day-to-day life of a school counselor before and after Covid.

(a) What are some things that have changed in your role?

2. Talk to me about how you feel like you have been successful in your role as a school counselor?

3. What are some challenges or obstacles that you face at your school?

4. What supports do you have for overcoming these challenges and obstacles?

5. How does a day in the life of a school counselor affect you after the school day is complete ?

6. How do you advocate for yourself and articulate the essential role you play as a school counselor?

7. How do you integrate student academic, career, and personal development into the mission of your school?

8. If I were to ask your school principal what your role as a school counselor is, what do you think he/she would say?

a) If I were to ask a teacher at your school this question, what do you think he/she would say?

9. What are some things that keep you coming back to work each day?

10. Do you believe that your school family values what you do each day? Why or why not?
11. How do you teach, develop, and support students' dealing with crises in their lives (e.g., peer suicide, a parent's death, abuse, etc.).
12. Can you share with me something that you do differently in your role as a school counselor pre and post Covid?
13. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate your happiness at work and why? Is there anything that could make it better?
14. What are some strategies you implement to avoid school counselor burnout?
15. Do you feel gratified in you role as a school counselor? Why or why not?
16. Tell me about a time that you felt distressed or despaired?
17. In the last year, have you felt like you might want to quit or leave the profession?
18. What things could make you enjoy your role as a school counselor more?
19. What are some responsibilities at your school that might violate the ASCA standards?
20. Is there anything I missed or that you would like to add?

## Appendix E

### Permission to Use SCSE as a guide to the interview protocol

The screenshot displays a Gmail interface with two email messages. The top message is a forwarded email from Jade Joie to Nancy Bodenhorn, dated March 13, 2023. The bottom message is a reply from Nancy Bodenhorn to Jade Joie, dated March 14, 2023.

**Message 1 (Forwarded):**

From: **Jade Joie** <jjoie@nnu.edu>  
 Date: Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 3:17 PM  
 Subject: Permission to Use the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale  
 To: [nanboden@vt.edu](mailto:nanboden@vt.edu) <[nanboden@vt.edu](mailto:nanboden@vt.edu)>

Dr. Bodenhorn,

I hope this email finds you well. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Northwest Nazarene University, pursuing my PhD in Educational Leadership. I am three months away from my dissertation proposal. My research is on School Counselor Efficacy in the Aftermath of the Covid Pandemic. With your permission, I would like to use your development of the Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale as part of my research. As a current school counselor myself, I feel that this topic is extremely important to help with counselor burnout prevention and the retention of good school counselors.

Thank you for your consideration to use the SCSE and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
 Jade Joie  
 NNU Doctoral Candidate  
 Jensen Beach Elementary School Counselor  
[jjoie@nnu.edu](mailto:jjoie@nnu.edu)

**Message 2 (Reply):**

Hi Jade, thank you for your interest in the SCSE. Congratulations on getting this far in the doctoral program! I am always excited to see school counselors entering the area of educational leadership.

If you and your committee believe that the SCSE would be of benefit to your research, you have my permission to use the scale. I have attached the final version of the scale for your convenience.

Nancy

Nancy Bodenhorn  
 Associate Professor  
 Counselor Education  
 Virginia Tech

## Appendix F

### School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale

Below is a list of activities that represent many school counselor responsibilities. Indicate your confidence in your current ability to perform each activity by circling the appropriate answer next to each item according to the scale defined below. Please answer each item based on your current school and based on how you feel now, not on your anticipated (or previous) ability or school(s). Remember, this is not a test, and there are no right answers.

Use the following scale:

- 1 = not confident,
- 2 = slightly confident,
- 3 = moderately confident,
- 4 = generally confident,
- 5 = highly confident.

Please circle the number that best represents your response for each item.

1. Advocate for integration of student academic, career, and personal development into the mission of my school.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Recognize situations that impact (both negatively and positively) student learning and achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Analyze data to identify patterns of achievement and behavior that contribute to school success.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Advocate for myself as a professional school counselor and articulate the purposes and goals of school counseling.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Develop measurable outcomes for a school counseling program that would demonstrate accountability.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Consult and collaborate with teachers, staff, administrators, and parents to promote student success.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Establish a rapport with a student for individual counseling.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Function successfully as a small group leader.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Effectively deliver suitable parts of the school counseling program through large group meetings, such as in classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Conduct interventions with parents, guardians, and families to resolve problems that impact students' effectiveness and success.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teach students how to apply time and task management skills.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Foster understanding of the relationship between learning and work.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Offer appropriate explanations to students, parents, and teachers regarding how learning styles affect school performance.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Deliver age-appropriate programs through which students acquire the skills needed to investigate the world of work.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Implement a program that enables all students to make informed career decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Teach students to apply problem-solving skills in a way that benefits their academic, personal and career success.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Evaluate commercially prepared material designed for school counseling to establish their relevance to my school population.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Model and teach conflict resolution skills.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Ensure a safe environment for all students in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Change situations in which an individual or group treats others in a disrespectful or harassing manner.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Teach students to use effective communication skills with peers, faculty, employers, family, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Follow ethical and legal obligations designed for school counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Guide students in techniques to cope with peer pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Adjust my communication style appropriately to the age and developmental levels of various students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Incorporate students' developmental stages in establishing and conducting the school counseling program.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Find a method of connecting and communicating with any student in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Teach, develop, and support students' coping mechanisms for dealing with crises in their lives (e.g., peer suicide, a parent's death, abuse, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
28. Counsel effectively with students and families from different socioeconomic statuses.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Understand the viewpoints and experiences of students and parents who are from a different cultural background than myself.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Help teachers improve their effectiveness with students.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Discuss issues of sexuality and sexual orientation in an age-appropriate manner with students.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Speak in front of large groups, such as at faculty or parent meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Use technology designed to support student successes and progress through the educational process.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Communicate in writing with staff, parents, and the external community.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Help students identify and attain attitudes, behaviors, and skills that can lead to successful learning.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Select and implement applicable strategies to assess school-wide issues.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Promote the use of counseling and guidance activities by the entire school community to enhance a positive school climate.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Develop school improvement plans based on interpreting school-wide assessment results.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Identify aptitude, achievement, interest, values, and personality appraisal resources appropriate for specified situations and populations.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Implement a preventive approach to student problems.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Lead school-wide initiatives that focus on ensuring a positive learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Consult with external community agencies that provide support services for our students.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Provide resources and guidance to the school population in times of crisis.	1	2	3	4	5

*Note.* School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES) Bodenhorn, N., & Skaggs, G. (2005). Used with permission (see Appendix E).

## Appendix G

### Facebook Post for Participant Interest

My name is Jade Joie, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed. Leadership program at Northwest Nazarene University. I am seeking research participants for my dissertation entitled School Counselor Self-Efficacy and Burnout in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study has been submitted, reviewed, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of the study is to look at school counselors' self-efficacy and potential burnout after COVID-19.

To gather this information and complete this study; I am asking for Licensed Professional School Counselors who have at least one full year of experience working as a school counselor and who are currently working full-time in a public school within the United States to complete a demographic survey expressing your interest in participating in the study. If chosen to participate, you would then agree to partake in an interview via Zoom with the researcher as well as completing the School Counselor Self-Efficacy scale.

Please note that there will be no direct or immediate personal benefits or compensation for your participation in this research except for your contribution to the study.

The qualifications to participate in this study include:

- \*Participants must be currently employed as a full-time school counselor in a public school within the United States (not Florida)
- \*Participants must have worked as a school counselor in a school setting during 2019-2021
- \*Actively still a school counselor in the school setting

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please contact Jade Joie at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time!  
Jade Joie

## Appendix H

### Email to Prospective Participants

Subject: Research Participation Request: School Counselor Self-Efficacy and Burnout

Dear School Counselor Participant,

I am a practicing school counselor and a doctoral candidate in Ed. Leadership at Northwest Nazarene University. I am requesting your assistance with a survey study on the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among school counselors.

To participate, individuals must be currently licensed/certified and employed as a school counselor in a school setting in the United States. Participation in the attached demographic survey is voluntary and will take approximately 5–10 minutes.

The goal of this study is to address the increase of stress and burnout among professional school counselors by exploring the influence of self-efficacy on school counselor burnout.

All the information collected in the study will be anonymous and confidential. The study has IRB approval at Northwest Nazarene University.

You will be contacted by email if you are chosen to participate in the study. Thank you so much for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Jade Joie  
Doctoral Candidate, NNU

## **Appendix I**

### **Email to Non-Selected Participants**

Subject: Research Participation Request: Self-Efficacy and Burnout

Dear School Counselor Participant,

We recently asked for your participation in a survey study on the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout among school counselors. We had a great deal of expressed interest, so I regret to inform you that you have not been chosen to participate in the next part of the research process.

I appreciate your support and thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jade Joie

## Appendix J

### Email for Interview Date and Time

Subject: Research Participation Request: School Counselor Self-Efficacy and Burnout

Dear School Counselor Participant,

Congratulations on being chosen to participate in the research study about school counselors' self-efficacy and burnout.

Attached is the informed consent form to be filled out. Please sign it and return it to me. Also additionally, please fill out what day and time will work best for the interview below.

Thank you so much for your time and support!

Date:

Time:

Once I set up a good date and time that works for you, I will email you the Zoom link. I will also attach the self-efficacy scale that will need to be returned via email before the interview.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask!

Sincerely,

Jade Joie

Doctoral Candidate, NNU

## **Appendix K**

### **Zoom Link Informational Email**

Subject: Research Participation Request: School Counselor Self-Efficacy and Burnout

Dear School Counselor Participant,

This email contains the date and time of your interview with the researcher:

Day:

Time:

Zoom Link:

Please also fill out the attached school counselor self-efficacy scale.

Sincerely,

Jade Joie

Doctoral Candidate, NNU

ProQuest Number: 31332336

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