Assisting Students with Post-Secondary Aspirations: How High School Counselors Help Different Student Groups with Post-Secondary Professional and Vocational Pathways

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Assisting Students with Post-Secondary Aspirations: How High School Counselors Help Different Student Groups with Post-Secondary Professional and Vocational Pathways

By

Roya Tabrizi

Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University

2023
Abstract

Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University: 2023

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High school counselors support students across three areas or domains: academic, socio-emotional, and college and career development. Growing confusion and tensions around the time and responsibilities of school counselors have accompanied ever-evolving changes with their roles and coincided with continual efforts to address the K-12 and potential postsecondary educational opportunities, especially those from lower socioeconomic and particular racial and ethnic groups. The global health pandemic exacerbated challenges these student populations faced and greatly impacted the work of counselors. This qualitative multi-site case study draws on the triangulation of one-on-one interviews with twelve high school counselors across six school sites, in Southern California, with website and demographic analysis, and analytical memos, to identify institutional and personal influences on counselors’ views and perspectives around education and work, and in turn, how counselors assist different student groups with their post-secondary aspirations. Findings indicate that counselors’ views of education and work in light of the transition to adulthood; institutional structures and resources (e.g., distributed counseling) between charter and non-charter schools, and institutional aims (e.g., increase college going culture), and perceptions of students and communities, influence how counselors work with students and which pathways they (dis)encourage. Much of their efforts take place considering their views about students embarking on adulthood and what they feel they will be tasked with after high school. This influences the type of information they offer students, which
promotes values around living meaningful, successful, and independent lives, as well as prioritizing college over career and technical education pathways.

*Keywords*: Counselors, post-secondary advisement, vocation, career and technical education (CTE)
Dedication

The efforts in this research are dedicated to friends and family who strive every day to ensure that the younger members of our communities are receiving high quality education. I am inspired by and continually motivated to understand and find answers because of my community, and for that I am eternally grateful. I also dedicate this to my family who has made great sacrifices for my educational and professional pursuits.
Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge and thank my co-chairs and committee members: Dr. Sera Hernandez, Dr. Thomas Luschei, Dr. William Pérez, and Dr. James Wright. Each has made a lasting contribution to my academic and professional advancement, and I am eternally grateful for their guidance and mentorship. Your kindness and thoughtfulness in each conversation and interaction to nurture and develop the capacities of your students throughout the process is greatly appreciated. I know that I have grown in my capabilities since the start of this journey, and I am so thankful for your efforts to guide me throughout this program and the completion of my dissertation. I have observed and admire your commitment to contribute meaningfully toward the field of education in your teaching, research, mentoring, and service. I also would like to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of the counselors in this study offered. They offered their time during a very challenging time in education, and regularly give their utmost energy to assist students each day. I am greatly appreciative of your time and efforts.
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Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Historically, education and work were considered an individual’s vocation; connected to a person’s calling to prepare them to take responsibility and contribute toward the betterment of their family, community, and society (Williams, 2004). However, certain societal changes in the United States, such as industrialization and the common schools movements, as well as the promotion of dominant philosophical ideologies and theories, such as modernity, postmodernism, and relativism, have impacted our understanding of the nature of education and work. In the mid-1800’s, vocational training and education began emerging as a separate track that targeted marginalized populations, predominantly people of color such as African Americans and individuals from immigrant families as well as those from low socioeconomic status (Kincheloe, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2007). Aside from the quality and the intentions, what did occur in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s meant that more people than before were receiving some kind of training and/or education, and this was connected to the changes taking place in the economy of the United States. These changes also raised questions of how to assist all the students in the educational system with their academics and work, which gave way to the field of counseling (Gysbers, 2007).

Given that the field of counseling was a response to a growing and changing vocational education system, it is important to understand how counselors' perspectives and views around education and work play a role in how they assist students. It is integral to understand the guidance that students receive and the role of the counselor, especially regarding the socio-economic and historical positionality of the student populations (McDonough, 1997; Martinez & Huerta, 2018). There have been many changes in education since the conception of the field of
counseling: there are many different types of school programs; the aims and purpose of education are continually revisited and revised; postsecondary institutions and training have grown; there are many more types of positions at schools aside from teachers; and the aims and focus of the counseling field have evolved (Gysbers, 2010). This study aims to understand how students are being guided or assisted by high school counselors, considering that vocational or college bound pathways have been expected, encouraged, or forced upon student populations based on socioeconomic and racial or ethnic identities.

The research for this dissertation emphasized uncovering the views counselors hold around the purpose and aims of education and work, to better understand the impact of the institutional environment on the views and work of a counselor and see how the beliefs and perceptions around student groups inform the way counselors guide and assist students with their postsecondary aspirations. This dissertation begins with the significance of the study in the first chapter and is followed by a literature review in chapter 2. The literature review aims to provide a historical overview and give context to the present-day realities of counselors, by first exploring the term vocation and influential movements and theories in education. It then analyzes the history of vocational education, touching on its relationship to tracking and the field of counseling. There is an examination of the changes in the field of counseling; it looks at their role and duties over time, especially with college preparation and access, and touches on models such as distributed counseling for shared responsibilities and collaboration with other faculty and staff. There is also a portion on the impact of the global health pandemic, given that this study took place at a time when many students, communities, and schools have been trying to learn how to transition back to in-person learning.
It then articulates the summary and gaps in the literature that the study aims to address. Chapter two concludes with the conceptual framework, and the third chapter is focused on the methodology for this study. It (re)states the research questions and references an earlier pilot study that informed the efforts for this dissertation. The methodology includes an explanation of the type of qualitative research carried out, a multi-site case study, the population and sample, and the instruments and mechanisms utilized, while acknowledging the limitations present and positionality of the researcher. Chapter four highlights the findings from the study around counselors’ beliefs around the purpose of education and work, the relationship with the institutional environment on their role and views, and the implications for how students are assisted with their postsecondary views connected to how counselors view students and their families. Lastly, chapter five analyzes and discusses the findings. It looks at and emphasizes the views and/or perspectives of counselors, considering helping students with their transition out of the K-12 educational system and into “adulthood.” The study concludes with possibilities for future research and ends with summarizing the key points of this dissertation.

**Background**

The aims of education in the United States have changed over time, given the philosophical, socioeconomic, and political movements present. Views around knowledge, science, and truth, and changes in our collective conception of the nature and purpose of work for a diversifying population are just some examples of factors that have impacted education. While there has been an effort within educational research and amongst K-12 practitioners to assist a growing number of students with their path to college, this has not always been the case. When the United States was “hit” by industrialization, there were parallel changes within the educational system (Kincheloe, 1999). Within the institution of education, the concept of public
schooling for a growing number of student populations raised questions around what the purpose of education and work was, the relationship between the two, and the different pathways that can be increasingly created and available for students. Around the time of industrialization and the common schools movement, a divide started to form between “academic” and “skill-based” learning which also correlated with views and stereotypes related to class, race and ethnicity, and gender (Kincheloe, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2007). Vocational education began to look different.

Embedded within this divide has been assumptions and dichotomies around the types of education, as well as which requires more intellect; these beliefs relate to deeply ingrained prejudices toward certain populations with erroneous conceptions around knowledge. Rose (2012) states:

Our society makes sharp and weighty distinctions - distinctions embodied in curricular tracking - between white-collar and blue-collar occupations, between brain work and hand work. But … [he] demonstrates … the degree to which physical work involves the development of a knowledge base, the application of concept and abstraction, problem solving and troubleshooting, aesthetic consideration and reflection. Hand and brain are cognitively connected … that physical work is cognitively rich, and it is class bias that blinds us from honoring that richness. (p. 59)

Though the purpose and aims of education began to shift at rapid rates from the time of industrialization into the 1900’s, at one time a vocation was connected to a person’s greater purpose to serve God and others by using their talents and responding to their calling (Williams, 2004). The models for vocational education also went from more mentor-like or apprenticeships to targeting or tracking marginalized populations to meet the changing economic realities, and to
reinforce systemic injustices (Kincheloe, 1999). The beliefs and assumptions then around tracking and how a vocation was described and carried out in a religious or spiritual context are vastly different. “Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes” (Oakes, 2005, p.3). How students are/were divided into these groups or pathways is problematic because of the assumptions and measures that are used to separate students, the assorted views and values around the separation, the varying quality of the programs and instruction, and the inequalities that are perpetuated as an outcome.

There have since been many attempts to reform vocational education, and in the late 1900’s and early 2000’s vocational education was more formally referred to as career and technical education (CTE) (Weingarten, 2015). The change in this term was to open pathways and possibilities for student populations as they decide on and pursue their educational and professional careers, though there are still some questions around whether some of the inequalities or injustices toward students of color and from lower socioeconomic statuses have been addressed with these changes. The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE, 2022) states that the connection of the term vocational education was connected to the areas of “agriculture, home-making, and trade and industrial education”; the change in terminology to CTE accounts for:

16 different Career Clusters that lead to 79 different career pathways and hundreds of different careers requiring varying levels of education. To reflect the changing nature of this type of education, we no longer use the term “vocational education,” but instead use “career and technical education.” In 1998, ACTE changed its name to reflect the changing nature of CTE from job-specific vocationalism to education that can prepare all
youth and adults for long-term career success. The vast majority of states followed suit as a way to better describe today’s education system. In 2006, Congress responded by replacing “vocational” with “CTE” in the major federal law impacting secondary and postsecondary CTE programs. (para. 1)

The California Department of Education (CDE) refers to CTE as “A program of study that involves a multiyear sequence of courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers” (CDE, n.d.). In some ways, this more recent description and aim of CTE offers a more coherent approach toward a vocation than at other points in the history of vocational education. But there are still some differences between CTE and vocational education that do not touch on the historical religious elements of a vocation, such as considering one’s talents in light of a collective calling or purpose to contribute meaningful toward society and how that informs what one is trained in for their future profession. The populations that pursue CTE still in some ways mirror those that were made or encouraged to pursue vocational pathways.

Today, in California, those who participate in these pathways “are more likely to be male, Latino, English learners, from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds than students who do not participate in CTE pathways” (Brighouse et al., 2018, p. 9). And roughly 37% of all students in California are engaged in or complete a pathway program (Brighouse et al., 2018). There is therefore still some correlation between student populations pursuing vocational or CTE pathways, though that might differ across the different types of programs that are available. Consequently, teacher and counselor beliefs can play a strong role in how they assist different student groups toward their postsecondary aspirations.
Statement of the Problem

Though there are many areas or issues that are of concern when looking at the history of the educational system in the United States, just a few will be emphasized for the purposes of this research and considering the points mentioned above. One is that certain populations have been marginalized when it has come to their education, particularly those with atypical needs, of lower socioeconomic status, females, populations considered “non-white”, and immigrant populations (Kincheloe, 1999). And although there have been efforts, regardless of the intention, to open educational opportunities to students, it has fallen short of addressing matters of equity, equality, and quality. For example, opening more public schools allowed more people from these marginalized populations to go to school, but issues of tracking and quality of education made their experiences vastly different than those from white and higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Kober & Rentner, 2020).

The variety of educational and work pathways that are available for people to pursue in the United States sometimes seems endless and has grown over the years. There are non-charter and private schools, charters, and magnets, as well as alternative forms of education. And work can range across fields like agriculture, food, and natural resources; architecture and construction; health science; information technology; and manufacturing (Advance CTE, n.d.). While the types of education and work have expanded and changed over the years, there have been some extremes that have arisen in the approaches, which have been tied to ideologies and movements that are explored in subsequent chapters. For example, there have been more opportunities for people to pursue, yet still only certain populations of higher socioeconomic status can access higher quality education and work opportunities that allow for more intellectual and monetary advancements (McDonough, 1997). Another example is that because there are
more opportunities for education and work, certain pathways like going to a four-year university are pushed for most people without consideration of their talents, aspirations, and capacities. While college has become an option for more students, there have been numerous studies that have shown that it is not the same experience for all students (Perez, 2012; Espinoza, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Oakes, 1985). Some of these issues include lack of adequate academic preparation, difficulty navigating the expectations and resources for students at postsecondary institutions, and low representation of diverse and non-white and/or lower socioeconomic status populations.

Institutionally, there are standards that are created and implemented through districts and schools, but then it is left up to the faculty and staff, and students, to adhere to these standards and accountability measures that at times feel like they do more harm than assist student progress (Greene, 2022). Changing the standards, like through the common core or the A-G college requirements, seems to be aimed at ensuring more students have the same opportunities and can have the chance at the same postsecondary pathways (CDE “Common core”, 2022; CDE “Courses required”, 2022). But they fall short to address certain foundational issues around the ability to offer the type of guidance and preparation during students’ K-12 education that adequately prepares them to decide and pursue postsecondary education and work options that they can excel and advance in. It is not enough just to offer or state that opportunities are available and require students to meet “minimum” and “universal” standards, but something must be done to actually prepare students (Betts et al., 2013). Preparation could include, but isn’t limited to, the actual academic rigor and intellectual capacities nurtured in students, could extend to understanding and knowing about opportunities, how to navigate them, the ability of students
to identify and nurture their talents further, and developing certain qualities and attitudes to assist students in their learning and work.

This by no means is the responsibility of one party, to address these issues; we must see what is realistic and doable to expect from schools, especially of teachers and counselors. But it is important to help students, especially those from historically marginalized populations, to not only have access to opportunities but to be able to prepare for them so they can practically and successfully pursue them. How can opportunities be made readily available for students, in a way where students can practically pursue them? Counselors are historically, and presently, one of the main avenues of information and knowledge that many historically marginalized (first generation, lower socioeconomic status, and students of color) student populations about what they need to advance through high school into their next stage in life (Martinez & Huerta, 2018). The views these counselors hold about the purpose of education and work, and the influence of their institutional environment on their work, have implications for the extent that counselors must share information, as well as what they share, how they convey it, and how it varies depending on the student population. Without understanding the reality of the guidance and assistance students are receiving, promoting various educational and professional pathways and opportunities will not materialize to reach more students, and from diverse backgrounds. One significant place to start is to understand how counselors, who have historically been assigned to assist students to offer vocational guidance, play a role in assisting students.

**Significance and Purpose of the Study**

There have been differing views around the purpose of education and work, and a false dichotomy created around the relationship between the two: if the purpose of education is just for people to generally receive an education or if education is meant to be something practical for
people to apply for their role in the workforce (Dewey, 1916, as cited in Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974, as cited in Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016). There have been an increasing number of roles over the years created in education to address the changes around the relationship between education and work. Schools and districts today are composed of, though not limited to, (assistant) principals, teachers, administrative support, staff within district departments, and counselors. These roles differ in their responsibilities and the nature of the interactions with students and communities. The role of school counselors has been continually evolving from its conception in the late 1800 and early 1900’s (Gysbers, 2010). These changes have at times created ambiguity amongst counselors and administrators about what falls under the duties or responsibilities of counselors (Schrader, 1989).

Ambiguity can be an opportunity to experiment and try things out, but it can also spread individuals too thin and not allow them to focus their energy to do certain tasks well. In the case of counselors, the structures within the schools and the lack of clarity amongst administrators has impacted how much counselors can assist students (Schrader, 1989). Over the years, national associations and models have striven to clearly articulate what counselors do in tending to the academic, social-emotional, and college and career development of students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019 as cited in “The School Counselor”, 2022), and help counselors share their responsibilities through distributed counseling models to collaborate with others who work closely with students (Oakes, 2014). Some of these models or structures include examples of distributed counseling, and academies or pathways so that counselors, teachers, and other potential collaborators are consulting regularly about the advancement and needs of students.
Though there have been many changes to the role, and at times ambiguity, counselors do play an integral role for many students’ academic and professional careers. Studies have shown that counselors’ perceptions of students have implications for how counselors assist, provide opportunities, and share information and resources with them (Dabach et al., 2017; Buriel, 2012). Understanding the ideologies around the purpose of work and education that counselors internalize helps with unpacking how counselors work with students, especially with students who are from a lower socioeconomic status and those who have postsecondary aspirations for vocational education and careers. This study is an initial attempt at that, and it should be stated that this study in no way supports the practice of tracking student populations. Instead, it is making a case that we need to steer clear of encouraging the same opportunities for large groups of students, especially students who have been historically marginalized, without understanding the values, talents, and aspirations of each student.

This study will still focus on settings with larger student populations who have historically pursued vocational pathways, but to understand if there has been advancement in how they are assisted with their postsecondary aspirations because low-income, Latino and African American students make up a larger percentage of certain vocational programs and careers (Reed et al., 2018). Increasingly there is literature on helping students to learn how to get into college, so more individuals are understanding how to help students with these postsecondary aspirations (McKilip et al., 2012). But there is not as much literature around helping students in these vocational pathways, as opposed to collegebound pathways, especially since there are still larger numbers of minority students pursuing these educational and professional opportunities (Waugh, 2017; Reed at al., 2018); therefore, there is value in giving attention to how school counselors are assisting these student groups (Martinez & Huerta, 2018).
One last point to mention is the importance of understanding the dominant views around the purpose of education and work that counselors adopt, as well as the impact of the institutional environment on their work.

The institutional environment impacts students as well as those that work for the school, like the counselors (Hatch, 2008). Schools and/or districts have certain missions that they strive to work toward, considering their beliefs around education and the policies that they must adhere to. And certain factors, such as these, affect the faculty and staff with what is expected of them and how much support or collaboration is encouraged. Therefore, there will also be an effort to understand the impact of the institutional environment on counselors, in relation to the counselors’ beliefs for the purpose of education and work, the implication for their work with students, and any bearing this might have on support staff or sharing responsibilities with others outside of their counseling unit.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will be guiding this study:

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?
   b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?

2. What is the impact of the institutional environment on the schools on counselors?
   a. How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?
b. How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the shared or
distributed responsibilities for counseling?

3. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs
and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. How do counselors assess who is college-bound, vocational bound, goes straight
      into the workforce, or pursues other post-secondary options?
   b. How do high counselors work with students who are pursuing vocational
      education or training in comparison to students who are college-bound?
   c. How do high school counselors work with students who don’t plan to pursue
      additional education/training or are unsure of their postsecondary plans?
   d. How do counselors work with student populations from different demographic
groups?

**Definition of Terms to Clarify**

The terms below are used regularly throughout this study. There are brief descriptions of
what they mean in the context of this study.

*Counselor*

The term school counselor or just counselor will be used throughout this study, though
many might often still refer to the role as a guidance counselor. ASCA states that there is a
difference between a guidance and school counselor; advocating that school counselor is the
proper title or terminology. They state that the reason for this distinction is linked to the history
of the role and how it has evolved. ASCA (Zyromski et al., 2018; [ASCA] “Guidance
counselor”, n.d.) states that at first the role was for vocational guidance and the changes in the
With five services: information, assessment, counseling, placement and follow-up. Then the counseling service assumed prominence, so the common labels used were guidance and counseling. Information and assessment continued to be a part of guidance and counseling, but placement and follow-up became less important and have now almost disappeared as active parts of school counseling. Following ASCA’s lead, counseling became the label of choice as in school counseling programs. Guidance is still present but is used to label one of the delivery components of the program, namely, the guidance curriculum.” (p.1)

In this study, the term counselor will then refer to those who are formally holding the title of a counselor at a high school, who is to an extent thinking of the elements of providing information and guiding or counseling students. And there are some portions that touch on individuals who are not formally holding these titles and roles, but through formal or informal structures that allow for distributed counseling (to share some of the responsibilities of creating and/or implementing programs) to support the work of the main counseling unit at the high school.

**Vocation, Vocational Education and Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

Throughout this dissertation, the term vocation or vocational education is used, but it is not to discredit the history of the terms and why career and technical education has replaced previous terminology. The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) (2022) states that the change in the terminology was reflective of “the changing nature of this type of education … to reflect the changing of CTE from job-specific vocationalism to education that
can prepare all youth and adults for long-term career success” (para. 1). So, the change was reflective of the types of professions that vocational education promoted, which was focused on trade and industrial education, agriculture, and home-making (ACTE, 2022). There are 16 different career clusters, and 79 different career pathways under CTE, which allowed for broader educational and work opportunities (ACTE, 2022).

The reason for using the term vocation is not to negate the increased educational and professional opportunities, but to focus on the elements mentioned earlier in this literature review around a purpose or calling, that connects individuals to think about the needs of the community and world around them. It emphasizes the need to nurture talents and capacities and doesn’t solely also promote individualism. One finds joy in contributing and helping society, which also requires them to develop certain capabilities. And the relationship between the individual and the community or society is a reciprocal one where the growth and transformation go hand in hand. This is discussed more in the conceptual framework below.

**Subsequent Chapters**

The remaining chapters of this study will include a literature review, in chapter two, to understand and contextualize present day realities given historical realities of education in the United States. The literature review also captures certain movements, ideologies, and policies that had and continue to have implications for the educational system in the country, as well as the state and locality where this study takes place. The polices reviewed reflect assumptions and values or beliefs that individuals and institutions held at the time they were created and implemented. The review will conclude with a summary and identification of the gaps which correlate to the research carried out for this dissertation, as well as the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter three is dedicated to the methodology, which includes a pilot study from
which this dissertation builds on and breaks down the type of study and instruments and tools utilized to explore the research questions. It concludes with the positionality of the researcher. The fourth chapter reports the findings and chapter five discusses and analyzes these findings. It also includes recommendations, future possibilities, and questions for subsequent research, and concludes with a summary of the entire study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review aims to uncover the historical context for certain present-day realities within education. It is aimed at helping understand counselors’ views and beliefs around education and work, and their role with assisting students in their post-secondary aspirations. It also touches on elements of institutional culture and environment over the years that might have implications for the views and responsibilities of counselors in assisting students. This literature review explores the term vocation from its roots in some of the Abrahamic religions, influential movements, and theories in education in the United States, the vocational education system in the U.S. as well as how views around college (and preparation for it) have evolved, the relationships between vocational education and tracking and the field of counseling, and the impact of the global health pandemic on education. This is followed by a summary of key points and gaps in the literature. This chapter concludes with the conceptual framework for this study.

Exploring the Term Vocation

Understanding the history of vocational education, as well as the term “vocation” itself, necessitates an analysis of its connection to religious texts since they provide some of the earliest references to the concept of a vocation. Wineberg (2006) states the connection of the “ethic of service or vocation in professions” have “ancient biblical roots in service to God” (p. 250). Judeo-Christian views around vocations, which have been influential in the West, touch on training or education to prepare an individual to assume the responsibility to contribute toward the advancement of society (Williams, 2004). Postmodernism and relativism movements have encouraged more individualistic ideals, which in turn impact how one makes life decisions with consideration primarily on the self in isolation to their connection to the collective. This is
different from the considerations made when turning toward a calling, or a dialogue to “respond …, choos[e] …, [and] delight … [in] personhood” (McIntosh, 2004, p. 120). When looking at the life of Jesus to understand a vocation, von Wahlde (2004) states that it means a person:

is born of the conviction that one’s life task can be chosen and lived out in some sort of response to a divine invitation. It is a combination of recognition of one’s own talents as God-given with the conviction that such talents, if used well, can contribute to the betterment of the world. (p. 53)

This Roman Catholic perspective bears some similarity to Protestant views that a person’s talents affect the individual and society which is exemplified through the life of Jesus. Jesus’ purpose was to use His abilities to carry out the “work” and mission of God versus personal advancement (von Wahlde, 2004). Earlier on, vocations seemed to be referring to those who worked directly for the church and not to other occupations, but the growth in Christianity and evolution of the church embraced an evolving view of work as “a more positive view of work as conforming to the will of God. Secular employment, while not viewed as sacred in itself, was seen as falling under the authority of the church as an avenue of God’s grace” (Badcock, 1998, as cited in Wineberg, 2006, p. 251). Protestantism extended this view around vocation Badcock, 1998, as cited in Wineberg, 2006) and emphasized the different occupations to “respond obediently to the call of God to serve their neighbor in love” (Schuurman, 2004, p. 4, as cited in Wineberg, 2006). Wineberg (2006) states that Weber’s views around the changes in views around vocation and work were partly connected to Calvinism’s role in capitalism (Badcock, 1998 as cited in Wineberg, 2006), and this led to a more secular society which Wineberg (2006) said emphasized personal and economic advantage (Bellah, 1985 as cited in Wineberg, 2006).
Looking at and analyzing Jesus’ life and death, as attaining the purpose of His life, assisted individuals in approaching their work in relation to the talents they have to serve a greater purpose outside of themselves. The Lutheran perspective of a vocation connects it to an action of love, and where a person is following the laws of God to offer a “service toward our neighbors” (Kolden, 1983, p. 383). This law guides and frames the lens and actions of an individual, connects them to their vocation, and there is not a distinction or hierarchy for what people pursue. “Each one has a calling that is part of the whole… In every calling that serves the good of the neighbor one can serve God if one fulfills one’s duties faithfully” (Kolden, 1983, p. 388).

Within Islam, the term vocation is not directly translatable, but there are terms in the Quran that refer to having a calling centered on the relationship individuals have with God; “the divine guidance is what is required in order for humans to fulfill their original sound nature” (Hermansen, 2004, p. 79). These Prophets that God sends, such as Jesus and Muhammad, share laws and commandments to guide humanity (Hermansen, 2004); one’s talents in addition to this guidance are from God. “One performs these actions of earning sustenance according to the provisions laid out by the Creator” and are concerned with “obtaining one’s livelihood” (Hermansen, 2004, pp. 81-82) with consideration to the talents of the individual and needs of humanity. Also, the fact that a person’s work should be aligned with the religious laws to ensure that it is ethical touches on a common source or foundation to help guide the parameters of the type of work or vocation that one embarks on.

These points around a vocation from Christianity and Islam suggest that vocation or work does benefit a person and there are material or financial gains. And in addition to that, there is a common source that people turn to for guidance or an example to carry out work that is moral or
ethical, and that a person can derive great joy in following the laws of God by serving others through their work. Though not directly stated, it seems to require and help people develop qualities and capacities to work toward a larger purpose outside of themselves and contribute toward the advancement of society. An individual has a responsibility to work, and through the guidance and laws of God and the talents He bestows, they can learn how to contribute meaningfully to society. In this regard, a calling or a vocation is an “approach [to] a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). The emphasis is encouraging a person to think of their path considering service, and that there are certain skills and qualities that are connected to the education and work that one pursues.

The Baha’i writings build on this by stating that all people are responsible and have been called to contribute toward the advancement of society. People should, therefore, strive to acquire knowledge and skills, so that like trees, they can bear fruits. The spirit in which people approach education and work is also of importance. First, education is viewed to bring out the latent capacities within us all and is an “indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, n.d.). Secondly, all are called to pursue an “occupation”, “craft”, “profession”, or “trade” that will assist others and oneself, and that “work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, n.d.). Lastly, the Baha’i Writings state that “... The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds” (Baha’u’llah, n.d.). Again, the relationship between the individual and the collective go hand-in-hand for a person’s calling and efforts.
Dik and Duffy (2009) state that socio-economic changes have taken society further away from these constructs when thinking about a career. These changes have explicitly or implicitly promoted certain attitudes and beliefs about education and work, and have some underlying assumptions associated with them that differ from some of the points explored above. For example, it is encouraged to go to school and perform well because after high school you should try to go to college and going to college ensures that you will get a job that is stable and higher paying. And when choosing where to go after college, you want to make sure you go to a “good school.” Some subtle differences in this are that one’s efforts and pursuits become more narrowly defined as trying to pursue a certain status to live a comfortable life and are focused on the individual in isolation to the world around them. It suggests certain assumptions about the purpose of work, education, and life which don’t connect as closely to the earlier points of a vocation throughout various religious texts.

There are also the considerations around a person’s work being meaningful, which can both refer to the work itself and how the person feels it compares to other aspects of their life. All these points “imply that every person potentially has a vocation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 429), and can show themselves in any area of work in its contribution toward humanity. In some cases, people might feel that they are in the “presence of” their vocation or calling, while others are searching for it, as it may be unrelated depending on how they approach their work (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Tabrizi, 2020).

These points also connect to Weil’s (2002) work that is based on her relationship to Christianity and emphasizes the spiritual nature of work. She observes that individuals and society have become disconnected or “uprooted.” Certain dichotomies or ideas have been pitted against or separated from each other when it comes to education and work. Weil (2002) mentions
another point about a vocation or work being meaningful when spiritual and scientific knowledge “are made to converge upon the act of work, work occupies its rightful place in a man’s thoughts. Instead of being a kind of prison, it becomes a point of contact between this world and the world beyond” (Weil, 2002, pp. 90-91). She aims to show how these two forms of knowledge are complementary and not opposing through an example of a peasant sowing seeds being capable and needing the example of the metaphors Christ offers in the Bible about planting while also understanding the science in helping seeds and plants to grow.

Weil (2002) identifies how the approach (qualities and attitudes) while carrying out work and the skills and knowledge go hand-in-hand, as does the connection between individuals and their environment (the community). She states how there has been an “uprootedness” or separation between people and the collective and this has implications for education and work. Weil (2002) states:

The desire to learn for the sake of learning, the desire for truth, has become very rare.

The prestige of culture has become almost exclusively a social one… The youth of our schools are as much obsessed by their examinations as our workmen engaged in piece-work are by their pay pockets. There is something woefully wrong with the health of a social system, when a peasant tills the soil with the feeling that, if he is a peasant, it is because he wasn’t intelligent enough to become a schoolteacher. (p. 43)

The responsibility of tending to and contributing to the well-being is not just the responsibility of schools. “We are not, at present, either intellectually or spiritually capable of such a transformation… Naturally, schools alone would not be enough. All sections of the community in which something resembling thought still operates would have to take part” (Weil, 2002, p. 92). One element then to consider with a vocation and the idea of a calling is that it is
more than just the individual in isolation from others, but in response to the needs of their community and the society that a person lives in.

**Influential Movements and Theories in Education**

The previous section touches on theological views regarding a vocation and education; where truth and the decisions a person made were based on God’s revelation and guidance (McIntosh, 2004; Williams, 2004). There was a close relationship to these ideas around vocation, and questions arise around the type of education required to prepare someone toward their true calling or purpose. How education and work are viewed and understood impacts the way a system is set up: from how educators and counselors assist students, to how communities and the younger generations experience and approach their academic and professional aspirations. There have been several different movements and theories that have impacted how education and work are viewed and approached, both separately and in relation to each other.

In the West, there were certain movements or ideologies that impacted the assumptions, beliefs, and values of individuals, communities, and institutions. These assumptions are related to how people or groups view or understand human beings and our individual and collective purpose and have had implications around ideas of equity and equality when it has come to the changes in the educational system and with regard to work in the United States. Karlberg (2020) states that there have been:

three epistemological tensions that arise in the culture of contest that foster cynicism regarding the possibility of constructing a more peaceful, just, and mutually prosperous social order. These are tensions between truth and relativity, knowledge and power, science and religion. The perennial nature of these long-standing tensions in Western
thought suggests there is a problem with the binary way truth and relativity, power and knowledge, science and religion all tend to be conceptualized. (preface, page VIII)

With many of these movements, there were certain ideas that changed the way truth and knowledge were viewed, such as positivism (which gave way to modernity, rationalism, technocratic culture, industrialization, scientific management, and Fordism) viewed truth in terms of the knowledge a person could create scientifically (Kincheloe, 1999; Young, 2000).

Knowledge and truth increasingly grew to be measurable and the rise in technology was justified by being predictable, reputable, and quantifiable (Kincheloe, 1999). Arguments for efficiency began to dominate more factory-like educational and work models and efforts to counter these views through progressive education arose in the early 1900s (Kincheloe, 1999; Young, 2000). The efforts to have more schools connected to increasing the pool of working citizens was implemented through the “common school movement, the lobbying of manufacturers, and the influence of organized labor” which led to “a debate in the late 19th century about whether and how job training or the development of occupational skills should be part of government-funded education” (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974, as cited in Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016, p. 330).

Education was used to promote certain values to create a “good worker” for those from marginalized populations, including those of lower socioeconomic status, from immigrant families, and working females (Kincheloe, 1999). While those from more affluent families were able to have their children advance through a more “academic” versus “skills-based” education, the days of apprenticeships began to fade away (Kincheloe, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2007). It wasn’t until later in the 1900’s that questions around whether students’ education prepared them for work, began to be raised (Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2007).
And conflicting views around knowledge within education and work arose through supporters of progressive education. The emphasis of progressive education looked at knowledge to be connected to “purposeful connections between educational experiences and the needs and nature of the student in connection with the social life of the community” (Curti, 1935; Harlan, 1983; Martin, 1962; Mathews, 1948 as cited in, Generals, 2000, p. 216).

Within this history of the school system in the United States is “a story of ongoing efforts to increase rationalization and efficiency, from the actions of administrative progressives in the early twentieth century through the rise of the accountability regime that has marked” the early 2000’s (Callahan, 2013 as cited by Diehl, 2017, p. 291). Diehl (2017) states that “periods of rationalization are frequently followed by periods that draw on Romantic theorizing in an attempt to infuse bureaucracy with meaning and sociality” (Barley & Kunda, 1992 as cited by Diehl, 2017, p. 291) which is a response or critique to modernity. Three periods where there were attempts to “infuse school bureaucracy with Romantically inspired values and practices related to personal meaning and communal relationships” (Diehl, 2017, p. 297) are: “the 1930s to 1950s: human relations, democratic governance, and life adjustment; 1960s to 1970s: humanistic and multicultural education; [and] 1980s to 1990s: school culture and teacher professional communities” (pp. 297-300).

The different waves within education in the United States were grappling with these differing ideologies and how to combine or separate academic and skill or manual education and work. Within the field of vocational or career and technical education (CTE), career development theories, learning theories, and economies theories Schmidtke (2017) have been utilized the most for the framework of the way it has evolved. Many of the theories drawn on seem to assume that individuals pursue these routes to see progress and meaningfully contribute
toward society, ideals which many young people historically have been drawn toward (Tabrizi, 2020). The changes in the terminology of the field are meant to reflect how things have evolved; the terminology of vocational education was no longer employed and replaced with career and technical education (CTE) (Hess & Martin, 2019).

The terminology reflects the socio-political and socio-economic changes, aims and values of society (Gysbers, 2010; Hess & Martin, 2019). Career and technical education (CTE) include pathways and programs that prepare students for work that can require a variety of different training, certification, or degrees and is not limited to a bachelor’s or less. This might range in the types of work such as professions in education and training, manufacturing, information technology, and health sciences. One benefit that might be considered for the change in terminology is that the term career in itself has associations of something that one builds towards thoughtfully and purposefully and might have implications for having rigorous and challenging programs for students to grow and learn in (ACTE, 2022). Though the term vocation might be used in this dissertation, conversations with participants often utilized the terminology of “college and career technical education” to not create any confusion and reflect the changes made decades ago. The reason this study does use the term vocation or vocational education at times is connected to the religious or spiritual history of the term: a calling and pursuing a training and education to support the pursuit of a profession that uses a person’s talents to contribute toward the betterment of society. At some point in a young person’s life, they will be tasked with making decisions about their education and the work they pursue, and there may be several factors that influence the decisions they make, including family life; relationships and information received from members of educational institutions; their socioeconomic status; and peer groups and mentors (Martinez & Huerta, 2018; McDonough, 1997).
Industrialization

A few words are worth mentioning regarding the Industrial Revolution before exploring key moments in the history of the educational system in the United States. The reason this time and shift were so transformative was that it was a major change for the country, including the following: it had impacted the economic sector and raised questions around work, especially working conditions, livable and equitable wages, and training; it promoted more urban centers and that had implications for family life and living conditions; and it had a strong relationship to the way the educational system started to shift by drawing stark distinctions not only about non-white and white populations, but also the type of education that people would receive. There were of course great inequalities and injustices that were present within the country toward people of color before industrialization, but that carried over in large numbers and at rampant speed toward the structures implemented for living, educational, and work conditions and environments.

The sweep of urbanization greatly impacted people of color: while more people could study, work, and live in cities, there was a disadvantage to anyone who was considered non-white, non-male, and non-affluent. More (urban) schools meant formalizing and creating structures that were less attuned to the community they were serving (Tyak, 1974) and entire cities like Detroit (Sugrue, 1962) became industrial centers with poor working, living and educational conditions and opportunities for African American and immigrant populations. These places, like Detroit, later turned into desolate centers with increased poverty and injustices (after they no longer utilized factory work) (Sugrue, 1962).
Legislation and Committees or Associations

During the 1800’s, shortly before the Industrial Revolution, some notable and major changes began taking place with the educational system in the United States. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list and analysis but rather focuses on a few key acts, policies, associations and/or reports as related to vocational or career and technical education. Some of these legislative acts are connected to K-12 education, while others have impacted postsecondary education. At first, many of the colleges that were established in the United States were for only Christian, white men (Croft, 2019). Part of this was due to conceptions of who was entitled or deserved education, as well as ideas around education and the fields of work where people needed to go to school or be trained for.

The growing demand for certain agricultural and technical disciplines required more individuals to be educated to contribute and individuals, like Johnathan Baldwin Turner, who began advocating for what would later be a land-grant university system (Croft, 2019). Justin Smith Morrill presented a revision to his earlier bill, the Land-Grant College Act, or Morrill Act, of 1862 (Encyclopedia Britannica, “Land-Grant College”, n.d.; National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.; Croft, 2019), to be passed by Congress, to have more “areas of study at the colleges to include military strategy in addition to agricultural and mechanical arts” and gave “land to states to establish institutions of higher education” (Croft, 2019, p. 2). By 1890, the “Morrill Act provided funding for the land-grant university system and prohibited racial discrimination in admissions policies. It led to the establishment of a group of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) known as the "1890 Institutions" (Croft, 2019, p. 2).

A few legislations, such as the Hatch Act of 1887 and Smith-Lever Act of 1914 extended “the services of the colleges to the farmers and mechanics” and “provided for a program of
cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics” (Walters, 1986). And a national organization, the Douglas Commission (1906) formed to gather information about the efforts of public schools for manual training in Massachusetts. The Commission’s report “was responsible for legislation incorporating vocational education into the public school system” (Walters, 1986). These efforts were to look at certain models and learning, and replicate or extend, while creating a system of support and accountability throughout the United States and there were changes also made around funding for these programs.

The Smith-Hughes or National Vocational Education Act of 1917 was another effort to respond and provide more opportunities and funding in certain fields, such as agriculture, industrial trades, and home economics (Walters, 1986; Steffes & Duigan, 2004; ACTE, 2018; Hillison, 1995; Moore, 2019). There was a push beforehand for more vocational education programs, but given that this was after the Industrial Revolution, the advocacy was around “the then widespread belief in the moral, educative, and practical value or work” (Steffes & Duigan, 2004). Dougherty & Lombardi (2016) state that:

The new law provided funding to states, with the idea that states would match federal funds to determine total expenditures on vocational education. It also, notably, included provisions that vocational education was to comprise only part of a student’s school day, the rest of the time being spent in general education settings focused on developing skills for reading, mathematics, and citizenship. (p. 330)

There was a push for reform, but the motives or type of reform being encouraged depended on whether it came from employers, unions, employees, or educators. Advocates of vocational education stressed the need for “more systematic programs and to emphasize its economic and utilitarian values more forcefully” (Steffes & Duigan, 2004, para. 3). The Smith-
Hughes Act (1917) “authorized the first federal funding for secondary CTE programs around the nation” and it encouraged vocational education as an option for postsecondary educational and professional opportunities (ACTE, 2018). The National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education “was formed to coordinate efforts across state boundaries and to work in conjunction with localized industry” (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016, p. 330).

The Federal Board for Vocational Education, which lasted between 1917 until 1946, (Hillison & Moore, 1993) was subsequently established to create a report each year that looked at the areas of industrial, agricultural, home, and commercial education. It focused on different types of schools promoting education, specific populations, teacher training, as well as relationships with different agencies and states. It summarized the progress in different states as well. The Smith-Hughes Act also gave way to the Vocational Education Act of 1963, which led to the Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984 that has been reauthorized numerous times since 1984 (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network [PCRN], n.d.).

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 (and 1968) “focused on addressing forms of social inequality that had been identified” (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016, p. 330). The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (with its amendments as of 2006, and its most recent version of Perkins V signed in 2018) emphasizes efforts to nurture academic, technical, and employability knowledge and skills for students to be able to qualify and prepare for high skill and wage jobs that are increasingly needed in the country (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, 2019). It aims to address systems for funding and allocation, as well as touching on partnerships between educational institutions, boards, and industries to assist with the preparation and employability of students. It also looks at the quality of education through its “teachers, faculty, administrators, and counselors”, as well as the courses offered and accepted at
the K-12 institution and through articulation with post-secondary institutions (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, 2019). The Carl D. Perkins Act (1984) was the first “four federal authorizations to continue to fund what is now called CTE… the most recent reauthorization … in 2006, declared a clear need to increase the focus of CTE on preparing students for postsecondary education” (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016, p. 330).

One notable portion of the Perkins Act is on “career guidance and academic counseling” (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, 2019) which highlights two main areas or points around assisting students: One is the access of information for students for “career awareness exploration” to be more aware of opportunities and better able to plan for their futures, and the second is information for “career options, financial aid, job training, secondary and postsecondary options…, dual or concurrent enrollment programs, work-based learning opportunities, early college high schools, financial literacy, and support services, as appropriate” (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, 2019, p. 5). Each state receives a share of the funding from the Perkins Act, and the allocation or allotment they receive depends on: “the size of its population in particular age groups, the state’s per-capita income over the past 3 years, the U.S. per-capita income over the past 3 years, and the total appropriations for Basic Grants” (NCES, n.d., p.3).

*Additional Acts Related to Career and Technical Education (CTE)*

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which was connected to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) are two acts which won’t be discussed at length but will be mentioned given that there are portions of their efforts that connect to CTE. ESSA focused on the standards of education for all students to be able to advance in their postsecondary pursuits. While the emphasis on
assessments as helpful measures for accountability is debatable, the purpose for mentioning the ESSA is because of the support it provided for CTE (PCRN: Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, “Every student”, n.d.):

   Including CTE in definition of a well-rounded education, requiring coordination of ESSA and CTE plans by State and local education agencies, supporting the integration of academic and CTE coursework, and encouraging States to include the progress of students in attaining career and technical education proficiencies on State report cards. (para. 2)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act from 2014 touched on strengthening “coordination between workforce development and CTE” (Advance CTE, n.d., para. 3). One of the ways it carried this out was through “aligned definitions, [and] requir[ing] postsecondary CTE to be a partner of state and local …” (Advance CTE, n.d., para. 3). One of the benefits of this integration was to lessen the separation of students and “tracking” by recognizing the importance of all students to develop career and technical education competencies. But there are difficulties and dangers for trying to use uniform measures for students and their progress, as demonstrated by the NCLB (2002).

   The ESSA had historical implications for shifting the decisions for educational funding to state and local decision makers (Duffy et al., 2009), and tried to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students (Duffy et al., 2009). The changes made to ESSA when NCLB (2002) passed were harmful for all, but especially with populations from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; the changes made through NCLB (2002) have been quite harmful for students and schools (Duffy et al., 2008). The purpose of NCLB (2002) was also to ensure that all children receive high-quality education and are proficient for nation-wide standards, but
the high stakes testing, and assessments created negative impacts on students, schools, and the work of counselors (Duffy et al., 2008). For the purposes of this study, just a few points will be highlighted regarding the NCLB (2002).

Firstly, creating and implementing high stakes testing and mandated assessments and accountability measures were not reflective of capturing the knowledge of, nor accessible to the diverse student populations in the country. The testing wasn’t “student friendly” and couldn’t measure English language learners’ (Kennedy, 2008) knowledge because of the exams being in English nor did it consider the socio-economic and cultural factors that would impact students from lower socio-economic status. And over-testing students versus taking the time to teach them will not help them. Secondly, the time of educators and counselors becomes consumed with these assessments (Duffy et al., 2008; Kennedy, 2008) versus helping students with learning and addressing their individual needs. Many teachers would just “teach to the test”, and counselors would “misuse…their time in coordinating and tracking student performance at the expense of critical direct counseling activities” (Duffy et al., 2008, p. 61,). Counselors’ time was redirected to administrative tasks versus helping students with their development needs (Kennedy, 2008).

The NCLB (2002) also was a concern for CTE programs and their supporters. This is because the programs would potentially not get the funding needed to be implemented in the schools, and the courses would be at risk of not being offered compared to pushing content that would be on the assessments (Chadd & Drage, 2006). There also was a concern for pushing models that grouped all students together, opposed to educating and raising a diverse and capable workforce.
Reports and Educational Strategies

The early 1900’s saw a growth in having commissions, committees, and associations, such as the Federal Board for Vocational Education (until the 1940’s), focused on research, training, and capturing the current state of vocational education to understand what was being learned, and the possibilities before the fields. The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education published a report in 1918 with seven cardinal principles for education (Kridel, 2010) highlighting health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home-membership, vocation, civic education, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character as part of education. This required students to develop and see the relationship between their vocation and their community; individuals who were “successful” in the vocations emphasized were preferred to be the ones to instruct the students. The ideas that emerged from the perspective were that secondary education should be informed “by the needs of the society to be served, the character of the individuals to be educated, and the knowledge of educational theory and practice available” (Bureau of Education, 1918, pg. 7).

A Nation at Risk from 1983 (Gardner et al., 1983) is another report that has had an impact on the educational system for encouraging reforms. Some portions emphasized secondary education, focusing on “content, expectations, time, and teaching” (Park, 2022, para. 3) and looked at the preparation that students require upon the completion of their K-12 education. The recommendations included having certain basic classes or courses that all students must complete before graduating high school with more “rigorous and measurable standards” (Park, 2022, para. 5), more and longer instructional days, and the need to improve teacher quality. There are numerous criticisms around the accuracy of the statistics and the ability of the report to address foundational causes of the issues being raised, but it did impact efforts for “the
academic-standards movement, drew attention to the importance of education policy, and led to a focus on school accountability” (Weiss, 2003 as cited in Park, 2002, para. 11).

*America 2000: An Education Strategy* (Department of Education, 1991) was a national strategy and report just 10 years after *A Nation at Risk*; it articulated six educational goals, with four strategies to achieve its aims:

All children in America will start school ready to learn; the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent; American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in American will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy; U.S. students will be the first in the world in science and mathematics achievement; Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; Every school in American will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. (p. 12)

The strategies included focusing on a certain number of schools and holding them accountable by certain standards or criteria; creating new schools; emphasizing the need for the current workforce to continue to develop certain knowledge and skills; and having certain communities to “adopt the national goals, develop a report card to measure community progress reaching the goals, and start a new kind of American school” (Manno, 2018, para. 17). These two reports tried to emphasize the gaps and disparities that existed in the educational system and tried to bring attention to these as reasons why high-stakes testing, assessments, and
accountability measures were crucial for schools to utilize to see improvement in their students’ academic performance.

The types of analysis and data utilized, as well as the recommendations for seeing improvement carried forward to influence acts like the NCLB (2002) to aim to correct the wrongs that arose in education. But the measures and presentation of the educational system, as well as the way to hold them accountable utilized few data points and considerations, and impacted the work of how teachers and counselors would operate (Duffy et al., 2008). The push for certain measures through assessments to make claims about the work with students, greatly impacted the utilization of the “scarce resource of time from multiple domains of learning and activities included in specific programs, like comprehensive school counseling programs, to an intense and narrow focus on its mandated components, namely, emphasis on the basic skills” (McReynolds, 2006 as cited in Duffy et al, 2008, p. 53).

**California’s A-G High School Graduation Requirements**

Many of the policies, commissions, and reports extended education to more populations, raised the questions of how and what type of education to offer students (which also connected to funding), aimed to capture what was being learned to implement across the country, and tried to address the relationship between education and work. The efforts to standardize and hold accountability measures for students, teachers, and schools has dominated quite a bit of the conversation the past few decades. In an ongoing effort to standardize learning, states adopted the Common Core Standards and California, like other states, has their own set of standards (CDE “Common core”, 2022). This study takes place in California and in addition to these grade level standards for what students should be taught and know, are California’s A-G course requirements for students to be able to receive their high school diploma and continue to higher
education. These A-G requirements are to be “eligible to apply for admission to the UC and CSU systems” (Betts et al., 2013, p. 4) and were fully implemented in one district in 2002, and for a handful of others after 2010. They require a certain number of units or years for English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Foreign Language, Visual and Performing Arts, and Physical Education (CDE “Courses required”, 2022). This was in response to students not meeting the requirements for the major public university systems in the state.

Betts et al. (2013 & 2016) looked at the implementation of the A-G requirements. Betts et al. (2013) found that in most of the districts that had implemented these policies:

They allow a–g course credit earned with a D or higher to count toward meeting graduation requirements. This lower standard seems to reflect the belief that it would be wrong to deny high school diplomas to students whose course grades fell slightly short of the C or higher required by California’s public universities. (p. 6)

The study found that in the second largest school district in California, English language learners struggled greatly even when reclassified as proficient in English with these standards, and most students struggled with English, Math, and Foreign Language requirements. In this same district, the students who started high school with lower grades and test scores were less likely to meet the new graduation standard (Betts et al., 2013), and this showed with only “35.2 percent of EL students who earned high school diplomas in 2011 [and] completed the a–g requirements with grades of D or higher. The completion rate for nongraduates was even lower” (Betts et al., 2013, p. 15).

The implications for supporting students would require administrators and counselors at middle and high schools “to work more closely than ever with students to develop plans for their path to graduation, because the new policy requires changes in course-taking behavior and
student achievement well before grade 8” (Betts et al., 2013, p. 15). These changes were expected to lower graduation rates, especially for certain student groups; “water down” the content of the courses if grades are raised to a D to pass; affect the passing of classes for higher-performing students given their lower-performing counterparts in the same courses; and potentially cause the district to “de-emphasize career and technical education in favor of a–g coursework, which would narrow the curriculum and serve both college- and career-focused students poorly” (Betts et al., 2013, p. 17). At the time, a very small percentage of CTE courses were approved for the A-G credit in the district, and there were questions if requiring all high school students to fulfill the A-G course requirements would negatively affect those students who wanted to work after high school versus going to college (Betts et al., 2013). And if “these districts eliminate high-quality CTE coursework that provides all students—college-bound or not—with relevant, real world experience” it could hurt them instead of helping “them in their chosen careers” (Betts et al., 2013, pp. 18-19).

The California Department of Education ("CTE general public fact sheet”, 2022), through their website, shared that the relationship between integrating CTE courses for students, has helped more students to be prepared for college, and that these programs take a “linked learning model” to have real-world means for applying the academic content that students learn. Their department website stated that students who advance in CTE courses are more likely to graduate, and high-risk students who take these courses are less likely to drop out before they complete high school ("CTE general public fact sheet”, 2022). One last point they make in connecting the CTE and A-G requirements is that these students are more prepared in college; that they have higher GPA’s, are less likely to drop out, and have higher incomes than those who don’t take CTE courses ("CTE general public fact sheet”, 2022).
Vocational Education

This portion highlights some notable or key persons from the 1800 and early 1900’s in vocational education. It acknowledges their contributions and some key views debated from early on. This section also mentions those who focused on specific populations, to acknowledge the experiences of historically marginalized populations and their contributions toward the field. This is followed by a portion that analyzes the relationship between vocational education and tracking, which again has impacted historically marginalized populations mentioned throughout this study and in earlier sections. And finally, it shows the connection of vocational education and the field of counseling before further delving into the history and present-day reality of school counselors.

Notable Individuals that Contributed Toward Vocational Education in the United States

Individuals like David Snedden, Charles Prosser, and John Dewey are often mentioned and associated with (vocational) education. The contributions of these men, and their debating views, are to be noted, but not to overshadow the contributions of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Snedden and Prosser emphasized the importance of efficiency and manual training (Zehr, 1999), which was often separated into different schools and programs. Dewey held different views than Prosser and Snedden about the aims, goals, and separation of manual training and if vocational programs were truly aimed at helping students or were of more benefit to employers (Goddard, 2019).

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois also had different views around education. Both were focused on how to improve and provide more educational and professional opportunities for African Americans. Their backgrounds and views were very different. Washington felt that vocational or “industrial training” for African Americans would show their
commitment to hard work and garner the respect of their white counterparts (Bauerlein, 2004/2005). But “DuBois… contended that black progress could be achieved through an educational grounding in the arts and sciences which would result in the development of a black intellectual elite” (Bauerlein, 2004/2005, p. 106). Their views and work seemed greatly connected to their personal experiences growing up: their socioeconomic status and educational training.

Washington was born into a slave family, and experienced emancipation; he later attended the Hampton Institute in Virginia (Frantz, N. R., 1997). The Hampton Institute was founded after the Civil War for educating freed slaves in both academic and practical or industrial trades (Frantz, N. R., 1997). After attending, Washington helped to establish the Tuskegee Institute where there was a relationship between academic and occupational courses, and training (Frantz, N. R., 1997). A major belief of Washington’s was that “all training derived its meaning and purpose from real problems and could be used to elevate the conditions of the individual students as well as the entire community” (Frantz, N. R., 1997, p. 88).

This differed from W.E.B. DuBois who was born into a middle-class family and community. His postsecondary studies were focused on language and science, and after receiving his Ph.D., DuBois taught as a professor within sociology, economics, and history. The program at Atlanta University where he taught “was designed to open a field of usefulness for African American city dwellers, comparable to what Hampton and Tuskegee had done for rural districts in agriculture and industry” (Frantz, N. R., 1997, p. 89). DuBois’ view around education for African Americans was that their education shouldn’t focus on agricultural and industrial training and knowledge, but that it should make them leaders who can achieve “social and
economic equality through the education of an elite few who could hold their own in the social and political maneuverings of the day” (Frantz, N. R. ., 1997, p. 89).

Washington and DuBois made important contributions to shape the future of education in the United States. In the case of Washington, he contributed toward adult and extended education by creating programs to reach, assist, and educate farmers while trying to address the issues of the agricultural condition in their area. He created a “system of extending on-campus programs to adults” to extend “the Tuskegee idea and helped make the farmers self-sufficient and productive contributors to society” (Frantz, N. R. ., 1997, p. 90). Washington contributed toward vocational and technical education by “accommodating and developing the practical skills of African American men and women” (Frantz, N. R. ., 1997, p. 90). But DuBois saw this as working within a white dominated system.

DuBois’ emphasis was on the same population, but incorporated both liberal and practical education (Frantz, N. R. ., 1997). His approach was to move away from working within the system and felt it was necessary “to develop the leadership capacity among the most able 10 percent of black Americans… [and] feared that what they saw was as the overemphasis on industrial training … [which] would confine blacks permanently to the ranks of second-class citizenship” (Encyclopedia Britannica, “Talented Tenth”, n.d.). DuBois did assist with forming the NAACP and that helped do away with segregated schools, which “provided the foundation for vocational educators to integrate programs and youth organizations … [and] preparation of a diverse workforce with the occupational and the social skills needed to succeed in the workplace” (Frantz, N. R. ., 1997, pp. 90-91).
Relationship Between Tracking and Vocational Education

Highlighting the contributions of Washington and DuBois to the field of (vocational) education, especially for African Americans, raises the issue of tracking historically marginalized student populations. From the mid-1800’s, vocational education was of a lower quality than other educational classes and programs; it led students to low-paying and low-skilled work and was for students who were not “college ready” (Holzer & Baum, 2017). Minority students were sorted or tracked into vocational education based on prejudicial views around: what these populations were capable of intellectually, the types of work that someone carries out and the capacities required to carry out the work, the importance or significance of different types of work, and the status of different professions. The increase in immigrant populations, the changes in the nature of work and skills required, and new student populations accessing formal education was dealt with through prejudicial applications of Social Darwinism, Scientific Management, and the myth of meritocracy (Oakes, 1986). This resulted in “grouping” or “tracking” students based on their perceived ability, or in comparison to white upper-class students, into classes and vocational pathways to teach them skills valued in factory work, and to teach “American” ideals and culture (Oakes, 1986).

The relationship between education and work also evolved so that the focus of secondary schools became to prepare young people for work (Oakes, 1986). Efforts to “equalize” education grew over the years, and in the 1960’s more parents and advocates began to question and fight back against tracking (Holzer & Baum, 2017). However, this led to another extreme of eliminating the need for career preparation within high school instead of “making it appropriate for all students and integrating it with the college preparation” (Holzer & Baum, 2017, p. 194). Oakes & Lipton (1992) state that detracking efforts require each school or institution to consider
how to create a culture to address and move beyond the underlying assumptions that educational institutions operate on for working with students, especially those from historically marginalized populations. They try to address that there are “powerful beliefs about the purposes of schooling” that support tracking, and schools need to be able to identify these beliefs around the “contradictory purposes” of education for all students to benefit (Oakes & Lipton, 1992, p. 449). Two of these “beliefs” include the view that schools are responsible for preparing the next generation of the workforce and “transmitting[ing] the essential knowledge and values of the culture to all students” (Oakes & Lipton, 1992, p. 449).

In addition to detracking, another effort to equalize education has been the promotion of college for all students. Holzer & Baum (2017) state that there are strong beliefs that a healthy economy depends on “improving educational attainment and skill acquisition for all Americans, particularly those from low-income backgrounds” (pp. 3 – 6). More students, especially from lower socio-economic backgrounds are encouraged to pursue college education to move away from tracking them into primarily trade-type training and work, but it does not guarantee that they will graduate. “The paths followed by [these] … students, who are often first-generation college attenders, too often do not lead to college attainment…Among those who do graduate, too many never experience the payoff in which they thought they were investing” (Holzer & Baum, 2017, pp. 3-6). An increasing number of students are encouraged to attend college because post-secondary education is seen as an opportunity to equalize and allow people to have higher paying work and positions in society. However, “Even among those who complete credentials, too many either concentrate in fields with low economic returns or for other reasons find themselves poorly prepared for the labor market” (Holzer & Baum, 2017, p.5).
These points are raised and considered because the issues with students from marginalized populations being singled out and tracked into less academically rigorous or supported studies and work (Oakes, 2005) perpetuates inequalities. But even efforts to address these inequalities by “detracking” seem to not address some foundational issues that exist within education, and that can be seen when students pursue higher education and work and are either unable to complete their programs or still move into fields with lower pay or are still not as prepared for the workforce. These issues need to be addressed earlier on in students’ education and become more difficult to correct overtime.

The inequities mentioned around tracking students, based on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, still exist even with CTE programs. In fact, efforts to “detrack” makes it seem as though these practices don’t exist, but there are still socio-economic and racial-ethnic differences between students who take honors or Advanced-Placement classes compared to those who take remedial courses (Truong, 2022). These historically marginalized populations “still face disparities in access to and participation in high-quality CTE programs”, including less progress and course credits than their white peers (Smith, 2019). One effort to remedy these inequalities would be to preparing “students of color, in particular, for advanced coursework in college, putting them on a path to better-paying careers” and “increasing participation in upper-level courses and creating accountability systems to avoid tracking students of color into lower-track career preparation” (Smith, 2019, para. 14).

The point being that we want to ensure that all students are provided with a rigorous education that helps them advance in their intellectual capacities, while helping to guide and counsel them around the career opportunities that will help them to be successful, in a way that is accessible for each student (Holzer & Baum, 2017). Efforts should steer clear of two extremes:
to repeat certain patterns and assumptions that give way to tracking students, and to apply a
general formula to get large groups of students to pursue the same postsecondary options without
giving consideration for the individual and their talents, values, and needs. Findings are showing
that efforts to create higher quality CTE programs in high schools (for all students) is allowing
for better educational and professional opportunities. “Academic support and effective
counseling will become increasingly important” (Holzer & Baum, 2017, p. 200) to assist all
students in how to think through and learn about the educational and professional opportunities,
and to actually prepare them for these opportunities so that they are not left at a continual
disadvantage within society.

**Relationship Between the Field of Counseling and Vocational Education**

The field of counseling is said to have emerged from a need to provide students with
vocational guidance (Gysbers, n.d.). During the time of industrialization and until the early
1900’s, there was a huge increase in public education for students, with many social protests and
reforms under Progressive Movements “that sought to change negative social conditions
associated with the Industrial Revolution” (Gysbers, 2010, p. 1). These conditions included but
were not limited to urban centers and poor living conditions for immigrants, promotion of more
149-149 as cited in Gysbers, 2010, p. 1). These changes gave way to the increase and formation
of vocational guidance, and the conditions that acted together and contributed toward the
formation of vocational counseling or guidance were: “the division of labor, the growth of
technology, the extension of vocational education and the spread of modern forms of
democracy” (Brewer, 1942 as cited in Gysbers, 2010, p. 2). And then there were more changes
that occurred as there were more students advancing to and through secondary education. These
increases had an impact on the approaches toward the types of curricula that were offered to the increasing student populations advancing to secondary education; courses such as “practice arts, manual training, and home economics and child labor problems” (Davis, 1956 as cited by Gysbers, 2010, p. 2) were offered for students to take before they completed their secondary education and advanced into the world of work.

Some of the earlier contributors toward vocational guidance include “Lysander Richards, George A. Merril and Eli W. Weaver … [,] Frank Parsons and Jessie B. Davis” (Gysbers, 2010, p. 3). Parsons’ work on vocational guidance stressed the importance of young people choosing their vocation and emphasized helping them with the transition from school to work (Gysbers, 2010). Parsons emphasized these three factors for helping young people choose their work (Savickas & Baker, 2005, as cited by Gysbers, 2010):

(1) A clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two group facts. Every young person needs help on all three of these points. He needs all the information and assistance he can get. He needs counsel. He needs a vocational counselor. He needs careful and systematic help by experienced minds in making this greatest decision of his life. (p.5)

Jesse Buttrick Davis (Pope, 2009, 248) is considered by many to be the first school counselor in the United States. The programs he implemented were influenced by his personal experience of needing guidance on what to do after high school and not feeling that he had help from anyone (Pope, 2009). His experience in education in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s was when many changes were taking place within (vocational) education. Davis was advised from
family to focus on obtaining a baccalaureate degree and finding an occupation later, and efforts from teachers mostly focused on helping students prepare for college entrance (Pope, 2009). It wasn’t until his last year in college that a conversation with a professor helped Davis in thinking through the potential careers, he was interested in. This professor offered him an option or opportunity to consider another career outside of the two Davis shared, posed questions about Davis’ interests, and asked what he planned to build as a career from the foundation he had (Pope, 2009).

Davis’ experience and conversations with his professor touched on a few areas that he felt counselors should utilize when helping students: knowing more about oneself, seeing the possible fields available and learning about them, and feeling confirmed in making a decision based on understanding the relationship between the opportunities before a person and the decisions they make about their future (Pope, 2009). Davis’ experience led him to become an educator and the “first guidance counselor”, and highlights the impact that counselors have, as one group within education, and their contribution toward student trajectories.

The Role of Counselors

The role of school counselors has changed quite a bit over the years. The first shift was in the 1920’s from vocational guidance to having “a more clinically oriented approach” because of “mental hygiene, psychometric and child study movements” (Gysbers, n.d.). The next shift was just a decade later with a conversation around counselors’ responsibilities which moved from a list of duties to perform having a “new organizational structure called pupil personnel services” (Gysbers, n.d.). Given the reality of the country during World War II, there was an emphasis on more counseling services in schools and it required more training and support for school counselors. All of this was supported “with the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1946.
and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958…, [and] the American School Counselor Association was established in 1952” (Gysbers, n.d., p. 1). The notion of having comprehensive school counseling programs started taking shape in the 1960’s and 1970’s and continued to build in the decades to follow, with continual focus on what the role, function and terminology around the work of school counselors should entail, and the need “to become more data-oriented, using data to identify school concerns and student needs” and also emphasized the importance of accountability within the profession (Gysbers, n.d.). By the early 2000’s the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) was developed, with their programs adopted in more and more schools.

**What Do Counselors Do?**

School counselors hold integral information that can shape students’ postsecondary educational and professional options (Martinez & Huerta, 2018; Tabrizi, 2020). As mentioned earlier, school counseling used to involve school faculty emphasizing vocational guidance and it has evolved to carrying out “a comprehensive program focusing on academic, career and personal-social development of all students”; this is done through counselors’ collaboration with school personnel and families (Gysbers, 2010, p. iii) and focuses on improving student success for the entire student population ([ASCA] “The role”, n.d.). The way counselors help students is assisting them with their postsecondary plans, their emotions and interpersonal skills, and with academic strategies for them to advance ([ASCA] “The role”, n.d.). The “ideal caseload” for counselors is 250 students to one counselor ([ASCA] “School counselor roles”, 2022). ASCA ([ASCA] “The role”, n.d.) states that counselors:

*Design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes. They lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by*
connecting their school counseling program to the school’s academic mission and school improvement plan. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: define, deliver, manage and assess. (p. 2)

Appropriate and Inappropriate Duties

The role of counselors has changed greatly over the years since the origins of the role began to emerge; and from the early 1900’s there was a recognition that the role was important within education, but it didn’t receive the proper training or focus (Gysbers, 2010). This has given way to some confusion at times, not just from counselors themselves, but from other school staff and faculty about how to appropriately utilize the contribution and time of counselors. Even early on, those in the field of vocational guidance or counseling, such as Myers (1923) (as cited by Gysbers, 2010) stated that the “principal and often the counselor … [have] very indefinite idea of the proper duties” (p. 140) and as a result counselors are given a lot of administrative work that doesn’t allow them to do their work. Myers (1924) (as cited by Gysbers, 2010) goes on to say:

In order to prevent this tendency from crippling seriously the vocational program it is important that the counselor shall be well-trained, that the principal shall understand more clearly what counseling involves and that there should be efficient supervision from a central office. (p.140)

ASCA outlines which duties are and are not appropriate for counselors to carry out in the following figure:

Figure 1

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

Some of the appropriate activities to highlight include the counselors’ roles with advising and planning with students, work that requires collaborating with teachers and principals, and utilizing, analyzing and overseeing data and assessments. And inappropriate activities include “building the master schedule”, “performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences”, “providing long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders”, “supervising classrooms or common areas”, and coordinating certain efforts such as testing programs, and plans and teams for students who require additional support ([ASCA] “Appropriate and Inappropriate”, n.d.). It should be noted that while these resources on ASCA’s website aim to clearly outline what does and does not fall under the role and responsibilities of counselors, it is unclear how familiar most counselors are with what was outlined and what opportunities there are for them to draw on these resources to convey and implement at district and school levels.
ASCA seems to be responding to protecting the time and well-being of the counselors by outlining and providing resources for counselors to use to operate within a common framework and convey those things to the school faculty they collaborate with. It also might be a response to the “mystery” of the work of what counselors do, to those outside of the field. There have been many changes to the field, as explored in this literature review, but it does mean that school faculty should increasingly become familiar with the way the field has changed to better meet student needs.

Counselors’ Roles in College Preparation and Access

Increasingly over the years, counselors have been helping students with career and college preparation. Counselors have a weighty task to assist large numbers of students to become familiar with and advance on a pathway, and there is a need for strengthening the programs and research to help students. Rojewski and Hill (2014) identify three areas that would strengthen Career and Technical Education (CTE) outcomes. They argue that work and/or a career used to be something that was viewed as stable and secure, but given the changing climate of work, the structure of how CTE is approached needs to be adapted so it can accommodate these changes but help students to be successful (Tabrizi, 2020). Rojewski and Hill (2014) state that focusing on career navigation, work ethic, and innovation, as a starting point, can help with student trajectories using CTE to the workplace.

Rojewski and Hill (2014) state that the following areas within work require more help and focus: to “understand and navigate a dynamic workplace using career-related information about self and the world of work” (p. 145), for having curriculum to assist with the instruction of teaching about work ethic, and to counter what schools typically teach which is to conform and about personal achievement, versus the work environment encouraging a more collective
advancement (Tabrizi, 2020). Rojewski and Hill (2014) highlighted the necessity to identify a clearer or more explicit framework for CTE to accommodate the changing workplace realities taking place. This could serve as a more coherent way of advancing the field.

The area of college and career support that counselors give attention to is connected to students’ postsecondary plans. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) discusses the importance of high school counselors given the changes and transition that students are going through as they begin in ninth grade, advance until twelfth grade, and complete the last stage of their K-12 education ([ASCA] “The Essential Role”, 2019). The nature of the work for high school counselors seems to be intimately connected to the developmental needs of high school students; where counselors create and/or implement programs that teach “knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to acquire in academic, career and social-emotional development, which serve as the foundation for future success” ([ASCA] “The Essential Role”, 2019). There is mention of counselor collaborations with teachers and parents and supporting school missions to help students with their academic advancement.

McKillip et al.’s (2012) literature review on the role of counselors in college access states that the increase of college-going efforts by K-12 educational institutions has been correlated with changes in the types of professions and the training and/or qualifications required for them. But there is still a large gap in assisting historically marginalized populations, such as low-income and first-generation students in both attending and completing or receiving a college degree (McKillip et al., 2012). Counselors play some role in offering students’ guidance, advice, or support for their postsecondary plans, and this can take place in different contexts, or “layers” which are the social context, the school context, the family context, and student context
McKillip et al. (2012), draw on Perna and Thomas’ (2008) conceptual model, and state:

Each of the four layers … influences the college-preparatory process of the student, including the students’ own attitudes and behaviors, leading a student towards or away from college readiness and access. The interaction between a school counselor and student reach across the school context and student internal contexts and are only a piece of the college preparatory process of the student. (p. 50)

Expectations for students to attend college has grown over the years, and these are connected to certain factors that McKillip et al. (2012) found:

may impact the school counselor’s role with college preparatory help in the school …: (a) organization of the counseling department within the school, (b) college preparation that is early and ongoing, (c) collaboration with other staff and teachers that allow school counselors to work to build and maintain this culture, and (d) resources to help in college preparatory activities. (p. 51)

The nature of the interactions between counselors and students when it comes to extending college-preparatory programs and efforts matters greatly. As mentioned earlier, there has been a history of tracking students into pathways while they are in the K-12 educational system and this has had major implications for the education or training, and professional opportunities once they graduate high school. One key literature that McKillip et al. (2012) cite is a study by Rosenbaum et al. (1996) which shows two extremes that may have formed or taken place regarding the role of counselors and their interactions with students. One is that around the time of the 1960’s and 1970’s when counselors were quite direct and “deciding” or gatekeeping when it came to assisting students for pursuing college (Rosenbaum et al., 1996). This, and sometime after, was
undoubtedly correlated to views around certain student populations and their capabilities, the type of education and performance students were demonstrating, certain qualities or characteristics of what they found would help or not help students while in college and related to the standards of college admissions (Rosenbaum et al., 1996).

However, Rosenbaum et al. (1996) found another extreme in their interviews with high school counselors at schools with student populations from white, Latino, and Black ethnicities and differing socioeconomic statuses. It seemed that regardless of the student realities, another extreme of encouraging college for all students had developed (Rosenbaum et al., 1996). Counselors from this study (Rosenbaum et al., 1996) self-reported that they don’t feel their role is to give advice, but to provide information and “minimize their own role in aiding students’ transition from high school, redefining their job as to have no influence on a student’s selection of a job or a college” (p. 263). Counselors stated they didn’t want to be the one to discourage students, or didn’t want to encounter parents pushing back; it has “limited counselors’ willingness to provide information about what students can reasonably expect from the future… [T]hey now avoid discouraging students with unrealistic college plans [with] … two strategies: they urge college for all, and they stress personal counseling” (Rosenbaum et al., 1996, p. 267). There were only two of 27 counselors interviewed who avoided these extremes by “providing concrete information about such things as college admission standards and job characteristics and offer alternatives to plans that are implausible” (Rosenbaum et al., 1996, p. 273); it was rare for counselors to provide career guidance outside of the two strategies.

A lack of concrete information and plausible opportunities still prevents students from gaining information and having a realistic understanding of what is required to advance in education and work after high school. Rosenbaum et al. (2016) state that:
If counselors are not giving students the information, they need about the requirements for completing college, then many students may be aimlessly drifting through high school and community colleges without any notion of what will ultimately be expected of them. In that case, gatekeeping has not ended; it has only been deferred, and many students will find themselves haplessly failing out of college without any forewarning. (pp. 277-278)

Counselors have a weighty task to be able to accurately provide information to students, considering their reality for their postsecondary advancement. There have been these extremes that exist for making decisions for students or on their behalf based on perceptions of what they are or aren’t capable of, and then providing the same kind of information to all the students without considering if that information is clear or presented in a way that can be understood by the individual student or specific student populations. One possibility for counselors to consider is that to promote the same future and same information for all students, might still make certain opportunities inaccessible for students. This can limit students learning about different possibilities of pathways to pursue, especially ones that might be of interest or aligned with their talents, because they only are hearing about the opportunities that are encouraged to the masses.

**Distributed Counseling**

Some points have been raised about the necessity of counselors to collaborate with others and one way that has emerged is through distributed counseling. Distributed counseling is an approach that has been growing over the years since the early 2000’s; it emphasizes being student focused by sharing the responsibilities of counselors to support students. The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) has been studying and promoting this approach, which has been more for small schools or small learning communities (SLC’s). Oakes (2014) states:
A grade level team of teachers and counselor share a cohort of students and take responsibility for their academic, social and emotional development and achievement. The team shares information and observations about students’ performance, behaviors, and issues to create a comprehensive approach to the whole student. The team then develops customized interventions to ensure students’ needs are being addressed academically, socially, and emotionally. It is this personalized approach along with a culture that encourages students to go to college that keeps students coming to school each day and achieving their goals. (para. 3)

This model has seven principles for academic success which include a “college preparatory curriculum for all students, distributed counseling responsibilities across the faculty, a dedicated team whose members work together to support their students, continuous organizational improvement [and] professional development, extended-day and -year learning opportunities, [and] parent involvement” (Allen et al., 2006). These team of individuals, which include teachers and counselors, follow certain components: a “team collaboration and integration of counseling strategies [,] … a dedicated counselor integrated into the team [,] … teachers as advisors [,] … student-support mechanisms [,] … consistent communication with parents [,] … [and] college preparation” (Allen et al., 2006, pp. 12-13). In this way, counselors are helping to support and extend, through teachers and other faculty, student academic, social-emotional, and college and career development.

This model isn’t meant to be a formula and seems to be for schools that allow working more intimately with students given a smaller student population. The focus on college preparation includes “a context-specific college-preparatory sequence of activities to ensure that students and families will be informed about what they need to do to be prepared for college”
(Allen et al., 2006, p. 23). All these efforts require a school to clearly define the purpose of their distributed counseling program, such as:

Monitoring and supporting students’ academic progress by the whole team; collectively supporting students’ progress and college preparation, involving the team, the student, and parents; preparing all students for college; developing student work habits and behaviors, such as studying, follow-through, organization, revision, and attendance; building a common school culture focused on student achievement; [and] developing relationships with students to promote their progress. (p. 28)

**Impact of COVID-19 Health Pandemic on Education and the Field of Counseling**

The global health pandemic has undeniably had an impact on the educational system in the United States and has exacerbated certain gaps that already existed. Since the growing establishment of the educational system in the United States, there has been a difference in the quality of education and resources provided to schools (Kincheloe, 1999), depending on the student populations being served. While all students, families, and schools have been impacted by the pandemic, student populations, communities, and educational institutions with larger percentages of lower socio-economic status, and Black and Latinx populations (Bansak & Starr, 2021) encountered additional stressors and difficulties.

**Pandemic and Students**

Some of impacts of the pandemic for students included increasing gaps in what they were learning, and changes or strains in the relationships between students and faculty; both of which have implications for helping students plan or prepare for their futures. Studies show that the impact of learning loss is greater for students of color and populations from lower socio-economic statuses than students who are white and from families of higher socio-economic...
status. Student achievement for students from historically marginalized racial/ethnic populations and lower socioeconomic status “were disproportionately impacted” (Lewis et al., 2021, p. 2) but this was highlighting the pre-existing inequalities that existed for these student populations. Some reasons that these inequalities continued to be exacerbated during distance learning included the quality of remote learning, technological and connection difficulties that impacted their ability to login and participate in class, and home environments that are less conducive to learning and studying, in addition to being isolated from friends/peers and having economic and health stress from loss of jobs and loved ones (Dorn et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2021). Research shows that across the board, many students have also struggled with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide, and their motivation and postsecondary plans have also been greatly impacted by the pandemic (Dorn et al., 2021).

The impact of school closures on learning loss reinforced and added to the existing achievement gaps between white students and those of black and Hispanic heritage, and higher and lower socioeconomic populations, as well as contributed toward higher dropout rates amongst students (Dorn et al., 2020). Longer periods of remote learning, compared to returning in person even part-time, meant that some students had longer periods of “lower-quality remote learning; they are generally stagnating at their current grade levels” and at times even not receiving any instruction at all” or even lead to students dropping out of high school (Dorn et al., 2020, pp. 2-3). These all have implications for the possibilities that students can pursue in the future, because of the gaps in their abilities to advance in their learning; with estimated losses of “three to four months of learning if [students] receive average remote instruction, seven to 11 months with lower-quality remote instruction, and 12 to 14 months if they do not receive any instruction at all” (Dorn et al., 2020, p. 3). And this loss was greater for low-income, black, and
Hispanic students because of the likelihood of having less conducive learning environments at home, resulting in “only 60 percent of low-income students… regularly logging into online instruction … [and] just 60 to 70 percent [of black and Hispanic students]…logging in regularly” (Dorn et al., 2020, pp. 4-5). The estimation of students falling behind at that time was 9.2 months for Hispanic students, 10.3 months for black students, and more than a year for low-income students. Factors like disruptions to the type of support students can get and relationships with peers and faculty, as well as stress from isolation, illness, and economic instability, all have adverse effects on motivation, performance, and engagement.

Being online also had an effect on the social-emotional and mental well-being of students, their families, and faculty. Huck and Zhang (2021) found that it was harder for teachers to communicate with students and their lack of preparation to teach remotely for such an extended period furthered the inequalities for their students. Teachers needed support and were not prepared or equipped to continue their work with students and families remotely, and while this is not talking about high school counselors, it does highlight the difficulties students, families, and institutional members are still recovering from during this pandemic. And moreover, it acknowledges and highlights that the inequalities that existed before the pandemic were further exacerbated and created even more of a gap with student populations given socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity.

Pincus et al. (2020) emphasize how the role of counselors would require a shift given the “social isolation and adverse childhood experiences, … concerns of suicidality, technology addiction, and school safety as schools attempt to transition to a state of normalcy” (p. 241), since counselors unlike some of the other faculty at schools, are trained to deal with crises. Their argument is more for counselors who have been trained from Council for Accreditation of
Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). As cited in Pincus et al. (2020), Jackson-Cherry and Erford (2018) state that counselors would then be required to play an integral role during this pandemic, given their responsibilities and training. And for collaborating and creating programs and/or systems for the school.

**Pandemic and Counselors**

Many studies have highlighted the impact of the global health pandemic on students and teachers, but fewer on what counselors have gone through. While there was some chaos in responding to the uncertainty of education and life during the beginning of the pandemic, counselors responded immediately “to help ensure that students and families had their basic needs met; the technology needed for online learning; and access to academic, mental health, and postsecondary services” (Strear et al., 2021, p. 4). Districts that had stronger counseling leadership saw more collaboration, support, and respect amongst counselors, and in some cases, counselors were given less that fell outside of their role in order to provide “their expertise in providing comprehensive services to students and families” (Strear et al., 2021, p. 1).

Savitz-Romer et al. (2021) carried out a study to look more closely at the experience of counselors during the pandemic. The study highlights the stress and toll the pandemic has had on students and their family’s mental health, as well “exacerbat[ing] existing inequalities in college access for first-generation, low-income, and minoritized students” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, p. 2). And counselors faced challenges with their work conditions even before the pandemic, such as “organizational constraints such as role ambiguity and an overemphasis on administrative responsibilities obstruct students from connecting with counseling support” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, p. 2). There are also some differences in counselor experiences depending on if their work is at a rural, urban, or suburban school because those in urban and rural settings deal with
additional “organizational and structural obstacles that affect their work” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, p. 2).

Savitz-Romer et al.’s (2021) study included around 1,000 counselors who completed online surveys and participated in focus groups. Counselors reported and/or shared that some of the challenges they experienced during the pandemic was due to educational leaders understandably giving more attention to the shift in instruction for students and teachers. Some implications were that counselors didn’t receive so much guidance, were not often asked to contribute toward school planning, “and their professional development needs went unmet. Together, these challenges left counselors feeling unsupported and challenged to fulfill their counseling roles. These findings align with previous research finding that school and district leaders do not understand counselors’ unique role” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, p. 12). In addition, the stress that counselors face, they experienced an “intensified form of role ambiguity […] their experiences revealed role conflict […] [and] experienced role overload from being assigned administrative or noncounseling duties outside the realm of what they perceived to be the responsibility of their jobs” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, p. 12).

Villares et al. (2022) emphasized the “importance of defining the school counselors’ roles and responsibilities and the extent to which school counselors were able to deliver their … services during the global pandemic” (p. 1). They began with looking at the ASCA model for comprehensive school counseling programs given that it is the common framework that provides guidance for what counselors should be and should not be focused on. Villares et al. (2022) explained that ASCA suggests “school counselors spend 80% of their time delivering direct and indirect services … to improve student achievement, attendance, and discipline” (p. 2). But there is role ambiguity, role conflict, and occupational stress that impacts their ability to effectively
perform their jobs. The ambiguity around their role increases the likelihood that they will carry out more non-counseling responsibilities and administrative duties; the role conflict comes for different expectations for what counselors should be doing and that can also conflict with what counselors are prepared or skilled to do; and the occupational stress arises from the inability to meet and cope with the demands of work (Villares et al., 2022).

**Summary and Gaps**

The literature shows that certain social, economic, political and philosophical movements and theories have impacted the historical changes within the educational system in the United States. At certain points the views around the purpose of education and work started to shift, and that was accompanied by waves of new student populations within the educational system and prejudicial views of these populations. The religious roots of a vocation emphasize a calling and responsibility for everyone to respond to their calling and contribute toward the betterment of their communities and society through their education and work. Instead, oppositional views shaped what became known as “vocational education” to track marginalized student populations into lower quality classes and lower paying jobs; thus, perpetuating the inequalities present in the United States.

Social movements in the mid-1900’s started to push back and efforts to detrack students and encourage the equitable opportunities for all also have left these same student populations with lower college completion rates and less preparation for all students to be assisted in their future careers. Studies and efforts to strengthen career and technical education from earlier on, especially in high school, are guided by needing to provide more rigorous programs and different pathways, to better prepare all students for their postsecondary aspirations, and to give attention to the coherence required for the skills, qualities, and knowledge for the pursuit of any career.
The role of school counselors was born out of a need to assist students and provide vocational guidance; to consider what their interests are, to learn about the opportunities before them and to be prepared to pursue these opportunities. However, there is still a gap in seeing how marginalized student populations, especially those who have interest in pursuing vocational careers (not just college as an end goal) are assisted by counselors. There has been little research carried out to understand the beliefs and perspectives around education and work amongst counselors and the influence from their institutional environment on these values, and to uncover how these underlying assumptions play a role in how counselors guide different student groups toward their postsecondary aspirations, especially given the big push for all to go to college over the years. This study is an attempt to explore some of these gaps.

**Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework aims to explore certain concepts that give insight to the researcher’s personal views and understandings pertaining to education, work, and how individuals are both influenced by and contribute toward their own development and the advancement of others. It touches on some underlying assumptions pertaining to the nature of human beings, their abilities, and how to assist people considering these assumptions. Another purpose that this conceptual framework serves is that it contributes toward the learning process this research took place within. Meaning, the concepts from this framework were considered and utilized in the reading of literature when identifying the importance of the topic, shaping the nature and aims of the methodology, and utilized in the collection and analysis of the data.

The research questions for this study are to understand what personal and institutionally influenced views and beliefs counselors hold, and additional influences that impact how they assist different student groups with their post-secondary goals and plans. There are several
influences to consider and how they come into play for counselors’ thoughts, actions, and interactions with students. This model is trying to explore the different interactions and influences that come into play with student and counselor interactions at school or in the community and how the nature of certain thoughts and actions can help people develop and/or nurture capacities to apply toward their future professional and educational pursuits.

Some of the work and concepts drawn upon include scholars within the disciplines of Philosophy, Psychology, and Economics, in addition to their contributions toward the field of Education. To begin, there are two scholars whose works were primarily drawn on for the conceptualization of this study: Farid-Arbab (2016) and Bronfenbrenner (1986). One underlying assumption which connects to Farid-Arbab’s (2016) work on moral empowerment and the conception of a vocation explored in the literature review, is that as individuals we have capacities that are latent within us. Farid-Arbab’s (2016) exploration of capacity in her analysis of a program in Latin America emphasizes that the role of education is to help nurture and develop these skills, attitudes, knowledge, and qualities. Consideration must be given around how to increasingly nurture and develop these capacities, regarding our life’s purpose. Farid-Arbab (2016) explores the concept of a twofold moral purpose as integral to the development of these capacities; that individual and collective transformation and advancement are interconnected. Our aim or purpose is to be of service, and how we excel and develop capacities is done with the goal of contributing toward the advancement of society.

Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2011) have both contributed considerable work toward the Capabilities Approach. While there are distinctions between capabilities and capacities, the notion of capabilities will be highlighted briefly for this framework as well. Nussbaum’s (2011) work complements, builds on, and is distinct from some of Sen’s (1985) work on this approach,
that was originally conceptualized to look at the quality of life in communities and countries. Kleist (n.d.) states that both Sen and Nussbaum highlight the role and relationships between function and capability to look at the opportunities that exist for an individual to have the real possibility of achieving something, but Nussbaum (2011) touches more on the powers that are within an individual and that the quality of life is related to being able to fully realize and express these powers within us. Keist (n.d.) also highlights that Nussbaum is focusing on measuring based on the fact that “each person should be treated as an end, worthy of respect, dignity and honor… [that] the capabilities is founded on the intuition that each person is worthy of a dignified life, and this intuition holds irrespective of one’s community” (para. 42).

While from an economic perspective, measures are correlated to economic growth and GDP (Sen, 1985), exploring one’s purpose, as mentioned in Farid-Arbab’s (2016) work, and worth or human dignity mentioned in Nussbaum’s (2011) touches on a higher meaning for our lives that we are striving for. A point that is raised in all these works are the conditions that enable persons to develop capabilities and capacities; it relates to the question of “What are people (and what is each person) actually able to do and to be?” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 14). This can be difficult or impossible for individuals, communities, and institutions to know the full potential of themselves and others, and challenging to ensure that there are opportunities to allow each person, community, and institution to develop the skills, qualities and knowledge that allow them to tap into and nurture the powers they possess and can apply toward their own lives, and the lives of others.

Since the individual and society are interconnected, there are different “arenas” or “spheres” where we can develop these abilities, we are influenced, and can be a source of influence. They are not separate spaces but can include and are not limited to individuals and the
community like family, friends, peers; institutions like school; and elements of culture and media. One note about “influences” is that they can be seen or referred to as forces: in some cases, there can be negative or positive forces that impact us and society, but similarly we have the ability to contribute toward these negative or positive forces or influences. Being able to contribute positively (or to draw on the positive forces) requires us to be ever mindful of our purpose and to continue to develop our capacities. Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) social ecology model is utilized to touch on the influences and relationships that affect students and their decisions and beliefs around school and work. It also applies to how counselors develop their beliefs and perspectives and the way they assist students. Bronfenbrenner (1986) explores how there are concentric circles with different systems that one interacts with and is influenced by.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1996) model also has been instrumental in the ecological model of professional school counseling (McMahaon, 2014), that looks at families, institutions, communities, and peers, that considers the schools as an institution or system within other systems (the community). It considers the interconnected, dynamism, balance and flexibility required and present in the systems, as well as the importance of having “culturally competent counselors” who seek to understand the values and realities, injustices and inequities that impact the students they serve (McMahaon, 2014). The spheres, systems, and/or contexts allow individuals to also develop capacities (skills, attitudes, knowledge, and qualities) through the interactions between the individual and collective, and reinforce certain conceptions of our purpose or take us further away from it. How we develop and nurture capacities must be done through these interactions and cannot take place in isolation from the world around us. As stated earlier, at the heart of this conceptual framework is the belief or assumption that everyone has a
purpose to serve and work toward the transformation of their community and society. This point is aligned with the concept of a vocation.

Considering these concepts while reading literature and having informal conversations with youth in the researcher’s community, raised questions around who or what some of these influences are for students. Some themes arose around the consistent encouragement of college pathways even though when speaking with students one would see that a “one-size fits all” model would not tap into understanding their talents and help them develop their capacities to serve others through their future professions. In some cases, college seemed to be viewed as an end goal and students seemed unclear about what to study, what career to pursue, and why. In questioning how students are thinking about their education and work and learning that the role of school counselors emerged to help students when teachers could no longer handle the “workload”, it became evident that research to understand the perspectives of counselors around education and work and how that translates to assisting students would be important. Though there are many factors, systems, or spheres (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) that are at play between students and the world around them, looking at high school counselors is one piece within the institution of education that would be helpful to better understand or unpack. Thus, the primary sample for this study will be counselors and different evidence sources will be constructed, utilized, and analyzed to understand counselor perspectives around education and work, how they assist students, and its comparison to some of these conceptions around a vocation and the development of a student or person’s capacities to contribute toward the transformation of society.

There are some considerations for the conditions or environment that allow or inhibit the abilities of counselors to develop certain capacities for their work, as well as how capabilities of
students are viewed and nurtured (or not nurtured). How counselors respond to students is likely not a formula and will require uncovering how counselors themselves are developing or demonstrating the capacities necessary to work with students considering how they assess students connected to the counselors’ personal beliefs. The diagram below is a visual representation of the conceptual framework for this study. It aims to demonstrate that within a population exist individuals (i.e., students and counselors), communities, and institutions (e.g., schools). There are forces at play which shape beliefs, assumptions, and the development of capacities across all three “groups” or protagonists. While the driving force is to understand how our young people or students (as the “individuals”) are being influenced or influencing the other spheres, counselors are also being influenced by certain forces and they too can be considered as “individuals” and representatives of the institution of education. The types of interactions or influences that take place between society and individuals have to do with our assumptions, beliefs, and experiences; the conditions and opportunities within or because of these interactions; and the development of capacities to assist with or because of the relationship between individuals and the collective.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework*
Universal Purpose/Goal:
Grow & develop to fulfill greater purpose
Contribute & have meaningful life

Assumptions, beliefs & experiences around education, work, & identity
(Research questions 1 & 2)

Interactions & development of counselor & student capacities
(Research questions 1, 2 & 3)

Individual

Family/Community

Institutions

Varied Socio-political Context

Society

Interact With & Influence Each Other

Individual(s)

Influence & (In)Form
Assumptions, beliefs, & experiences

Create
Conditions & opportunities

Nurture & Develop Capacities
Skills, attitudes, qualities & knowledge
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

In light of the literature explored in the previous chapter and the gaps identified, this study aims to explore the following research questions.

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?
   b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?

2. What is the impact of the institutional environment of the schools on counselors?
   a. How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?
   b. How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the shared or distributed responsibilities for counseling?

3. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. How do counselors assess who is college-bound, vocational bound, goes straight into the workforce, or pursues other post-secondary options?
   b. How do high counselors work with students who are pursuing vocational education or training in comparison to students who are college-bound?
   c. How do high school counselors work with students who don’t plan to pursue additional education/training or are unsure of their postsecondary plans?
d. How do counselors work with student populations from different demographic groups?

**Pilot and Exploratory Study**

Prior to this dissertation and pre-pandemic, an initial pilot study was conducted with one of the high schools in this research. The pilot study included three high school counselors, and aimed to understand how they assist different student groups with their postsecondary education and work aspirations, and how the counselors’ perspectives around education and work were connected to their efforts. Of these three counselors, two were at the high school and the third worked there before and was at the district level at the time of the study. Findings from this pilot study indicated that counselors aimed to assist students based on how they viewed the student groups and their needs, as well as if the counselor felt it fell under their responsibilities. Counselors expressed that how they conveyed information to students and the way they shared correlated to how they viewed the student, and the counselors’ personal experiences and beliefs around education and work (Tabrizi, 2020). They did feel that their responsibilities were to guide students, especially with their postsecondary aspirations, and were primarily concerned that the students knew what was required to graduate high school.

Counselors shared that there was some level of exploration around what the student values or is interested in and that the counselor tried to bridge what was expressed by the student with a career, which alluded to trying to inform students of options, knowing the steps of how to get there, and removing barriers (Tabrizi, 2020). Counselors shared views around education and work as connected to a larger purpose of contributing toward society or community and having opportunities to grow. However, there were still many questions around the specifics of how students who might be pursuing vocational studies and careers were assisted and it was still
unclear what the practical implications were of what it requires of counselors to help different student groups, based on the varying needs and demographics of the student populations.

Though informative, the findings just shared seemed to be more general. There was still much unknown about how counselors might assist specific student groups, such as students who are undocumented (if they are aware of this information), immigrant students (including first through third generation), students who were recent arrivals to the United States, developing English language learners (even if they have been “reclassified” as proficient), and students with known or possible disabilities. There also was not as much conversation about how students pursuing vocational pathways would be assisted, and where experiences might lay between assisting students with vocations in comparison to college. It was difficult to gain an understanding of how the counselors were developing in their own capacities to work with students based on the students’ specific needs and it was felt it would be beneficial to learn more details about counselors’ views pertaining to education and work, in comparison to the points raised around vocation, the evolving role of counselors, and college, career and technical education in the literature review.

This dissertation is not just a replication of the pilot study, but it took the findings and the gaps from the pilot study to make a few adjustments. One point is that it would still be helpful to interview counselors and learn more directly from them about their perspectives on the purpose of education and work, and the implications that has for the different student populations they serve for their postsecondary aspirations. Second, the dissertation, unlike the pilot study, was going to include student perspectives about what they understand and take from their interactions with counselors and observations of interactions between students and counselors, but this was not possible because of the health pandemic. And another area of focus emerged, which was to
look at the implications of the institutional environment on the views and responsibilities of counselors. This emerged because speaking with and interviewing students was not possible, and counselors were expressing directly and indirectly about their work based on the expectations of the schools and district around their professional responsibilities.

A last point is that the pandemic had undoubtedly impacted the counselors’ work and views, and that needed to be captured in this dissertation. The conditions of the health pandemic also naturally impacted the sample and design of this dissertation. This study was a multi-site case study within six high schools in a large district in southern California, with all identifiable information including county, district, schools, and persons replaced with pseudonyms. The subsequent sections touch on the reasoning for carrying out a qualitative study, specifically a multi-site case study, and more about the population and sample, and collection procedures, instruments, and mechanisms for data analysis.

**Multi-Site Case Study**

The decision to carry out a qualitative study versus employing quantitative methods is best highlighted by Maxwell (2005) and the intellectual goals he highlights. The research questions focus on the views and beliefs of counselors; the historical, contextual, and institutional influences on their ideologies; and how they practically assist students considering these forces and assumptions. These questions touch on trying to see how counselors are creating meaning, being mindful of the influences and contexts of their actions, as much as it requires the researcher to adapt the study to what is learned and looking at the process and mechanisms throughout the study (Maxwell, 2005).

A multi-site case study was chosen to go deeper into analyzing a bounded system (Merriam, 2009) and to gain a better understanding of the question around the type of support
different student groups receive (Yin, 2006). After the pilot study was carried, it was necessary to expand and see if there were similarities or differences across several schools in the same district. Case studies are a method that help “examine, in depth, a “case” within its “real-life” context” (Yin, 2006, p. 111). This method is useful since the research questions touch on trying to understand and explain what the perspectives of counselors are and how they assist students (Yin, 2006) and “addresses descriptive or explanatory questions and aims to produce a firsthand understanding of people and events” (Yin, 2006, p. 112). Choosing to carry out a multi-case study allowed for the possibility of understanding and uncovering any recurring or similar patterns amongst counselor beliefs and how they assist students.

Carrying out a case study required collecting and analyzing data simultaneously (Yin, 2006), which is discussed in the subsequent sections. This required responding to findings as they emerged and adjusting, when necessary, for example with the sample size. Even though a sample size was identified, there was flexibility to respond to the data collected and/or continuing to interview counselors until there was sufficient information to answer the research questions being explored.

**Population and Sample**

This study took place in a large school district in southern California. It is a predominantly urban school district with a total student population of 114,467 students (Data from California Department of Education, n.d). The district has 137 elementary schools, 29 middle schools, and 28 high schools. This multi-site case study has each high school as a case, with high school counselors as the population of focus, and the sample includes the specific counselors (and any collaborators or staff members that share their responsibilities) that were interviewed. The research utilized demographic and performance information from education
websites, such as Ed-Data, the California Department of Education, and NCES (Data from the California Department of Education, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). to identify schools that have varying performance or achievement levels in English and mathematics, as well as student populations who have historically populated vocational education pathways, such as English language learners and immigrant students. Consideration was also given toward traditional non-charter or charter schools that offer multiple pathways toward college and/or career technical education.

The following tables highlight some of the student demographics within the district.

**Table 1**

*State and District School Overview 2021-2022*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Number of Elementary Schools</th>
<th>Number of Middle Schools</th>
<th>Number of High Schools</th>
<th>Number of Charter Schools</th>
<th>CAASPP English Language Arts/Literacy Results (Std Met Level 3)</th>
<th>CAASPP Mathematics Results (Std Met Level 3)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Free and Reduced-Price Meals</th>
<th>English Learners</th>
<th>African American not Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian (not included: Filipino or Pacific Islander)</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>White not Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>5,892,240</td>
<td>5,861</td>
<td>1,209</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>1,288&lt;br&gt;26.56%&lt;br&gt;17.32%&lt;br&gt;83.60%&lt;br&gt;57.80%&lt;br&gt;19.10%&lt;br&gt;5.06%&lt;br&gt;9.53%&lt;br&gt;55.86%&lt;br&gt;21.05%</td>
<td>41&lt;br&gt;19.06%&lt;br&gt;85.9% for 2020-2021</td>
<td>55.90%&lt;br&gt;19.60%&lt;br&gt;10.20%&lt;br&gt;3.30%&lt;br&gt;46.50%&lt;br&gt;23.40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>114,467</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41&lt;br&gt;27.25%&lt;br&gt;19.06%&lt;br&gt;85.9% for 2020-2021</td>
<td>55.90%&lt;br&gt;19.60%&lt;br&gt;10.20%&lt;br&gt;3.30%&lt;br&gt;46.50%&lt;br&gt;23.40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total student population of the district includes 55.9% of students who are eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals, and 19.6% of students as English language learners. The graduation rate for the district, in 2020-2021, was 85.9%. The number of full-time counselors in the district was 119 (U.S. News, n.d.); middle schools and high schools often have multiple counselors, but the elementary schools sometimes have counselors that work across multiple sites (Taketa, 2021).

The study focused on high school counselors, and before addressing the considerations around which counselors to purposefully sample, some information will be shared about the reality of the specific high schools and student populations that the counselors were working at and with. Initially, the consideration for the population and sample of this study included...
students and one of the research questions was aimed at understanding their interpretation of the advice they receive from counselors around their postsecondary decisions. However, given the reality of the pandemic, this was not possible at the time of this study and would be beneficial to consider down the line. High schools with historically marginalized student populations, specifically those of lower socio-economic status, were considered because of their historical experiences in the (vocational) educational system. The counselors at these high schools were the focus or sample for this dissertation. Below are tables that breakdown some of the data about the schools of the counselors who accepted to participate in this study.

Table 2

Student Overview and Outcomes 2021-2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Charter or Non-Charter</th>
<th>CAASPP English Language Arts/Literacy Results (Std Met Level 3)</th>
<th>CAASPP Mathematics Results (Std Met Level 3)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Free and Reduced-Price Meals</th>
<th>English Learners</th>
<th>Student-Teacher Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairview</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>38.56%</td>
<td>21.19%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92.00%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>20.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfield</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>30.99%</td>
<td>6.16%</td>
<td>99.40%</td>
<td>71.10%</td>
<td>59.30%</td>
<td>21.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>14.71%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>61.1%*</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>19.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centerville</td>
<td>Non-Charter</td>
<td>37.71%</td>
<td>19.75%</td>
<td>89.60%</td>
<td>52.10%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Non-Charter</td>
<td>32.57%</td>
<td>8.39%</td>
<td>83.60%</td>
<td>83.30%</td>
<td>31.40%</td>
<td>26.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakfield</td>
<td>Non-Charter</td>
<td>26.27%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>75.80%</td>
<td>85.70%</td>
<td>19.60%</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Fairview, Westfield, and Clinton are all charter schools; with Fairview and Clinton serving students in sixth through twelfth grades. Clinton’s graduation rate was only available for the 2020-2021 school year.

To understand counselors’ beliefs and views, there was a purposeful sampling of high school counselors, with an aim of having at least two counselors from each school interviewed, given that the ratio of students to high school counselors is recommended to be 250 students to one counselor (National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) & American
School Counselor Association (ASCA), n.d.), though it is often much higher. At first, there was a focus or prioritization of counselors who work with eleventh and twelfth grade students, since this is primarily a time when students begin thinking about their post-secondary choices if they hadn’t done so already. However, there was a recognition that high school counseling units are structured in different ways, and oftentimes counselors work by an alphabetical system by last name versus being grade specific.

A second point around which counselors to focus on for this study, and that emerged over time, was that according to the ASCA, counselors have three domains or areas of development that they focus on: academic, social-emotional, and career (ASCA, “The School Counselor”, 2022). Though it would be understandable given the social-historical reality of the school and experiences of the counselors, they would not focus equally on each domain, it implies that at some level all counselors are thinking of or touching on college and career conversations. Lastly, it was clear that students would not be participating in this study and speaking to other faculty and/or support staff at these schools and/or the district would help to learn more about the collaboration and conversations that are extended around the three domains of counseling though they are not formally a high school guidance counselor. Below is a table about the counseling units from the six schools that had counselors and other faculty participate in this study.
### Table 3

School Counseling Units for 2021-2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Number of Counselors</th>
<th>Student - Main Counselor Ratio</th>
<th>Counselor Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairview</td>
<td>6-12th grade Charter</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>3 counselors at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>284.3</td>
<td>3 main counselors by last name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfield</td>
<td>9-12th grade Charter</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>3 counselors at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>199.3</td>
<td>1 main counselor 2 transition counselors for students with extra assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>6-12th grade Charter</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1 counselor at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1 main counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centerville</td>
<td>Non-charter high school</td>
<td>2,289</td>
<td>6 counselors at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>381.5</td>
<td>6 main counselors by last name, ASCA model area focus, and English learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Non-charter high school</td>
<td>2,326</td>
<td>5 counselors at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>465.2</td>
<td>5 main counselors by last name and for academies 1 intervention counselor for 9th grade students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakfield</td>
<td>Non-charter high school</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>4 counselors at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>383.3</td>
<td>3 main counselors by last name 1 intervention counselor for 9th grade students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All student-counselor ratios were calculated based on main counselors.*
Table 3 illustrates the differences in student enrollment between the charter and non-charter schools. Though the counseling units at the non-charter schools are larger, their student caseloads are still much larger than those of the counselors at the charter schools.

**Sample Size**

This study is aimed at understanding the views and beliefs that counselors form around education and work, and how that translates into assisting different high school student groups with their postsecondary aspirations. Both charter and non-charter high schools were considered for this study, and attention was given to identifying schools with similar student demographics in the district (particularly with race and ethnicity, and lower socio-economic status). These student populations reflect more of the historically marginalized peoples within the educational system in this country. This school district has neighborhood schools that most students attend, but it does allow for “school choice” with families being required to fill out applications to enter a lottery to attend the school of their liking. Schools were identified based on the percentage of their student populations who qualified free/reduced-priced meals, which reflects “Fall Census Day…data certified by local educational agencies as part of the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System” (“Free or reduced-price meal (student poverty) data, 2023). I looked at schools that were above the district percentage for free/reduced-priced meals. As shown, Centerville was the closest to the district percentage, with just over 50% of the student population qualifying for free-reduced-price meals. The aim was to have at least six schools, where counselors participate, in this study to have a representative sample of institutions with larger percentages of historically minority and socio-economically disadvantaged populations adequately represented.
I recognized that the number of counselors at each high school would depend on the size of the student population and the type of school (for example, charter, magnet, or non-charter). I assumed that most schools would have, at minimum, two counselors, given their enrollment numbers and the type of school counselors worked at and I aimed to interview at the very least two at each school. Having a sample of six high schools, with at least two counselors at each school would mean a minimum of 12 counselors would be interviewed. There was flexibility around the number of counselors interviewed since each counseling unit varies in relation to the total student population and resources. If needed, I would adjust the number of schools and counselors for this study and reach out to schools that have more diversity of socioeconomic statuses. The changes with the research questions do not include students and include others at the same school or district, that support the work or areas that counselors tend to, also meant that I would attempt to include as many individuals as I could connect with and interview outside of the 12 counselors. Based on these projects, 12 counselors participated in one-on-one interviews and four others participated as distributed counseling or support staff, resulting in 16 total participants. Tables 6 offers breakdown of participants by institutions.

**Collection Procedures, Instruments, and Mechanisms for Data Analysis**

All counselors were initially contacted via email and were informed of the purpose of the study, sent consent forms to ensure the privacy of what they share and any identifiable information, and to inform them that they have a choice to participate or withdraw at any point. There were several instruments and mechanisms utilized to carry out this study and for triangulating the findings: semi-structured interviews, analytical and reflective memos, document (website) analysis, and demographic surveys.
Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with counselors, faculty, and staff to ensure that the points that are desired are touched on, while allowing room for new points that are raised by the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These were one-on-one interviews that took place either in-person, over the phone, or via video conferencing based on the preferences of the participants and complied with health regulations at the time of the interview. Participants were informed and consented to the interviews being audio recorded and could stop or ask to not record any portion of the interview that they did not want transcribed. The interview protocol for counselors included questions written through the lens of the conceptual framework, considering what was understood from the literature reviews, and provided both structure and room for the participants to share, with the aims of the study in mind. The interview protocol is in Appendix F for this study.

There were questions for counselors around their views and perspectives around education and work and understanding how these beliefs formed and play a role in how they assist students, and questions to understand how they assist different student groups with their postsecondary aspirations, especially for students from differing demographics and pursuing options other than just college. Maxwell (2015) states that “The development of good interview questions… requires creativity and insight, rather than a mechanical conversion of the research questions into an interview guide… and depends fundamentally on how the interview questions… will actually work in practice” (p. 92). There was an effort to consider how the questions would be carried out and work when interviewing counselors, and to practice or pilot the questions on individuals to determine what questions would work well and which to adjust (Maxwell, 2015, p. 93). The questions asked of the counselors are the same in the protocol but
were asked in way to allow for open-ended responses (Turner, 2010), and in the one-on-one conversations, the purpose of speaking with participants was expressed, with a brief review of few points from their consent forms around confidentiality and what to generally expect of the interview (Turner, 2010).

The recruitment process for faculty and staff for distributed counseling was done through the network and suggestion of the counselors. And then either the counselor who was the point of contact, would inform the person that I would be contacting them, or they would send an email between their colleague and me to connect us. The initial contact I made was through email. The semi-structured interview protocol, which can be found in the appendix, had some questions that varied to learn more about the counselors’ specific role depending on the institution they serve. These participants were provided the same information about the purpose of the study, given similar consent forms with the option to participate through the mode of communication they preferred, were audio recorded for the purposes of transcription, and were informed that no identifiable information would be used in reference to this study.

Demographic Survey

After each interview was carried out, there was a demographic survey sent for participants to fill out. This was a link provided after the interviews, so that it would in no way impact participation. The survey was anonymous and meant to capture certain demographic information around counselors pertaining to their age, educational levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender, and socioeconomic status. What the counselors and I were unaware of, was that when using Google Forms for the surveys, a timestamp was included with each response once a counselor completed the survey, and this allowed me to connect survey responses to the
person who filled it out. The surveys, like the interviews, were voluntary and left up to the participants to accept and fill out all or any of the information they felt comfortable to provide.

**Memos and Document Analysis**

The use of memos throughout the study has been integral to the process of collecting and analyzing data. Maxwell (2005) states that the value of memos is dependent on the researchers “engag[ing] in serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique, rather than just mechanically recording events and thoughts. [And] … that you organize your memos … so that the observations and insights can easily be accessed for future examination” (p. 13). The memos are a data source that have an intimate relationship with coding; they hold a “reciprocal relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon” and assist the researcher to think “critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 58). The act of writing and carrying out the memos for this research was organized by date. Memos were written out throughout the process of creating the research design and tools; recruitment; after interviews with counselors; when any adjustments were made to the research; and with the analysis throughout the study. Memos also helped me to reflect on my positionality and its role in the research throughout the process of its conception until the conclusion of this study.

There was an aim to carry out document and policy analysis to identify and analyze policies relevant to vocational studies; to see how they have evolved over time to see the changes in education, and at school and district websites to compare language and ideologies. However, it was not plausible to locate any of these policies online and there was no response from district level staff to refer or offer additional information about policies that could be located and
analyzed for this study. Instead, this study focused on document analysis, particularly through the school and district websites, to compare and analyze the institutional environment with consideration to what counselors shared. The portion in the literature review which captured key educational movements, ideologies and policies are utilized for the website analysis, as well as analyzing the institutional environment or culture and dominant views around education and work that counselors may be influenced by. The analysis of the school websites and policies serve as forms of document analysis, reflecting the thinking and values that individuals and institutions hold at the time they are created and implemented.

Saldaña (2021) states that documents are socially produced and should be:

examined critically because they reflect the interests and perspectives of their authors’; these documents give insight to the beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies that the authors hold and/or are influenced by and “should be analyzed not just for the information they provide but also for the cultural representations they suggest and the embedded action they imply.” (p. 78)

The analysis of documents, which are specifically websites for this study, could be either skimming, reading, or interpreting what is provided and includes a combination of content and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) states that documents give context and background, allow “additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources” (pp. 30 – 31).

This study carried out the document analysis in different stages: initially when counselors were contacted, I skimmed through the school websites to find their contact information but also to get a quick “glimpse” of the school. Following the interviews, I went through each website in more detail to become more familiar with the content of the sites (or documents). And lastly,
after the process of transcribing and identifying codes from the interviews, I narrowed down on
the information I would “pull” or analyze from the websites. This included any direct or indirect
portions or links that discussed the school or district's mission or vision; information on work
and education; and counseling department websites if they were available. The process of the
document analysis was intimately connected to research questions around the institutional
environment and how different student groups are supported in their postsecondary aspirations.
The utilization of document analysis, combined with memos, semi-structured interviews, and
demographic information on schools and counselors all are to understand and uncover the
complexities of the underlying views and beliefs that counselors carry with them around
education and work. As stated in the conceptual framework, individuals (in this case counselors)
are not isolated or separate from the communities they are part of and serve, nor the institutions
they work for. They influence and are influenced by the ideologies and assumptions connected to
education and work, and there are many nuances to try to uncover, which requires the
triangulation of data to better capture and understand the complexities at work. These data
sources utilize coding methods to better understand the contributing factors toward the views that
counselors hold, and how it carries forward in their work with students.

Coding

Coding methods were employed for interviews and memos and informed the approach
toward the document analysis. Saldaña (2021) states that codes are employed in qualitative
analysis “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient,
 essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.
5). The approach for coding was to first go through all the transcripts to see if there were general
ideas or themes emerging, and to assess how best to proceed to review the interview transcripts
at least for a second and third analysis. This was connected to an initial coding process (Saldaña, 2021), where general notes and highlighting were done in the first reading of the transcripts, to see if uncover they any similarities, patterns, or differences and see if it might give insight to themes that could emerge. And then the transcripts were uploaded using the NVivo software to organize and properly capture selections to form themes and pull-out direct quotes.

The type of coding that informed the approaches of going through the transcripts for the second and third time, as well as the memos and websites for document analysis, were most closely related to In Vivo and Values coding. In Vivo coding was utilized to use the “actual language found” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137) and to have it reflect the voices of the counselors themselves. Values coding is “the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 368). And the use of Values coding was reflective of the aims of the study to understand the values and beliefs of counselors and the institutions they serve, and to capture counselors’ perspectives.

These forms and approaches toward coding were also used to analyze school and district websites. The coding for the websites was about the “interests and perspectives of their authors [,] ... [their] values and ideologies, either intended or not” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 78). The coding of the transcripts informed the process of going through the websites in more detail after the interviews and with consideration of the second and third research questions. Portions of the websites about mission and vision, education and work, and counseling were copied and pasted into a document. After reading through and highlighting and/or making notes, I created charts to compare these three areas first among the charter schools, then among the non-charter schools, and to capture the district website.
I analyzed by comparing the language and information across the different schools and district. And then I revisited what counselors had shared to compare it to what was presented to the non-charter on these institutions’ websites. The processes of coding interview transcripts, and websites, was slightly adjusted for coding the researcher’s memos. Coding the memos was to complement what was being found in the other data sources and it assisted with “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 58).

**Triangulation**

This study triangulates multiple data sources and combines methodologies as a primary strategy to increase the validity of the findings. “The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence … to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). It was necessary to have multiple data sources to “corroborate findings … and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). It helped to have a more complete picture and better understanding of counselors and the values and beliefs that they hold. There are a few strategies that researchers can employ to strengthen the credibility and validity of their research and findings. One of these includes having “multiple sources of data” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 244) to triangulate. Triangulation “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (Maxwell, 2015, pp. 93-94). This includes “comparing and cross-checking data-collected through observation at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with
different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people" (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 245). Additionally, there is a section on positionality to acknowledge how that might impact the study, and opportunities for peer review and examination throughout the process (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 259).

**Table 4**  
*Tools and Mechanisms for Data Collection and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments or Mechanisms for Data Analysis</th>
<th>Final Breakdown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one counselor interview</td>
<td>2 counselors (minimum) at each of 6 high schools</td>
<td>12 counselors and four interviews from distributed counseling staff and faculty. A total of 16 individuals were interviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any additional staff or faculty at school or district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-interview anonymous demographic surveys</td>
<td>Each counselor (2 minimum)</td>
<td>11 counselors responded and three of the four distributed counseling staff and faculty that were interviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any additional staff or faculty at school or district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials shared by counselors</td>
<td>Dependent on if each counselor has something to share</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos and reflections</td>
<td>Memos, during research design, implementation, and analysis (e.g., after interviews and throughout analysis of transcriptions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document website analysis</td>
<td>Look at the school and district websites, as well as ASCA website, to analyze the language and information they present to the public on their mission and vision, any portions that share more about the views and perspectives on education and work, and the roles and responsibilities of counselors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment and Adjustments Resulting from the Pandemic**

The process of recruitment occurred in multiple and simultaneous changes and played a role in adjusting the study. The recruitment took place during the 2021-2022 academic school
year, including the summer school session before the 2022-2023 school year began. At first, there were schools that were identified in the same school district that have similar demographics, as was shared in the previous sections about the population and sample. One point to note, is that 2021-2022 was the first year when the district was reopening the schools for the entire year since schools were closed for in-person instruction since they were closed in March of 2020 due to the global health pandemic. All recruitment efforts followed the health protocols at the time of the interviews and offered flexibility in meeting the time availability and mode of communication best fit for the counselors. This was to reduce any additional stress or pressure counselors may have experienced during the difficulty of transitioning back to in-person instruction.

Initially, the research questions necessitated interviewing counselors, observing their interactions with students, and having focus groups to gain student perspectives on the guidance they receive. Any conversation that took place had the option to occur in-person, over Zoom, or over the phone. The first effort for reaching out to schools was done by focusing on making connections to interview counselors. There were eight high schools that were contacted in October 2021 to give at least one month’s time to adjust going back to school. At first, principals were contacted via email about the study to explore possibilities for connecting with staff and students. Of those schools, only one principal responded and declined, and no other responses were received.

After careful consideration, the counselors at these same high schools were reached out to directly. Of these eight schools, three were charter schools and one of the other five were non-charter high schools has “schools within schools”; meaning that there is one main campus with smaller schools, each with a different focus on certain pathways such as art, engineering, or
health with different counselors at the different “schools” on the same site. Emails were sent to counselors at seven of the schools, to roughly 23 counselors, and continual efforts were made to set up interviews through follow up emails, phone calls or messages, and dropping off informational and consent forms at the schools for the counselors to be recruited. Once an initial contact was able to be made at a school, there was an effort to see if the counselors could help to connect to other counselors. The phases for recruitment can be found in Table 5 below. Most of the interviews for counselors and distributed counseling support staff took place over phone and/or video, and only two of the interviews took place in person.

Table 5

Recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1 - Fall 2021</th>
<th>Phase 2 - Fall 2021 to Summer 2022</th>
<th>Phase 3 - Spring to Summer 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacted 8 high school principals</td>
<td>Contacted 16 high schools total, roughly 63 counselors total</td>
<td>Contacted 8 individuals for support staff between 2 schools and the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response from 7 principals, 1 decline</td>
<td>12 counselors from 6 schools accepted</td>
<td>3 support staff from 2 different schools were accepted, and 1 from the district office accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the span of these interviews, it was clear that some of the questions and approaches would need to be altered. For example, conversing with counselors and/or trying to reach out to them shed light on the point that student recruitment would not be attainable during the school year. Most, if not all, campuses were considered “closed campuses”, so no one outside of the faculty and staff were allowed on site. This meant that focus groups could only take place over the phone or Zoom, or only contact with adults in the office was allowed. Counselors also expressed that when virtual learning was taking place, it wasn’t possible to connect with students.
when it wasn’t in-person. This point also made it seem that trying to connect with students over phone (if they had a phone accessible to them) or over Zoom, would not likely allow the opportunity to engage in a conversation with them. It was deemed best to focus on the research questions where conversations with counselors could take place instead of incorporating student perspectives within the same school year.

Another reality that started to emerge was the difficulty of reaching counselors to reach a sizable pool of at least 12 individuals at six schools, and that counselors had from the existing interviews touched on how the nature of their work draws on other faculty and staff. The study extended to try to include any faculty or staff that, though not formally serving as high school guidance counselors, shared in some of the responsibilities of assisting the work counselors were engaged in and having conversations with students around education and work. This raised the importance of looking at distributed counseling structures at the schools. Efforts were made to ask the counselors who were interviewed for suggestions of persons to reach out to, and some of the suggestions included teachers, mental health specialists/therapists, invention counselors, pupil advocates, and individuals at the district level. More high schools and counselors were contacted, with a total of 16 high schools and 63 counselors reached out via email, phone, and some in-person effort to recruit. One of these high schools and counselors were connected through a mutual contact. There were six high schools with twelve counselors interviewed, and four additional interviews to complement conversations with counselors (from two high schools, and one from the district level). All these schools and individuals worked within the same district jurisdiction.

Table 6

*Final Sample to Participate for 2021-2022 Study*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Number of Counselors Interviewed</th>
<th>Additional Persons Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairview</td>
<td>1 counselor</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westfield</td>
<td>2 counselors</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>1 counselor</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centerville</td>
<td>2 counselors</td>
<td>1 mental health therapist, 1 site tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>3 counselors</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakfield</td>
<td>3 counselors</td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1 program manager for CCTE department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 16 participants</td>
<td>12 counselors</td>
<td>4 additional persons, one of whom was from the district office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 provides an overview of the self-reported demographic reality of the counselors. It offers a picture of the number of years the counselors have been in the field, their ages, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. It is presented by “case.”

**Table 7**

*Participant Demographic Survey by Case*
Most of the counselors at the charter schools, compared to the non-charter schools, were newer to the field and younger. The average age of the counselors who responded to the survey was around 43 years old, and the average time of being in the field was almost 14 years. Most counselors reported that they primarily speak English, and a little more than half of the counselors who responded are female.
Limitations

Naturally, there are a few limitations that are present with this study. Firstly, this study took place during a historic time within the educational system and society in the United States. Interviews took place during, or shortly after, schools have been trying to accommodate virtual learning for all or most of their students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This naturally forced school staff and faculty to try to meet student needs in a way they might have not prepared for or been trained to do, so the context of their work is much different than what this study was first aimed at understanding. Secondly, given that the study took place when there were still health restrictions in place from this pandemic, the interviews mostly took place over phone and/or video versus in person. This might have affected the level of comfort between the interviewee and interviewer, as well as be exhausting if many of the counselors still spend so much time behind a computer or phone versus in person connection.

It was mentioned earlier that the research was adjusted given the pandemic and the focus groups with students were not able to take place. There are limitations with focus groups, but given that they did not occur, those points will not be explored in relation to this study. It was anticipated that the focus or nature of the work of counselors may be more reactive to the pandemic and much of the current focus at the time of the interview might be different than how they would normally view things or operate. There may be certain things that are specific to the current conditions and changes in their work that are newer considerations within the field that were not present before, or many things that are circumstantial but at the forefront of their minds and efforts. The study and questions had to somehow recognize the challenges counselors are facing in their current realities but be broad enough to allow them to think about the larger context of their work.
Some of the counselors were interviewed before the adjustments to the study were made. While interviews were still semi-structured, this could have had implications for what counselors shared, since edits to protocols were made after the adjustments were finalized. This meant, for example, that counselors interviewed earlier might not have been asked questions connected to their institutional environment like other counselors might have been asked later. These counselors still shared some points around their school and district environment, but it might have been less than after the adjusted research questions were formulated.

One last point is around the timing of data collection and analysis. This study took place during the 2021-2022 school year, but counselors were interviewed at different parts of the year. Some during the late fall or early winter months, and others at the end of the school year or during the summer school period. And additionally, the schools’ and district websites were analyzed between fall and winter of 2022, which is during the 2022-2023 academic year. The differences in the timing could have impacted what and how it was shared by the counselors: they could have emphasized certain views, perspectives, and experiences based on how close or far it was from transitioning back to in-person instruction or what they were focused on for their work during that time of the year. And if there was too little time that had passed, then there might have been more to share about the pandemic while having distance-learning compared to in-person instruction.

Analyzing the websites during a different school year also created the risk that the content of the material would have changed, and there would be differences in the counseling units and information they post. This might make it seem like there are differences or conflicting information or views being presented to the non-charter compared to what counselors shared. But the reality may be that it is a different school year, and there are changes that are not
captured through interviews given the different collection and analysis timelines. Lastly, many different sources are available to utilize regarding demographic and student outcome data for the schools. While I did my best to draw the most accurate sources, there are variations of what is reported about student populations and schools across websites, and I recognize that there will not be 100% accuracy in capturing and presenting quantitative data representing the schools.

**Positionality**

This portion on positionality includes a few points around the purpose of addressing positionality in research, after which I explore and convey my personal values and views which connect my position to the research carried out in this dissertation. Holmes (2020), building on Foote and Bartell (2011), Savin-Baden and Major (2013), and Rowe (2014) states that “positionality both describes an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (p. 1). There are ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as “assumptions about human nature and agency” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1) that people carry which have implications for how the research is thought of, carried out, analyzed, and presented.

“The identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process. Identities come into play via our perceptions, not only of others, but of the ways in which we expect others will perceive us” (Bourke, 2014, p.1). To address these assumptions and perceptions, which are connected to the experiences, beliefs and values individuals hold and are influenced by as social beings, researchers must engage in reflective and reflexive approaches throughout the process of their work (Holmes, 2020) to become aware of their ever-evolving positionality. This requires trying to understand the influences and identities that one holds and encounters that undoubtedly contribute toward their lens. In this study, I will
state and explore my positionality regarding the formation of the research questions, the populations I encounter directly and indirectly related to this work, and the assumptions, perceptions, and biases that I hold and reflected on throughout this dissertation.

When I was reflecting on my positionality, I considered Holmes (2020) and Chavez’s (2008) points around “insider-outsider” relationships and where I stand in relation to the participants in the study, the schools and district, and the student and community populations (in)directly connected to my dissertation work. Being part of a group or community allows for certain insights, connections, and perceived legitimacy, as well as difficulties “with recognizing patterns due to familiarity with community” (Chavez, 2008, p. 479). And being new or unfamiliar required me to become aware of any histories that existed that might impact perceptions and interactions with the persons, community, and/or institutions I interacted with.

Like many other researchers I am asking and exploring questions to understand the reality of the world better, while describing what I observe and learn. Throughout the process of this dissertation, I have tried to remind myself to see the participants as individuals who are striving, and/or have the potential, to contribute toward a better community or society through their profession. This is connected to the beliefs that latent within all individuals are qualities of a higher nature, such as generosity, trustworthiness, and humility. This also helped me to see a foundational similarity, or to have an “insider” relationship with the counselors interviewed: that whether we acknowledge or can see it, we all have a contribution to make and qualities and capacities to contribute in relation to this greater purpose.

The following have shaped my views, values, and assumptions that I needed to explore including my personal experiences as a student and individual growing up in the United States, consideration toward my middle-class socioeconomic status upbringing, and the disparities I
have seen with youth and young people in my present-day community. I was born and raised in the United States, in a suburban community, to immigrant parents who came to this country to pursue educational opportunities not available to them, as well as other human rights, because of religious persecution. Education was and still is of great value, but I have had to navigate differing values and perspectives around education: the more I went through school as a K-12 student, I thought education was associated with studying and getting good grades. But since then, I realized the quality of what is being taught, the understanding of foundational concepts and knowledge, and the qualities and attitudes of a learner are important and not always stressed.

I did begin my experience in the educational system “labeled” as an English language learner, but this was only because my home and first language were not English. My parents are fluent in English, and I learned the language quickly once I began school. The community I grew up in had a majority of white and Latinx populations, with fewer Asian and African American populations. My family, who immigrated from Iran, was one of few families in the nearby communities who were also from similar backgrounds. And the other families that I knew, were often from the same country and religion. I was unsure of where my race or ethnicity fit in comparison to the majority of white or Latinx populations; though I felt I connected with many people I came across; I wasn’t sure about what “box” I fit in and eventually found over time compared to other students. I did speak Persian, or Farsi, as a first language, but found that I lost the ability or connection the more I advanced through my education.

There weren’t many others outside of my family for most of my K-12 education to speak with and all the instruction at school was in English. I did not realize the implications of these experiences while I was a student, but I see that it has made me sensitive to the needs of immigrant and English language learner populations. I compare my experience as a second
generation immigrant to many of the first and second student immigrant populations in my current community. It also has influenced my desire to learn more about how these populations are thought of and worked with by school faculty and staff.

I found early on that my parents had a stronger understanding of certain things in academics than I was being offered in the educational system here in the United States, because of the training and education they had before coming here for college. I started to wonder why this was, and what that said about the quality of education and the type of knowledge being taught in schools here. I took mostly honors and advanced placement (AP) courses in high school and still found college to be a shock because there was so little I was actually prepared for to actually understand what was being taught. There was also the shock of thinking I knew what career I wanted to pursue and having to adjust that because of how little I knew. I recall having conversations with high school counselors about applying and going to college, and once taking career tests, but it never gave me more insight about the reality of what I would be faced with. My first experience with a high school counselor was when they met with my eighth-grade class to finalize classes before we attended school in the Fall. I was intimated by the style of communication of the counselor I was paired with and avoided them the rest of high school. Instead, I would visit and speak with another counselor who was the spouse of my student government teacher; she would help me with classes when I needed it and with the college application process.

It has taken me since my time in high school until more recently to figure out what I can study and pursue for work. Though I don’t directly interact with the students in this study, I need to address that they are a huge component of my drive for this research. The young people in my current community come from refugee, immigrant, English language learner, and lower socio-
economic status populations. They hold similar values around the importance of pursuing a quality education, and through my conversations with them I know they are just as unclear about and unprepared for the possibilities that exist with education and work, even when they share that they know what they want to study or do for work. And many like me, constantly change their minds about their future professions. I was however in a different position given how long my family has been in the United States and my parents’ experiences of attending postsecondary institutions, having a mastery of the English language that many of these students don’t have, and not having dealt with being a K-12 student during a global pandemic.

I am in the field of education and that helped me connect with the counselors, while trying to sincerely learn from them about their views, and their responsibilities. The memos carried out throughout the process helped me to try to identify if and how I am drawn toward or accepting of certain views versus others that counselors share. I tried to navigate this younger-older or learner-learned dynamic with some counselors depending on how I anticipated I would be viewed, as well as how the individual views themself. I don’t know many of the realities around the work of counselors and the culture of the schools within this study and will have to navigate it humbly; learning from the counselors, acknowledging that they might have certain perceptions of me either as a “researcher”, “academic”, or “graduate student.” I am mindful of how my own ideologies and beliefs regarding education and work are manifesting themselves regarding how I view the counselors, the questions I ask of them, and the way I analyze the information they provide.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, there have been aims since the mid-1800’s to create differences in the educational system based on views and/or prejudices pertaining to groups of people based on but not limited to factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. I
recognized that this area of research is aiming to uncover and understand how these same populations of students are assisted with their postsecondary aspirations, considering counselor beliefs around education and work and their perceptions of students. This can be a sensitive topic for those who are directly or indirectly contributing toward this study, and I recognize that I might not be aware of all those realities and feelings going into the study. I completed my K-12 education at a much earlier time than the students that the counselors are working with, and within a different sociopolitical context than many of the counselors I’m connecting with are working in. I continually reflected throughout this dissertation to enhance my capacity for listening and understanding the history of the student populations, schools, and counselors to contextualize their current experiences, to ensure that no patterns are reproduced or encouraged in my research an approach, and so I can to the best of my ability capture what was shared as was intended.
Chapter 4: Findings

This study is aimed at understanding how high school students are supported or worked with to pursue postsecondary pathways. The emphasis was to look at high school counselors from one of the largest school districts in Southern California and understand their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work, and to uncover what shapes their views. Additionally, there were questions around how the institutional environment might play a role in counselors’ beliefs and perspectives, as well as their ability to assist different groups of students. This chapter begins with an overview of the findings, sharing and describing the themes that emerged from the study in relation to the research questions that they uncover. It is followed by a multi-site case study and concludes with a summary and diagram to illustrate a few points about the themes, before proceeding to Chapter 5 to analyze the findings. The cases highlight the more general findings and themes from the study, while the summary goes into more detail about the points or subthemes that emerged within each theme.

Each school site, or case, includes background information to provide context about the school, and this information is triangulated from multiple data sources including the school websites and other educational or governmental websites, interviews, demographic surveys filled out form the participants, and memos. The Madison school district, for the non-charter schools, is presented as a separate “case” but more so, it offers a context for the institutional context and environment that impact the work of counselors. For this reason, it does follow the same format in its description through themes. This is because the charter schools operate independently and separately from the district, meaning they themselves oversee and tend to their governance and structure, employment, and student enrollment. Within each case, findings are shared to respond to the research questions around how students are assisted with their postsecondary aspirations,
by trying to understand the role that counselors’ personal beliefs and values play in shaping their thoughts and actions, as well as the role institutional influences have on counselors and their work. The impact of the global health pandemic is woven throughout the different themes in each case, as are the implications of counselors’ demographics on their views, perspectives, and the work with supporting students.

**Overview of Findings**

Three overarching themes emerged from this study from interviews, website and demographic analysis, and analytical memos, all in response to the research questions explored. The themes and the research questions they aim to answer are highlighted Table 8 below:

**Table 8**

*Overview of Research Study Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Corresponding Research Question(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Education and work  | Research question 1 (1, 1a, and 1b) on high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around education and work.  
Research question 3 (3, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d) about how counselors work with different student groups in light of their beliefs and perspectives. | This theme emphasizes the views counselors hold around education and work, which has been shaped by what they have experienced themselves as students in the American educational system, what they have encountered with their students, and draws comparisons with popular ideological movements. |
| Institutional influences | Research question 2 (2, 2a, and 2b) on the impact of institutional environment on counselors.  
Research question 3 (3, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d) about how counselors work with different student groups in light of their beliefs and perspectives. | This theme compares the experiences of counselors at charter and non-charter schools, including the implications for the mission or aims of the institutions; the relationship between counselors and who they work with and/or receive their “mandate” from; considers distributed counseling and resources; |
Each theme is explored within each case, but then after all the cases, there is a summary of the findings that goes into more details about the findings on the three themes. The views counselors hold around education and work are connected and touch on ideas they hold around the future and being an adult and that touches also on some tension at times between individual and collective ideologies. And there are beliefs around education and work that are connected to feeling that individual effort “makes or breaks” the possibilities students have for the future.

Some of the school counselors touch on the implications that resources have for student advancement. This ties into the second theme about institutional influences that counselors experience across the charter and non-charter schools.

Distributed counseling plays an integral role in how counselors at the charter and non-charter schools share and tend to their responsibilities of assisting students with their academic, social-emotional, and college and career goals. Schools who utilize and implement mentorship, academies and pathways, as well as institutional collaboration with other faculty like teachers, feel that their students receive support and as long as someone is assisting them, they feel reassured that their students are assisted. During the pandemic, outsourcing for mental health needs became a critical need and response to the impact that students faced being home and
transitioning back to in-person school. Caseloads and institutional aims varied between charter and non-charter schools.

Lastly, the third theme touched on how counselors assist students and the information they convey in light of how they viewed the students and families they served. Similarities and differences arose in deficit versus asset-based or culturally responsive approaches and views. In some instances, counselors described the population they served in terms of the cultural and linguistic characteristics, and in some cases highlighted similar or different values or experiences they had with parents. While all counselors expressed their desire to help students, some of the nuances from the pandemic, institutional structures, and personal views around the students and families played a role in how their desires materialized.

**Multi-Site Case Analysis**

The findings from this dissertation are presented through each case, or high school, that had participating counselors and faculty in this study. It also includes the school district for the non-charter schools as a separate case. The cases begin with the charter schools, Fairview, Westfield, and Clinton, before transitioning to share about the Madison school district and the non-charter schools that are represented in this study, which are Centerville, Jefferson and Oakfield. This was done because each charter school is its own “entity” compared to the non-charter schools which are under the district. The charter schools have different structures and missions or mandates than the non-charter schools. As stated earlier, each case provides a context by highlighting some background information about the school and counselors who participated in the study, which are triangulated from multiple data sources (e.g., school websites and other educational or governmental websites, interviews, and demographic surveys filled out by the participants, and memos). Each case has subheadings to explain the findings within each
theme, which undercovers what was found regarding the research questions for this study: education and work; institutional influences; and through whose eyes?: how counselors view students and families. And within each section, certain quotes are in bold and italicized to emphasize key points. Lastly, to protect the anonymity of the schools, the school websites will not be included as a full citation, because their links include the school names. All non-charter school websites can be found through the district website, and all charter school websites have personalized links outside of the district.

**Charter Schools**

**Fairview**

Fairview is a sixth through twelfth grade charter school with 853 students during the 2021-2022 academic year. Its mission is “to prepare low-income, first-generation students to succeed in college and career. [They] do this through a unique partnership with a world-class university, longer learning times, experiential internships, and a college mentorship program” (Fairview, n.d.). They had a 20 student to one teacher ratio, and of their total student population, 13.1% were classified as English learners and 92% qualified for free and reduced-price meals. According to their school profile, the ethnic demographics of the student population during the 2021-2022 school year comprised of: 55.63% Hispanic, 16.78% African American, 16.68% Asian, 7.39% multiethnic, 1.64% White, and 1.64% unknown (Fairview, n.d.). Fairview focused on ensuring their entire student population, which includes only those from lower socioeconomic and first-generation backgrounds, would apply for and advance to a university or college once they graduated from high school. At the time of the interview, Ms. Smith had been a newer counselor at Fairview, though she had worked in the field of counseling for several years at other schools.
**Education and Work**

Ms. Smith’s views around the purpose of education were that it is for preparing students for the next part of their life, and it helps raise up the next generation of professionals. She expressed that education enriches students’ minds and helps them build skills. This connected to her views around work, which overlapped with institutional views:

*We always say … your future career. And then, you know, like experience to lead up to that career, like, professional experience… I would say career… shows like, there's a passion behind it… I think it's also a perspective … [that] a job … [is] something you're doing for the short term, but [a career is] something [that requires] … an education to connect it to that a little bit long term and more of a passionate drive behind it.*

There is something about the longevity around the type of work one pursues, as well as the intention and joy or interest that Ms. Smith felt should be connected to how students are encouraged or directed to think about the possibilities for their futures. She referred to it as a “perspective” to distinguish a job and a career, and this also related to the idea of education as something to build abilities within students to carry out these possibilities.

**Institutional Influences**

During the 2021-2022 school year, Fairview had three main counselors who were organized to work with students across all grades, alphabetically, with a caseload of roughly 284 students per counselor. Their institutional website reported almost 100 percent of Fairview students pursued some form of higher education, and that they “do more than prepare our students for higher education. We provide them with the skills necessary to effect change in society and help transform communities here in [Madison] and throughout the world” (Fairview,
The preparation mentioned on the school website is what Ms. Smith referenced as being more rigorous, with expectations for all the students to apply for college. Though Ms. Smith mentioned that education contributes toward raising the future generation and the school website touched on students developing the ability to contribute toward transformation, she at the same time referred to getting into college as an end goal. This shaped a great deal of how counselors would support students, and their work with students was greatly framed by the school’s mission to get into college. Even the type of college that students apply to seems more narrowly focused on four-year colleges and/or universities as compared to community college.

Ms. Smith shared that counselors constantly have conversations with students about college, and help students find a school and career that is a good fit for them. The counseling website stated that their counseling unit “explore(s) resources and services related to college planning and career exploration. It is our goal to provide the guidance needed to help students make informed decisions about their future” (Fairview, n.d). The responsibility to assist students to make these decisions for their future seemed to be counselors’ primary responsibility but one that they shared with others because the structure of the school allowed for counselors to assist students through shared or distributed responsibilities around college preparation. The utilization of internships, volunteer opportunities, mentoring, and technological programs focused on personality and career assessments played an integral role in finding a right fit for students’ postsecondary education and career.

Ms. Smith conveyed that Fairview’s human resources and institutional structure were key to helping students meet the demands and accomplish the mission and vision of the school. She stated that:
Here at this school, it’s kind of like a mindset built… you kind of know what you want to do and you’re very confident in that. Because of the resources that are provided, because we have a really big mentorship programs like you’re interested … in like a different pathway, you can be matched with a mentor. And that mentor … you know definitely encourage(s) and inspire(s)… It’s just different here for that reason.

The mentorship aspect was emphasized as a main resource or way that counselors shared or distributed their responsibilities in helping students with their postsecondary aspirations. Mentors can come from the university that Fairview is associated with, as well as any adult that signs up to volunteer from the city. The mentorship program was linked to their school’s association with a major university and complimented and extended Ms. Smith’s work with students by having individuals work intimately with students to think through their interests and gain experience in the fields they would be interested in pursuing. Ms. Smith, worked at different schools through the state as well as others in Madison Unified, yet she very much promoted the aims of the school and distinguished their efforts from other institutions. The institutional culture and environment had a great impact on her vision for the students, as well as the nature of her work as a counselor at Fairview. She used pronouns like “we” and “us” and felt it was important to have students supported in any way possible to ensure that they advanced to a university or college after high school.

Fairview had a higher graduation credit requirement than the state to better prepare students for college, but the pandemic naturally impacted these efforts. Like other schools in Madison, Fairview lowered their requirements and expectations for students, and counseling was focused on tending to the whole child, meaning Ms. Smith and her colleagues offered a place for students to process and express what they were experiencing. She did state that the pandemic
effected students’ peer relationships and academic performance (especially with distance learning) and this likely was the least number of resources students were used to receiving at this school. Ms. Smith shared it was difficult for students to navigate being at home or isolated and that the trauma carried over into the school year as students transitioned back.

The counseling approach that Ms. Smith took to address the changes in structure and accountability, as well as relationships with students and their peers and staff was to be available to the students, and something she tried to convey to them was the importance of giving their best effort. If students were unable to perform well then, she shared, she tried to help work through and find the tools or refer them to the person who can assist them based on their needs (though she did not specify or give an example of who that could be). Counselors needed to then be able to understand both what the needs of the student were, but also be familiar with the resources available to connect the student to the best person (or organization or group) to make sure they received the support they require. The counselor is not necessarily the person to always offer that support directly, but they depend on others to share in the responsibility of assisting students, especially because of the pandemic, and typically for attaining postsecondary aspirations.

*Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families*

There are a few points to mention around how Ms. Smith perceived the students she worked with, which had implications for how she worked with them regarding their postsecondary aspirations. There was not much conversation about families, but her views of the student populations seemed to touch on: coming from first-generation and low-income populations; approaching counseling students as a whole person versus separating and focusing only on certain needs; the potential students possess and their abilities to meet higher
expectations than at other schools; and students as people experiencing trauma from the pandemic. The view of students in terms of educational background and socioeconomic status is one that seems to come with the working at Fairview given their mission and aims to work with only students from these populations, but it also means that seeing students through this lens emphasizes providing certain academic expectations, resources, and efforts to push for students to choose a path which focuses solely on college and university for what their future can be like. While interests or passions and having the right fit were raised in the conversation, it seems that those have to present themselves solely in a university or collegial setting.

These views relate to seeing the potential in students as well as recognizing the impact of the trauma they experienced from the pandemic. On one hand, Ms. Smith saw her students in their “wholeness”; acknowledged that assisting them with their postsecondary aspirations included helping them process and deal with the day-to-day difficulties they dealt with from the pandemic. She shared her work with students included being a listening ear to them and helping them find the tools to overcome what they’ve gone through or referring them to the right person or resource. This included helping them adjust given the changes in social interactions and relationships, as well as the accountability and structure they lacked while at home as opposed to in-person learning. While the pandemic shortly altered the expectations for students on behalf of the school and counselors, it seemed that helping students to “adjust” and transition meant being empathetic while going back to promoting or implementing the intended mission and rigor of the school. Lastly, viewing the population from their demographic background for Ms. Smith means thinking in terms of the “potential” they have to advance to college and contribute through their profession. This was coupled with seeing the importance of providing tools and resources, as well as viewing rigor and high expectations to assist students to “succeed.” Views around
success, given the mission and aims of the institution, seemed to be tied primarily to college
attendance.

**Westfield**

Westfield is a charter and middle college high school, meaning they have offer more
resources and college classes. Their students become more educated about health and healthcare
through:

- a world-class education in a safe and supportive environment. [It] is a home away from
  home, an open door, and a place of rigor and academia – where students earn a diploma
  that matters. We… set no limits on our potential to learn and grow. Here, we are all
  family… (Westfield, n.d.)

Unlike Fairview which focuses solely on college advancement, Westfield is a career technical
school; students carry out “rigorous, standards-based A-G (college prep) coursework, [with]
immediate application through community college courses in allied health, and real-world
application through internships” (Westfield, n.d.). The school website promotes vocational,
career and college preparation alongside each other so that students begin their career
development while in high school. Students can graduate with allied health certifications ready to
work in the field they studied and gain practical experience and skills while advancing
academically. Westfield’s website tried to convey that they prepare all students so that they can
secure employment within a clinical position, as well as being prepared to pursue opportunities
in their fields at “elite” universities.

During the 2021-2022 academic year, they had 593 students, with a three-person
counseling unit. The two counselors who participated in this study, Ms. Hermington and Ms.
Chandler were the transition counselors for students who required additional support under 504
or individualized education plans (IEP), though they still assisted all students; their caseloads were broken up by ninth and tenth grade, and eleventh and twelfth grade students with roughly 60 to 70 students each. Both counselors had been in the profession for about two years and at the school for one year. They were also close in age and reported being 28 and 29 years old during the time of the interview. Ms. Chandler reported being proficient in English and Spanish, while Ms. Hermington reported proficiency in just English. The student to teacher ratio was about 21 students per teacher or class. The student population included 59.3% as English learners and 71% as qualifying for free and reduced-price meals. The racial-ethnic demographics of the student population during the 2021-2022 school year was: 5.5% Asian, 18.4% Black, 68.4% Hispanic, and 3% white (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center of Education Statistics, n.d.).

Ms. Chandler and Ms. Hermington both had backgrounds in rehabilitation counseling, and their emphasis on helping students to have transitional plans and skills seemed to correlate to the school’s focus on students having employable capacities. They began their high school counseling professional experience during the pandemic, and at Westfield, and emphasized the importance of the nature of their relationships with the students as integral for their work. This was something that also was a challenge to do because of the pandemic during distance learning, but they worked on nurturing relationships as students transitioned back to school. Though they were relatively new counselors at Westfield, Ms. Chandler and Ms. Hermington expressed their support of their institution’s approach and aims, just as Ms. Smith did for Fairview. They emphasized the environment of the charter school they work at as a “home” and “safe place” for students, and highlighted the many educational and professional opportunities were available for their students similar to how the school website conveyed to the non-charter.
**Education and Work**

Ms. Chandler and Ms. Hermington spent a great deal of their efforts trying to prepare students for adulthood and/or life after high school, and this seemed to correlate to their responsibilities and conceptions around education and work that had formed from their personal experiences, the pandemic, and the aims of the institution they were at. Ms. Chandler shared that her experiences growing up greatly shaped her views around education; where she saw education as a way to leave the area she was growing up in or to get out of the situation she was in, and that there was a fear of being “unsuccessful in life.” So, for her, education was correlated to changing her circumstances and as an “outlet to independence.” But those views evolved; whereas before she felt she equated education with academic advancement, taking honors and AP courses, and being pushed or encouraged to apply to universities, but not being able to advance in the UC she was accepted to resulted in feeling like a failure.

Restarting at a community college, and reconsidering her interests and talents, led Ms. Chandler to pursue the field of counseling, and see that there is not only one path for education for all students; many different possibilities are available. In terms of Ms. Chandler’s views on the purpose of work, she expressed that it is a means of independence, stating that “I have a strong belief that that’s everyone’s goal; to maintain employment, and gain employment. Right? To be independent… just like you and me.” This independence includes the type of living situation, economic mobility, and family life that one wants to pursue. Ms. Chandler shared she had an experience where she was unable to do something she could once do before and relying on others or losing that independence was a great challenge for her. And this has played a role in helping students – to try to understand students and their hopes, aspirations, and values and assisting them to have clarity on what they will do after high school.
Ms. Hermington acknowledged that she was “product” of the educational system and really enjoyed school and the opportunities it offered her. But like Ms. Chandler, acknowledged it is less about promoting college or the same opportunities for all students and more about trying to help students pursue what they are interested in and passionate about, so that they can do something meaningful to them. Ms. Hermington mentioned that pursuing one’s passion can be a privilege and that she felt it was important in her role to provide equitable opportunities and exposure for students. Ms. Hermington tried to share the nuances that come with these two areas of life: that there is more to a person than their work, but the reality is that people spend much of their time at their jobs. Both counselors stressed really listening to students to try to unpack what they want and hope to achieve, and to reflect and adjust their approaches based on the student they are working with. And Ms. Chandler acknowledged that while her values (especially with education and work) might differ from students, she hopes they can see that has she good intentions with wanting to support them in their educational and professional pursuits.

Institutional Influences

Ms. Hermington and Ms. Chandler were the only transitional counselors interviewed in this study who were working specifically with student populations with disabilities, though they were available to all students. Their focus on this student population, as well as working at a charter school, had implications for a smaller caseload of students compared to the other counselors in this study. The counselors at Westfield also had a different structure of working by grade, not alphabetically, and not being bound physically by an office so that they were integrated throughout the school. Ms. Hermington and Ms. Chandler expressed that they were often in classrooms and in spaces throughout the school to be accessible and visible with students, and if they needed to have more private conversations then there are enough spaces to
move to speak with students. And that a main part of their work is connecting students with resources, or scaffolding support but they cannot solve students’ problems.

Ninth and tenth grade students received more exposure to possibilities with work and school, as well as building a student profile through their school portal for what they could pursue. It provided notes and progress for the counselors to be able to follow. It seemed then in eleventh and twelfth grade, students were supported to narrow down what they planned to do and were connected to the appropriate organizations, assisted to learn how to apply for work or have resumes to apply, and would get assistance with things like financial aid so that they could know how to execute their plans. Westfield had different pathways for students to pursue education, patient care, mental and behavioral health, or emergency response. All this had set curriculum at the school, some aspects of dual enrollment with local community colleges, and internships and experiences for students to have the opportunities to be certified for certain work in some fields by the time they graduate; this last point in particular separated them from some of the other charter and non-charter schools, and also distinguished their work as counselors. Ms. Hermington highlighted the importance of having “exposure” for the students so that they can pair that with understanding their values to explore what possibilities existed for students to pursue.

Ms. Hermington shared that as a counselor, her role was less concerned with performance and more about assisting students with the resources or services they required. She stated:

And I don't know, I think just being in a role, like, some of the first things I say too, is like, I don't care about your grades, I don't have to ask. Like I care about you as a person, and how you're doing and like school, your academic stuff as part of that, but like really not what I'm focusing on. So, I think that helps too, because a lot of our
students like if that is a struggle, they have like a recovery plan and recovery team. And there's a lot of people that are kind of checking in and poking about that specifically and I get to be like, Okay, I can't sign your work permit till we're passing our classes, but like, we don't talk about that because other people are talking with you about that. So, I think that helps too not having like, the same like pretty typical academic relationship. But then also not being the like mental health counselor, right? Like we have other services. So, I'm, a lot of times I think, like, of myself as like the connector between different things. Like it's usually me that I can't fix the problem, but I can, like, connect you with who can or whatever it is.

This seemed possible because of the way counselors shared their responsibilities or had them distributed with others. The counselors worked with teams of people, especially because they supported students with IEPs who have support teams with individuals such as parents, teachers, and mental health professionals (which increased because of the pandemic). But the structure of the school also supported the transition counselors in their work because it was based on students being assisted to gain exposure to move into their future employment (and future lives) more seamlessly. Westfield is not only a charter school but also a middle college high school; meaning that they not only have opportunities for students to take college courses like many of the non-charter schools, but that they have those college courses offered on their school campus (Middle College High School, 2009). This is another level of support or resource, and exposure for all their students, as well as a distribution of responsibility for counselors. One last component of the formal structure at Westfield is that Ms. Chandler expressed on top of being available to assist all students (not just those with IEP’s) that counselors, and or faculty work to
mentor students and that she worked with 10 mentees. The nature of these relationships was not explored, but just stated that there is an additional layer of support and guidance.

Though not a formal part of the structure and distribution of responsibilities, the counselors seemed to echo some of the language or what was conveyed on the Westfield school website; the importance of relationships and being like a family to the students. The counselors shared how the pandemic made it difficult to build relationships with students they never met, and how they tried to approach their work with understanding and incorporating the values of their students. But it was not possible to do this online and that the transition back was a process of building trust with the students. Ms. Chandler shared:

> And when you don't have that relationship, I feel like that, especially for kids… that trust when it's not there, then the information is not there. And when the information is not there, you miss that part of that person that they need to explore more, that they need to figure out more. And of course, kids don't know themselves, or they may not understand themselves at a certain age, or…maybe they do and maybe they just need that extra support.

Counselors needed to understand students so they try to be encouraging and exploratory; that way counselors can have clarity on how to better assist them. Ms. Chandler shared that she wanted to know that the students understand what they are choosing, and clear about what they wanted to do. Ms. Hermington added the balance of trying to understand students’ motivations and values, while trying not to come across as her sole function being to get their students jobs. Ms. Chandler and Ms. Hermington seemed to try to scaffold the process with the students – that the counselors showed the steps and where to find resources, did it together with the students, but ultimately students needed to learn how to do it themselves.
Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families

The counselors at Westfield saw their school representing a diverse student population, reflecting many different populations from the Clinton neighborhood. There was an emphasis on the school and staff being like a family and a safe place for students. Ms. Chandler sometimes recognized that she had different values than her students, but this recognition helped it to not become a barrier between her and the students. There were a few descriptions or points raised about the students and the implications for how counselors would assist them: as transitional counselors working with students by grade-level and because of their IEP’s; students struggling with relationships and technology because of the pandemic; student populations coming from diverse backgrounds and wanting a safe place; and that there are many interests that students might want to pursue to live independent lives. Ms. Chandler and Ms. Hermington approached some of their work with students to help them with the transition for after high school because their students have IEP’s, but they don’t approach their work in a way to have these students separated from the rest of the population.

They don’t want their students to be isolated because much of the information they share about postsecondary options might be of interest to other students too. They are present in the classrooms and accessible to everyone, including those outside of their caseload, and they utilize the school structure to make sure they maximize exposure to different pathway opportunities, while offering the help they need to create a plan, identify resources, and scaffold for students to have equitable and just opportunities and to develop the skills they need to be “independent” and “successful.” Ms. Hermington recognized that many of the faculty are limited to pursuing similar and multiple degrees compared to the pathways some students might be interested in and views it as her role to help the students learn more about the opportunities they can pursue.
One observation is that the Westfield website and the counselors touch on the “diversity” of the populations, and the importance of school being like a home or family with a safe environment for the students. Some of this for the counselors seemed to be connected to the struggles dealt with because of the pandemic, but there was not as much explored about its connection to the perceptions of the populations that Westfield serves. Ms. Chandler specifically mentioned technology and habits or relationships as areas that were difficult for many, including herself, to address while getting back to being person. Ms. Chandler emphasized the importance of building trust with students to have a relationship to work with them because both counselors identified that young people are only open when they trust and have a relationship with the person they were talking with. The counselors needed this type of relationship to be able to talk through and identify possibilities for students’ future.

**Clinton**

Clinton is a charter school that served 123 students in grades six through 12 during the 2021 to 2022 school year. They are similar to Fairview in having middle and high school students, and similar to Westfield regarding the neighborhood or community they are situated in. Clinton had the smallest student population of total students of all the schools represented in this study. In 2021-2022, their student population had 8% English learners and all students qualified for free and reduced-priced meals and roughly 9% were Asian, 31% Black, 41% Hispanic, and 18% White (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center of Education Statistics, n.d.). Their website stated their mission and vision:

- is to provide an excellent neighborhood based and college preparatory education for the middle and high school students who reside in [Clinton]. Our vision is to see our
graduates succeed in the college or university of their choice and become community leaders who work for positive change in our world. (Clinton, n.d.)

Their student to teacher ratio was 14.47 to one and they have had just one school counselor. The school website emphasized college preparation and being neighborhood based school, as well as offering rigorous academic courses and many clubs for students to choose from in order to develop the “unique talents, dreams and interests” of their students.

The school has had only one school counselor, Ms. Burlington, since they opened in 2012. Ms. Burlington reported that she identifies as white female, who is proficient in English. She was at Clinton for three out of the four years of working in the field of counseling. Ms. Burlington’s age was 27 at the time of the interview (comparable to the Westfield counselors’ ages and years of experience in the field).

Education and Work

Ms. Burlington grappled with her views around education and work because of the reality of the lives of her students and her own educational and professional experiences. Having been a student athlete, her motivation for postsecondary education was minimal and dependent on advancing in her sport. She was able to pursue counseling because she knew working with kids was an interest, and she was encouraged by faculty she interned with while student-teaching in college. There are some nuances that Ms. Burlington was navigating in her views around education and work; some of which are related to her personal experiences in school, motivation, and trying to figure out what to do for work; and others had to do with the different realities of the students she assists. When asked about her views around education and work she stated that it can be punitive and not caring, but her wish would be that schools have a restorative justice approach to build more of a community “because home isn’t always that and school isn’t
always that.” What she tried to convey to students is that what they are currently learning isn’t always clearly applicable; that education is not just academic content and includes learning life skills; and that being exposed to different classes helps the students to figure out what they enjoy and can pursue in the future.

At the same time, she expressed that she feels work is something that one should do because they are passionate about it and not only consider the money they will get out of their career. This dichotomy of education being punitive for some populations and the privilege that comes from considering “passion” over the practically of income made its way into some of the views she held about the students and families she served, which is explored in the third theme. There was an aspect of education that she saw as providing opportunities that she felt she experienced by pursuing postsecondary education, coupled with identifying one’s interests and learning about oneself. However, the views around pursuing careers out of passion compared to working solely for income are aspects of life that she seemed to not have to choose between, compared to the students she served who might not have been in the same position to have the same luxury as her. Especially when she shared that there are people who don’t have as many resources and money within education.

The example she gave of choosing passion out of practically was with her husband, who graduated with a computer science degree from a prestigious private research university and chose instead to make beer. However, there were not examples provided where the students she served could be in the same position to attend such a school and chose to pursue such a career over having a reliable income. Practically, Ms. Burlington tried to convey the reality of life for students who are trying to make certain decisions about their postsecondary education and work; she tried to show how her college experience could have been so different if she approached
education in a different way. And how her efforts led her to discover her path toward being a
counselor.

_Institutional Influences_

Ms. Burlington was in a unique position at Westfield compared to the other counselors in this study because she is the first and only counselor at her school and has been the one to create the counseling program. The head of the school allowed her a lot of autonomy to create the counseling program at Clinton. She began with looking at policies to put into place (e.g., academic policy, graduation requirement policy, credit checking). While Ms. Burlington still does assist with applications and financial aid, she shares or has distributed responsibilities to help students. One way she has done this is through teachers helping with some of the college and career support (e.g., the school being an AVID school means that teachers work with them during homeroom for college and career efforts and provide information), and another was bringing restorative justice practices to help the teachers with the way they discipline the students throughout the school.

Ms. Burlington worked with teachers quite a bit, and the fact that their school is an AVID school (AVID, n.d.), has allowed teachers to talk with students about their passions and provide information on college and career and take them on college tours. If students ever receive false information from others, such as the internet or social media, Ms. Burlington tries to “myth bust” and provide them with a more accurate view. Ms. Burlington shared that there is a lot of pressure to focus on the college/career domain, but that mental health should be a bigger aspect of helping students. During the pandemic, Ms. Burlington was not able to reach students in the same way; students were not responsive online and much of her work became about credit recovery and administrative. The elements of mental and social-emotional well-being were greatly impacted.
because of the pandemic, and when students were not communicating through online platforms it made it hard to assess and help them.

Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families

The views that a counselor holds around their students and the community they serve can be quite complex and imply how they might convey information or the type of information they decide to convey to students. In Ms. Burlington’s case, she seemed to uphold some of Clinton’s mission on their website to encourage collegiate options and expressed that many students pursue community college to stay at home. And this might relate to students coming from cultures of more collectivist thinking and operating. There are some views of students in terms of what requirements they meet and what paths they are helped to pursue: if they get their diploma and complete their A-G requirements then college and university are encouraged, but if they graduate with state diploma and are unable to complete certain required courses then they can attend community colleges. Or students with certificates of completion who have a disability and are unable to advance past a certain level might also be encouraged to attend community college, but they are unable to receive the same financial assistance that other students could receive. And sometimes then trade opportunities at the community colleges through continuing education are encouraged.

It seemed at one level, Ms. Burlington tried to differentiate how to help different students based on how she viewed academic performance and ability. This meant differentiating which students would be able to pursue certain educational postsecondary, but the examples she gave of helping specific students were those who either were not progressing academically and made a comeback or turn things around with their effort, or those who she did not discourage from taking classes that seemed beyond their language abilities to pass. In these instances, it was
showing examples of students whom most people might not assume would be able to overcome academic challenges because of language, motivation, or academic ability but surprised others with their progress.

One last view of students and the community seemed to be regarding the differences that Ms. Burlington perceived regarding the families; she stated:

*Our population is different because we have zero parent involvement because of language and different values than Americans have... Times have changed, and a lot of parents want their children to start working. I don’t think they understand what those diplomas mean for jobs and options. It’s hard to encourage kids when their parents aren’t encouraging them. Also, in a lot of cultures, marriage comes sooner than in our culture. A lot of them want to be married in high school and in a lot of countries females don’t get an education so families expect their children to be mothers and do chores, but females can have an education too and have passions and make money. It’s just a different cultural aspect for students and shifting their mind to education and ... I don’t think they know the long-term effects of being here.*

There are many points that could be raised about Ms. Burlington’s view about the community and the student populations and the implications for how she assists students with their postsecondary plans. But some to highlight are that there is some tension she experienced with her personal views and values around education and feeling that they differ greatly with the students’ families.

There are many complexities that arise for a counselor if they feel that they are promoting different views or values; that they are not collaborators with parents and the community but instead must be the main resource students will depend on to get the “correct” information about
the importance and/or correlation between education and economic advancement. Especially in communities with families from lower socioeconomic statuses than others in the city. Again, the point around passion and money are raised, which seemed to be heavily conveyed to students, and this seems to contradict views around families emphasizing working possibly because of financial implications especially after the pandemic. A question could be posed about views around parental involvement and how much Ms. Burlington does interface with the community, because of language (especially within an institution claiming to be a neighborhood school).

**Madison (District) and Non-Charter Schools**

The Madison Unified School District is one of the largest in southern California. It tends to some 114,467 students and has roughly 28 high schools and 41 charter schools. Of the total student population, about 20% are English language learners, and roughly 56% are eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals. The student population in 2021 to 2022 comprised of roughly 56% Hispanic or Latino, 21% White, 10% Asian, and 5% African American. The district had some 119 counselors across all their schools (U.S. News, n.d.). The district’s mission is that their students will graduate with “skills, motivation, curiosity and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow” (Madison Unified School District, n.d.). This emphasizes the importance of having students develop certain attitudes and qualities to pursue future educational and professional opportunities that contribute toward society, and that students will advance to college after high school.

The district website also conveyed its adoption of certain policies like the common core and the A-G graduation requirements; the latter of which is present on all the different high school websites. There is grade specific information for being accepted to state universities, and each grade (sixth through twelfth) highlights courses and tests to take to get into university
The information on college, career and technical education emphasizes four components: “rigorous academics, high quality CTE sequence of courses, work-based learning experiences, and student supports” (Madison Unified School District, n.d.). Lastly, counseling information through the district website outlined their responsibilities and role to help students with transitions to be ready for “character, college, and career” (Madison Unified School District, n.d.). It touches on counselors creating and implementing programs (focused on the three ASCA domains) that offer interventions and tend to high school graduation requirements (Madison Unified School District, n.d.).

**Figure 5**

*District Counseling Website*

School counselors will:

- Design and implement a comprehensive school counseling program based on the National Standards for School Counseling Programs and the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model

- Ensure that students will receive guidance curriculum in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. Provide intervention services for students experiencing academic and personal/social barriers to learning. Provide guidance and information to students and families to ensure success in student attendance, behavior, and graduation, and prevention of drug use and violence.

- Provide resources to staff to ensure that each school counseling center is a family-friendly environment.

- Ensure that students have access to a safe school climate necessary for academic and social/emotional growth.

The district website indicated that they follow and adhere to the ASCA National model, which would suggest that counselors are able to use that as a common framework to guide their work. This would be in addition to fulfilling their responsibilities to the school site they serve, and the district. Their responsibilities required them to create a comprehensive counseling program to provide resources and information, guidance, and create a climate for students to grow academically and socially-emotionally. One individual was interviewed from the district for this study. Mr. Wright worked for the district under the Office of College, Career and
Technical Education (CCTE). Their department served over 20,000 students, with roughly 15,000 high school students and 5,000 middle school students participating in their programs.

Mr. Wright stated that their department’s goal was to “prepare students for college and career… because we know that college is not the end result… the end result is a career” (Mr. Wright, personal communication, July 18, 2022). The nature of their work supported the college and career domain that counselors focus so heavily on, and an overview of their website is included in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

*Office of College, Career and Technical Education (CCTE) Website*

Welcome to the Office of College, Career and Technical Education (CCTE). We provide high quality, college and career-pathway programs that enrich and engage students with state-of-the-art, dynamic and challenging courses. CCTE Pathway Programs include four core components: rigorous academics, high quality CTE sequence of courses, work-based learning experiences, and student supports.

CCTE pathways integrate core standards, pathway standards, and industry competencies with real-world applications to prepare students for success.

Visit our CCTE website, for information on pathways at each high school, middle school courses, student opportunities and more.

[CTE Model Curriculum Standards](#) - Introduction, Anchor Standards and Standards for Career Ready Practice

Looking for job opportunities for students? [Visit the job board](#)

Their department website includes curriculum standards, and competencies, as well as grants and funding to support and carry out their programs. Mr. Wright expressed that while all students will be able to graduate with the A-G requirements to have the opportunity to attend a four-year college, they recognize that not every student has the desire to pursue that route. They also know that there is a high demand for high-skill high-waged jobs through the trades that
require specialized training. He expressed the many benefits for these pathways including that students get trained and paid right away so they don’t go into debt, that they complete their programs in a shorter time and have great benefits. Their department then is responsible for or has a goal of helping prepare students with their postsecondary careers.

Part of their department’s efforts included offering programs, academics, and opportunities for students through the courses offered at the schools; college credits they can receive or certifications they can complete while in high school; the pathways and academies; and work-based opportunities to learn through internships. Mr. Wright stressed that their “ultimate goal is to have our students have, you know, livable meaningful wages.” Part of assisting or preparing students included what Mr. Wright calls the “essential skills” that students need to develop to be successful in the workplace (e.g., communication skills, a good attitude, professionalism, being on time, having a willingness to learn) because these are more sought after by employers than academic performance. Mr. Wright viewed their work in terms of providing opportunities for students in an urban district and expressed that what students experienced is not an achievement gap but an opportunities gap, so their department was responsible to provide programs, pathways, and experiences to assist students. This emphasis implied that students require ample support throughout their academic career, and gaps were less a reflection of the capability or performance of the individual but a reflection of the resources available to them.

Their department worked with industry partners, communities and colleges, and tended to collaboration and support for school staff and faculty to carry out college and career technical education programs. This required relationships with principals to execute their visions for the students and schools, recruiting and hiring CTE teachers, and working with teachers and
counselors. Their department included a counselor to work with the (high school) counselors at the different sites. Mr. Wright shared that their department hosted counselor conferences to talk about the programs and information they hope will be conveyed to students. But Mr. Wright expressed that it has been a challenge having higher turnover with counselors the previous two to three years, and that “counselors can either make or break your programs.” Mr. Wright expressed:

One of our focuses [these]… next coming years [is] we've got to do more CTE counselor conferences, because we have a lot of new counselors that don't necessarily understand our programs right. And maybe they give kids the wrong information, right? So it's really, really important to have our counselors on our side and know our programs, and they can speak the language… [Counselors] can make or break our program; it's really important to communicate [and] I think that's one of the reasons why we brought these two counselors on board, which we have had in the past and just think of that additional layer of support, working with school sites and then working and being available to work with students to as well.

This excerpt emphasizes that their department reflected on how to address extending the CTE knowledge to newer counselors who aren’t aware of or don’t understand the programs offered by their department and throughout the district. The department wanted to decrease the possibility of students receiving incorrect information and/or not receiving any information that they should have. These difficulties around counselor support, training, and sharing the appropriate information might have been exacerbated during the pandemic. Other challenges that were to figure out how to teach very hands-on courses online, and what the students have encountered. Mr. Wright expressed that students were addicted to their cell phones, a willingness
to try had decreased, and lack of motivation was a major issue. He recognized that home life for many students was challenging including living circumstances and distractions. Mr. Wright shared that a lot of these challenges are social-emotional.

**Centerville**

Centerville is one of the non-charter high schools in the Madison district with a student population of 2,289 during the 2021-2022 school year. These students are divided amongst 6 counselors, which averages to about 381 or 382 per counselor. The student to teacher ratio was about 26 students per teacher, and of the total population in 2021-2022, 24% were English learners and 52% qualified for free and reduced-price meals. Of the total student population in 2021-2022, roughly 46% were reported as Asian, 4% Black, 24% Hispanic, and 11% white (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center of Education Statistics, n.d.). A few points are highlighted on their institutional website, some which utilize language reflecting the district’s mission for students to graduate with “skills, motivation, curiosity and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow” (Centerville, n.d.).

Their institutional website claimed to prepare students for their postsecondary education and work, as well as service to the community, emphasizing: the type of rigor and measures they have academically for their students; the expectations they hold; the extracurricular options that are offered; and the type of courses (including CCTE, honors and AP) they provide. Centerville’s website highlights that what they offer students in terms of programs and classes, resulted in a 98% graduation rate with 89% of those individuals who continue to college and university. They also emphasized the kind of capabilities and attitudes they strive for students to have for the type
of people they can become: being helpful, respectful, ethical, motivated, analytical, and contributors toward their school and community.

Four individuals were interviewed from Centerville; three of which are employees and worked for the school site and one was a mental health therapist from an organization that was serving the students at Centerville. Mr. Carter and Ms. Woodland were two of six high school counselors who participated in the study, and Ms. Weston was the school site technician and office clerk. Table 9 shows the self-reported demographics of the counselors and distributed counseling staff from Centerville:

**Table 9**

*Self-Reported Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in Profession</th>
<th>Years at Site</th>
<th>Ethnicity and/or Race</th>
<th>Languages Proficient In</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Carter</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>16 yrs</td>
<td>6 yrs</td>
<td>White/Hispanic</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Woodland</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Teacher 8 years; school counselor 14</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sofia</td>
<td>Mental Health Therapist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>English and Chinese</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Weston</td>
<td>Site Tech-Office Clerk</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Carter reported being proficient in English and a white/Hispanic male, aged 53 years old, Ms. Woodland as a 50-year-old Caucasian female who was proficient in English, and Ms. Weston as a 53-year-old white female who was proficient in English. Ms. Sofia reported being a 29-year-old Chinese female, and proficient in English and Chinese. Ms. Sofia had been working
as a mental health therapist for two years, and with students from Centerville for five months. Ms. Weston had been at Centerville for eight of the 20 years she had been a site technician. Mr. Carter had been a counselor at Centerville for six of his total 16 years in the profession. And Ms. Woodland had been at the school for 22 years; eight years teaching and 14 years as a school counselor.

*Education and Work*

Ms. Woodland, Mr. Carter, and Ms. Weston’s views around the purpose of education and work seemed to reflect some aspect of the abilities that a person can or should develop and the type of person that students can become. Ms. Weston conveyed that she felt the purpose of education was to help students gain information to be able to understand more about their lives and what’s around them, and she felt that education is “not everything” but that working has its proper place and not all are meant or should pursue the same paths. Ms. Woodland expressed that there are certain skills that students can gain from education that might not seem so obvious or directly related to the subjects they are studying but carry over into other aspects of their lives. Certain classes or fields help with forming cohesive thoughts, to think more critically and be able to problem solve. And Mr. Carter seemed to stress that education should at the very least offer a means of raising responsible citizens that contribute to or follow what society asks of them. But he seemed to feel a tension in differing views at times with families, more so when he worked at private schools, seeing families wanting their children to pursue educational opportunities because of the reputation or status. Mr. Carter felt very strongly against this and wanted to promote education and work as something students pursue because of their interests.

In terms of work, Ms. Woodland experienced that its purpose might vary given the individuals. That for some it might correlate to reputation and/or pursuing what their families
encourage them to do, paying bills, and/or following a passion as related to education and the purpose of work. Mr. Carter expressed that he saw such a difference in how education and work were approached because of the pandemic, and stated that:

...education is getting very unstructured right due to Covid… It got [to this] … where we allowed kids too much freedom and flexibility that they … feel a little bit entitled and … like they [don’t] have to do much to get by and that's going to be a huge problem in the years to come. Because again and at our most basic function we're teaching kids to be responsible citizens, you know who live by the norms of society. We have now adjusted those norms that don’t benefit our society anymore okay so that's that if you asked me … if there's anything if I could work … on a bigger level than what I could possibly ever imagine being … it would be to get that structure back into place… It's tough love time; you know you're going to be expected in this world… to be certain places at certain times, expected to do certain things, expected to be in meetings, to have a camera on [and be] present and engaged. Now, [seeing] that these kids have not been … present, they've not had to have been engaged, they weren't held accountable for turning in work to get a grade; and so, these are all things… we're seeing huge deficits in those behaviors. And their behaviors that are necessary to lead a life of you know where you're able to make money…, you know afford to … provide for your family… You keep thinking hopefully in college that will change; What we're seeing here on the counseling front is that kids can't cope anymore… with change, they can't cope with disappointment. They can't cope with the rules … So, we'll see [what] happens; maybe the whole world will adjust to that model.
Both Ms. Woodland and Mr. Carter acknowledged that students often change what they want to do for education and work, and as counselors they have difficulty assisting an increasing number of students who are unclear or undecided about their future. Certain factors of the pandemic have changed students’ motivation, increased uncertainty, and made circumstances more challenging for students to develop the skills and be held accountable. This has altered counselors’ abilities to help students, but they continued to try to help students gain clarity on what options exist, and not push students to pursue something that someone else wants for them.

Institutional Influences

Centerville counselors had an average student caseload of roughly 470 students, which was significantly higher than the charter schools. The counselors primarily worked with students based on last name, but they also held additional responsibilities which had implications for which student populations they supported. A few points arose about the work with students and the institutional environment and culture that impacted counselors’ work: counselors organize their work under the three ASCA domains (every two counselors tend to one area or domain) and they share responsibilities with other faculty and/or outsourcing to other resources to reach more of their students; the pandemic had changed some of counselors’ work to force them to be more flexible and responsive to crises, and increased their student population who was unsure of what their postsecondary future might entail; institutionally the counselors hold many responsibilities and at times the accountability measures of the district make it hard to assist students more intimately; and though counselors are not attached to nor encourage specific paths for students, they often encourage or have experience with students pursuing college compared to other options and counselors try their best to help students understand the reality of their decisions or know the path before them.
Non-charter school counselors seemed to express a great deal more responsibility than they tended to, but part of it seemed to be connected to the organization of the counseling units, the student caseloads they had, and their responsibility to adhere to the district. Mr. Carter and Ms. Woodland would not be able to tend to the many “layers” of their work sharing or distributing their responsibilities without individuals like Ms. Weston, as a site tech who helped to generate analytical reports and assist with the master schedule, or Ms. Sofia who assisted with the growing mental health difficulties students battled because of the pandemic. There also seemed to be a few career pathways and programs, as well as informational tools and resources for college, coupled with dual enrollment for courses through the community college that assisted with their reach of students.

The counseling unit was organized alphabetically, but also split between the three ASCA domains of college and career (which Ms. Woodland and Mr. Carter tended to), academic, and social-emotional well-being between the six counselors and certain counselors also had the responsibilities to tend to coordinating exams (Ms. Woodland) or working with certain populations (Mr. Carter for English language learners). Even with a calendar in place, counselors’ work can be unpredictable depending on the day which required them to be flexible and able to respond to crises. Working with students under these three domains included providing information so students know about the A-G graduation requirements, postsecondary educational opportunities and resources, which courses to sign-up for and take, and the pathways they could pursue. Counselors would do this through classroom presentations, one-on-one conversations, informational sessions or workshops and fairs. As counselors, they made sure students are on track and have the support they need (e.g., check if there are at risk of not
graduating because of credits, participating on intervention teams and meetings, supporting alongside others for students with IEP’s or 504 plans).

As a result of the pandemic, counselors found that students had fallen into difficult and bad routines and were held less accountable for their efforts. Changes were made while learning online and even upon returning to in-person instruction where students were receiving less learning time; the amount of graduation credit requirements was dropped from 44 to 26 credits; students were given unlimited absences for mental health days; and students were less clear about what they might pursue after high school. Mr. Carter and Ms. Woodland seemed to have reflections on the different challenges presented for their work because of the pandemic. Ms. Woodland did notice that students were less motivated but that they dealt with much uncertainty over the pandemic with increased deaths from COVID-19 and school shootings, a false sense of reality and lack of privacy with everything available for their viewing on social media, and uncertainty from the type of comments and feedback they might receive from peers. Ms. Sofia, an outsourced mental health therapist, shared that the students dealt with a lot of instability: that losing friends, family, and financial uncertainty have contributed to their worries about and difficulty adjusting to changes, “feeling lonely, empty, [and] a lack of motivation.” This created concern amongst students that they’ll lose their friendships again, just like they did earlier in the pandemic. While Ms. Sofia was there to try to help counselors assist students with these struggles, she stated that institutionally it was difficult to work for another organization while trying to navigate the differences in some of the views and rules that Centerville faculty were adhering to, given that their mandate came from the school and district.

The way counselors at Centerville worked with students across grades varied, with a lot of work intimately connected to assist juniors and seniors to be prepared for what is to come
after high school. Counselors at the non-charter schools listed off many more responsibilities compared to what some of the charter school counselors conveyed about their responsibilities. Non-charter school counselors also grappled with how to assist students (especially during the pandemic) and respond to the expectations of the district and general views that others hold of counselors. Mr. Carter and Ms. Woodland expressed their work changed to help students during very uncertain times and decreased accountability and expectations because of the pandemic. And Mr. Carter shared that people, though not specifying who, have perceptions of counselors not doing anything though their job requires a lot of them. In Mr. Carter’s experiences, he acknowledges that the district has a responsibility for needing to oversee and keep counselors accountable. But it often results in adding more work for the counselors and feels like it takes them away from assisting the students, which is their primary responsibility.

The changes in accountability that the district adjusted for students because of the pandemic also seemed, in Mr. Carter’s experience, to make it difficult for students who were not meeting the lowered standards and expectations for students. Ms. Woodland did not comment on the lack of accountability, but she acknowledged the changes in students’ clarity for their future. It seemed they were institutionally able to have support and structures in place to help more of the college-bound students, and/or students who were performing well or at risk academically. It was the middle-tiered students and the trade pathways that they had less ability to reach. Both counselors seemed very uneasy at the thought of telling students what paths they should advance on or discouraging them from what they express interest in. Mr. Carter and Ms. Woodland expressed that they do not promote certain options for students but try to think with them and help them know the information they need to make the decisions for their future. In the excerpt below, Ms. Woodland shared her process for working with students:
... it depends on the situation... I will say to a student like “You know, have you ever thought of this?” or try and brainstorm with them, and you know, one of the things that I will not do is, I will not tell the students what they can't do or what they can do... I'll have students who come in and they want to be an engineer and their math grades are not so great and I'm not going, you know I'm not going to tell them [they] ...can't ever be an engineer [because] your math grades suck. But you know I'm just going to say you know there's a lot of math involved in this... what are you doing to try and improve upon your math skills, so you can be as successful as possible? ... What is your plan for that? ... Do you know what you would need to do to be able to go into it? .... Who do you know who you can turn to who you can work with you know?... We used to have a counselor I remember, she would kind of laugh at a student who would say something like that, and I was like no you can't do that because there has to be one. There's going to be that one person, and why not that student? ... Who knows what's going to happen when they grow and mature. But then... it would be irresponsible to not ... kind of point that out. But in a diplomatic way ... and let them know okay so math isn't a strong suit for you... Do you realize that in that industry you're going to have to rely heavily upon the skills? Are you aware of that? ... So ... sometimes what I'll do is go and look up curriculum for students so ... you need to take all that...How does this look to you? Do you think you can do this? ...You know and kind of guide the conversation that way. I don't want to take away hope, though...one moment of high school does not determine a life... But it's like you said it's providing like sharing other opportunities... But it's just trying to help them, at least with me having kind of age, on my side and helping them kind of see some different ways,
where they could take what they're already thinking of, or maybe what they haven't thought…. and then again it's okay to change your mind. But you know … I try and reassure students… that's part of like going into education and understanding, like the culture of the people you are serving… and while that might be okay for me and my family, for other families that's not okay. You know, and I have to be able to navigate that and respect that.

Ms. Woodland felt she had a responsibility to point things out and shared with the students so that they understand what would be required of them to pursue the pathway(s) they are interested in. She shared that many students changed their focus and didn’t want to continue their education after high school anymore. So, this raised the need to help more students figure out their career pathways and expand on the trades emphasized and present at the career fair they have at their school. When counselors do meet with students, they try to make note of the points they explore together so when they see each other next, they can follow up and see how students are thinking about the possibilities before them and what steps they’re taking.

*Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families*

Mr. Carter shared that Centerville is one of the largest schools in Madison Unified School District, with roughly 2,300 students and it’s located in the middle or center of the community. Mr. Carter shared that while the district does have something called “school choice” where families apply to attend a school outside of their neighborhood school, Centerville has 98% of their student population from the community itself. This is unlike some other schools that have many students “bussed in.” Mr. Carter shared that this has implications when trying to connect with parents, since they live close and in the community. He grew up in the Centerville community, went to the same high school, and shared there are some cultural differences
amongst the Asian and white parents for how they approached raising their kids and are involved in their lives. The Asian culture (not specified which cultures specifically) comprised of almost half of the school racial/ethnic population, which Mr. Carter deemed as “pro-school” and “pro-independence” while he felt was different than his own white background and for others whose parents do everything for the students.

While not all students at Centerville attend college, about 85% of the student population does and it seems only students who are “struggling” are encouraged to pursue vocational/trade programs or prepare for work. And counselors acknowledged that they are less likely able to help the “middle tiered” students – that often attention might go toward those who are struggling or those who are “higher achieving.” Centerville’s counseling unit also seemed to distinguish students based on grade level and offers many resources and meetings to ensure that juniors and seniors are on the path to graduate. They saw that many more students are somewhat lost in terms of how the pandemic has impacted their ability to take steps forward.

One last point is that Mr. Carter drew distinctions between the population he serves at Centreville compared to neighboring more affluent populations and those he encountered at private schools. His comments were connected to feeling differences in values and opinions than parents and what they would try to do on behalf of their students. Mr. Carter seemed to convey differing advice or help to students with advice based on his own views around education and work compared to the views parents who were overly involved, valued or would push certain career paths for their students. He appreciated students advancing based on their own interests.

Jefferson

Jefferson had the largest student population of all the non-charter and charter schools represented in this study. It is the larger of two non-charter high schools that served students
primarily from the Clinton community or neighborhood. Oakfield was the other high school on the border of Clinton and another neighborhood that serves primarily students from the Clinton neighborhood. During the 2021-2022 school year, the student population at Jefferson was 2,326 with five counselors for the entire school. This meant that the ratio of students to counselors was 465 to one, and the student to teacher ratio was 26 to one. Of the entire student population, 24% were English learners and 52% qualified for free and reduced-price meals. The racial and ethnic demographics of the student populations during the 2021-2022 school year were: 12% Asian, 7% Black, 78% Hispanic, and 2% white (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center of Education Statistics, n.d.).

Jefferson and Oakfield generally serve the same community in Clinton, but because of the boundaries Oakfield is made to seem like it serves another neighboring community. The information on Jefferson’s website emphasizes the diversity of the student population. It has a higher Hispanic or Latinx population compared to the other ethnic populations that it serves and compared to other schools in this study. Jefferson’s school website emphasizes different aspects of the same realities they see as the Clinton, Westfield, Oakfield, and Fairview schools. Their school website stated that they are in “an ethnically diverse neighborhood”, with “first-generation college students.” The school website stated that they offer what students need for college and career readiness through STEAM (science, technology, arts, and math), Linked Learning approaches (combines rigorous academics, support services, CTE, and work-based learning) for exposure to college and career options, small learning communities, and academy teams and/or pathways (About the linked learning approach, 2023).

The school has the structure of academies which students have to pick, and they stick with for their four years; the academies have specific elective classes students take, and
internship or opportunities for students to gain experiences with. Academies all have a counselor associated with them, and a teacher who serves as the academy director oversee the programs and how efforts advance. The academies at Jefferson are Academy of Health and Healthier Communities (AHHC); Academy of Information Technology (AOIT); Academy of Literature, Media, and Arts (ALMA); Social Justice Academy (SJA); and Sustainable Academy of Building and Engineering (SABE). During the 2021-2022 school year, Jefferson had five counselors and one of those five was an intervention counselor. Oakfield and Jefferson both had intervention counselors at their schools. Three of the five counselors participated in this study: Mr. Leo, Ms. Collins, and Ms. Summers. Ms. Summers, who was the youngest counselor, interviewed at Jefferson, at 31 years old, self-reported as being Latina and proficient in Spanish and English, and had been at Jefferson for five of the eight years she had experience in the field. She was with the Social Justice Academy. Ms. Collins was the head counselor, who was 44 years old at the time of the interview, reported as being Chicana and proficient in English and Spanish, had been at Jefferson for 10 of her 21 years in counseling. She also had experience as a counselor for elementary and middle schools, before going to high school. Ms. Collins was with the Academy of Health and Healthier Communities. And Mr. Leo, who self-reported as a 52-year-old Latino male who was proficient in English, had been a counselor for 24 years and had been at Jefferson for eight years. He was the counselor with the Sustainable Academy of Building and Engineering academy.

Education and Work

Counselors’ personal experiences as students and their interactions with student populations over the years shaped their evolving views around the purpose of education and work. None of the counselors seemed to promote or believe that education should be limited to
college or university pathways. One view of education seemed to be connected to the opportunities that it provides for those who pursue it. Mr. Leo conveyed that regardless of the type of education students decide to pursue after high school, advancing in education or training helps so that they aren’t tracked into something that they don’t want to do. He also stressed for students to pursue opportunities for education and work that bring happiness; that there is security that comes with money, but it doesn’t guarantee enjoying one’s career.

The counselors touched on notions of opportunities through education and work connecting to the transition into adulthood. Ms. Collins expressed that she sees that students will become an adult when they turn 18 years old, have bills they need to pay, and she prepares them for that. She seems to view education and work as a form of preparation but also very personal and different for each person. Ms. Collins did not have a positive experience with her school counselor and expressed that her mother would not allow her to move away for school, so she felt that she related to the populations at Jefferson who are first-generation college bound students making these decisions with their families. Something about education seems to relate to a different life path that students can choose, because she expressed that going to college can be an opportunity for students to leave their homes and move away. But when Ms. Collins refers to college, she clarifies she means universities, community college, and apprenticeships.

Ms. Summers’ views on education and work have evolved as her understanding of her role as a counselor has changed. Earlier in her career, her views around her role and education were to get every student to pursue college. But overtime it changed to encouraging students to try their best to do well in school so that they would have options to pursue any path that will make them happy, whether that meant advancing to a four-year institution or community college,
trade or military pathways. Education for Ms. Summers is something that helps individuals build the skills that they’ll use for their future careers.

**Institutional Influences**

Mr. Leo shared that the counseling unit at Jefferson used to be structured differently; when he started there, counselors worked with students by grade level, but much of the work with the ninth-grade students that he focused on ended up being disciplinary, with many referrals and suspensions. That was exhausting and led to reorganizing the work of the counselors by alphabet. The work with ninth grade students and responsibilities that counselors have for working with them seems vastly different than the other grades. One aspect is that Jefferson, like Oakfield, has an intervention counselor focused solely on ninth grade students who require academic intervention. Ms. Collins shared that certain schools in the district, like theirs, have these intervention counselors because that’s when many students drop out. At Jefferson, Ms. Collins and Mr. Leo shared that only 400 of the roughly 600-750 ninth grade students they have graduate.

Counselors at Jefferson reached their students through classroom presentations, one-on-one conversations, through the structure of the academies, and the many partnerships that offer resources and organizations to their students. They shared that they have classroom presentations for each of the grades, though tenth graders have the fewest presentations, and these are aimed at conveying specific information to each grade level. For some of these presentations, the counselors collaborate to use similar or the same presentations, and then for others they may convey the same content in different ways. Counselors acknowledged that the classroom presentations aren’t enough to build a relationship with their students and they must get to know each of them but was more difficult to do because of the pandemic.
Teachers and the academies were very helpful for counselors to distribute or share their responsibilities of the three domains to assist students. Mr. Leo acknowledged that “for the everyday little things, [students] go to the teachers because they have a stronger relationship” and that was due to the nature of the role of the teacher being in the class with the students each day. But counselors still made an effort and felt it’s important for the students to know who their counselors are and hear about what the school counselor’s role is. While the counselors themselves meet regularly and tried to build and implement a comprehensive counseling program with support and/or encouragement from the district, the structure of the academies allowed for relationships to be built more intimately with teachers too. Ms. Summers shared that she could work with the same cohort of teachers each year, and this helped since the teachers get to know the students more closely. The academies allowed for students to gain exposure to careers (on top of the presentations or career and college software that the school counselors and district utilize), and gain certain experiences with the potential fields they might be interested in.

The counseling team included an intervention counselor to assist with ninth grade students who required extra support to make sure they are on the path for graduating, and a pupil advocate to work with students who won’t have enough credits and require alternative education options. Ms. Summers shared that their pupil advocate does do a lot of social-emotional work, which seemed to touch on the ASCA domain as well as the academic domain to assist students in finding an alternative educational program. Many of the school counselors in this study shared that they have certain organizations or partnerships that have allowed for more mental health resources on campus, to help with college information and resources (e.g., financial aid, scholarship information, college applications), and some have mentee/mentor relationships (more at the charter schools). Ms. Collins shared they have over 40 partnerships, most of which
are college access partners (some through local universities and community organizations), to focus on helping students with college access, as well as many health related and legal resources for the students. The overwhelming caseload still made it difficult for counselors to reach every student, even with the many relationships and distribution of responsibilities with teachers, organizations and the structure of the academies.

This had implications for what counselors spent their time on. Ms. Summers stated that a large part of her job was on the academic and social-emotional domains. Even though there was a lot of focus on graduating seniors, she ultimately focused on make sure that students were in the correct classes and passing. Ms. Summers was also very conscious that building a comprehensive counseling program would have implications for helping to clarify what is working or what counselors can do differently, as well as distinguishing what falls under the role of the counselors. Mr. Leo like some of his male counterparts at the other non-charter schools, expressed that people (not mentioning whom), have impressions that counselors do not do work. He grappled with these false views of the counselors, differing perspectives than the district, and frustration with the reality he was tasked with being responsible for. Mr. Leo stated:

*Counseling is the ugly second cousin of education. It doesn’t get respected because if it did they would caps on our caseload, but they don’t, it seems like whenever counselors are off campus the school can’t function. There is just 5 of us but we can’t leave campus because something might happen. It’s weird because on the one hand we don’t get respected and then on the other hand we can’t be off campus because if something happens the school can’t function. I’m getting to the end of my career, and I don’t care to play the game anymore. I’m going to do what’s best for the kids regardless of what*
the district thinks. I put faith in the district earlier in my career and they didn’t do much. Now I’m going to do what is right for the kids.

Mr. Leo was at odds with what he felt he could do at Jefferson because of what the district expected and the disparities he saw within the student populations he served. And he was frustrated with the false perceptions regarding the demands that counselors were responding to. On one hand, there are so many demands put on counselors regarding the three domains they are responsible for, and on the other there seem to be perceptions to diminish the amount of work they do or the contributions they make. Counselors are also in different positions in terms of the daily relationships they are able to nurture with students compared to teachers.

There are tensions that Mr. Leo expresses that can exist between counselors and the district that they serve. Institutionally, there might be certain expectations and mandates that come from the district, but as a counselor their read of the reality of their students may mean they see a disconnect about what is being asked and what is needed. And though it is not explicitly stated, there is a lack of feeling appreciated or providing realistic caseloads and responsibilities to counselors. This might be one of the reasons that the district sees turn over, as was mentioned through the interview with Mr. Wright.

Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families

The counselors at Jefferson seemed to distinguish between students and the populations they served based on: seeing students based on the grade level and/or academy they were in; identifying students based on the populations counselors connect or have difficulty connecting with; seeing differences in students as a result of the pandemic; and the differences observed while “on the ground” compared to the district. Though counselors were not always the ones to directly support students, their interactions with students and the information they provided them
seemed to vary based on their grade level (with more emphasis on those closer to graduating) or those within the academies that they served.

Ms. Collins expressed explicitly that she has a harder time relating with her male students compared to the females; that the male students tend to want to focus more on becoming an athlete and are late to begin formulating plans for after high school. Like Centerville and Oakfield, Jefferson counselors shared about needing additional mental health providers available for their students because of the increased cases of trauma, depression, and anxiety. Ms. Collins shared how some students were happy to be back in person because “the family can put anxiety on [the] child”, whereas others didn’t want to return. Mr. Leo shared that the transition coming back was gradual but once everyone returned it was clear that they were not the same because students had more anxiety and depression. He stated that:

… it’ll be people at universities to see what happened. I don’t know if it was isolation, being stuck at home with abusive parents, being with younger siblings that they needed to take care of; but they came back with issues. I had students getting panic attacks and being in my office shivering. I had to talk them through it and remind them they are in a safe place… In a typical year, pre-pandemic, maybe I would have to call our school police in for support to evaluate a student, twice in a school year, and one of them, they would be taken to [the] emergency [room]. This time it happened four times, and all four kids got taken away and all got extended stays in hospitals. It was just that type of year. While you are still trying to manage everything else you are trying to do and still trying to graduate kids and do course requests and classroom presentations.

Mr. Leo illustrated the growing number of cases of students struggling with mental health because of the pandemic. Part of his point was the increase in the number of crises counselors
dealt with, but the context was the difficulties that he was “guessing” or assuming that students dealt with during the pandemic. While many did deal with isolation and taking on more responsibilities for helping family members (such as taking care of siblings), it is unclear if his experiences or personal perceptions gave the assumption that a percentage of students were dealing with abusive family members and/or parents.

The counselors could not tend to the growing demands of student support with their many responsibilities. And having a relationship with their students greatly declined during the pandemic when things were online, and that carried over a bit once back in person. Ms. Summers shared that the year was “very rough. I didn’t really feel like I knew my seniors from sophomore year because that’s the last time I had seen them…I didn’t feel like I have that…strong connection that I had built with my sophomores previously.” She went on to share that usually she makes her way into the classroom earlier in the year to get to know students and share about resources that are provided for them, but Ms. Summers was not able to do this until the winter.

Lastly, Mr. Leo shared that he was concerned about the students they would work with that experienced great discrepancies in their education and abilities; that they were pushed through the educational system and opportunities that don’t truly address their needs are pushed or encouraged through the district. Mr. Leo stated:

*That’s on us. Those are the kids that I worry about. The kids that want to do more. The ones that want to change the direction of their life, but we haven’t empowered them with the skills. I don’t know if the district is aware of the struggles that we have. It feels like there is [a divide] north … and south [of the district] … I don’t know if the district isn’t aware of challenges [in the] south … or they aren’t familiar with how to address it, but it feels like all they want to do is offer more college opportunities. That’s great*
for the ones that can access that curriculum but what about the ones that can't do those, what are you doing for those kids? That’s sad because I thought I would get into education to help that group and all I’m doing is pushing them through the system and I’m good at it. I can get kids a diploma with a 9th/10th grade reading level. I can get teachers to give students an opportunity to retake a test because I’m good with staff but am I really doing anything to help them with their future? No. I think about that, and it sucks. My professor here… would harp on … the struggles with literacy that keep kids where they are or worse yet put them in places they don’t want to be. In the back of my head, I was thinking about how all the kids in my neighborhood read. But when I got to [Jefferson], I would ask them to read something to me and I realized they couldn’t read. The kids can't read, nor can they comprehend what they do read. Maybe the next wave of counselors coming up will be able to address it but it's really a district issue. They need to own it and deal with it. Offering schools like … [Jefferson and Oakfield] more college classes isn’t going to solve the problem.

Mr. Leo’s comments showed that there were differences between what the school and district faculty see or understand about the reality of the students at Jefferson and other schools with comparable student populations. That while all students have the potential to learn, many of the students are not able to access curriculum and instead of being taught they are pushed through the educational system without acquiring the grade-level intellectual knowledge and abilities. Instead, of addressing these inequities, college-level courses and opportunities are offered the students without strengthening the gaps that exist earlier on in the students’ education.
Counselors might see the challenges that the students face, but they still do not want to be the ones to be responsible for preventing them from pursuing opportunities. The counselors at Jefferson expressed that they would not be the ones to prevent students, even if they knew that they would not be able to advance in the postsecondary path that they chose, to try for something they wanted. Given the populations they worked with and the emphasis of the school, counselors tried their best to provide information and have students create backup plans, but it did not touch on the root of the problems.

**Oakfield**

Oakfield had the smallest student population of the three non-charter high schools in this study, with 1,150 students attending during the 2021-2022 school year. They had three main counselors, an intervention counselor for ninth grade students, and each counselor had a caseload of about 383 students each. And their student to teacher ratio was about 24 students for each teacher. Their student population included roughly 20% who were English learners, and 86% of students who qualified for free and reduced-price meals. The racial and ethnic demographics of the student population included: 17% Asian, 30% Black, 46% Hispanic, and 3% white (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center of Education Statistics, n.d.).

Their school website had the least amount of content about their school but included the same points as the Madison’s district website about the promotion of “Skills, motivation, curiosity and resilience [for students] to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow.” Oakfield emphasized the elements of linked learning and had links by grades from 6-12 for taking classes and the path to get into a Cal State (Oakfield, n.d.).
Three counselors were interviewed from Oakfield: Ms. Cooper, Mr. Weathers, and Mr. Huntington; and one teacher who oversaw their main academy, Mr. Fisher. During the 2021-2022 school year, Oakfield had an intervention counselor, who was contacted but did not participate in this study. Mr. Weathers and Ms. Cooper have had over 20 years of experience in their profession of counseling, and Mr. Huntington has had 14 years of experience entirely at Oakfield. Ms. Cooper has had most of her experience at other institutions, with three years of it at Oakfield, whereas most of Mr. Weathers’ experience has been at Oakfield (except for two years). Ms. Cooper self-reported as a 49-year-old Mexican American female, proficient in Spanish and English; Mr. Huntington as a 53-old white male, proficient in English and some Spanish; and Mr. Weathers a 60-year-old Black male, proficient in English.

In his interview, Mr. Weathers made it a point to state Oakfield and Jefferson serve the same community, but boundaries make it so that Jefferson receives support from a major charity in Madison through the Fairview Foundation. According to Mr. Weathers, the boundaries and funding targeted Jefferson by the local state college for partnerships and highlighted the differences in resources they receive; stating that Jefferson received more resources for their staff and students to be automatically accepted to the state college if they met the requirements. The counselors have varying degrees of collaboration and sharing of their responsibilities with programs, and individuals to assist students with social-emotional, academic, and college and career support. Ms. Cooper did share about the increase in mental health services required for students because of the pandemic. The counselors at Oakfield were asked, either via email correspondence or during their interview, who they recommended I speak with based on who they felt supported the work they do.
Amongst the three counselors, there was the intervention counselor mentioned, and two teachers. One teacher oversaw the AVID program and the other was Mr. Fisher who runs their law academy. The conversation with Mr. Fisher was from the distributed counseling perspective; it came from the recognition that the nature of the work of counselors is quite broad in some ways and their caseloads are demanding. Throughout the conversation with Mr. Fisher, I tried to understand how he or the academy operates and supports students, and what perspectives around education and work guide or influence his or their work.

*Education and Work*

The counselors at Oakfield, and Mr. Fisher, related the purpose of education to having opportunities, options, and a plan for one’s future so that they can decide what is before them versus being stuck doing something or living a life they did not want or anticipate. Some of these views seemed to correlate to personal experiences, like Ms. Cooper who shared about being a first-generation college bound student and seeing her mother experience teen pregnancy, homelessness, and the “repercussions” of not completing high school nor pursuing further education. Mr. Weathers and Mr. Huntington seemed to also heavily emphasized the relationship between education giving opportunities to avoid issues of homeless or being stuck living with one’s parents. Mr. Weathers stated:

> For me … *Education indicates where you’re going in the future. This is the time to start discovering, I don’t know about you but at college I changed my major, and those things. Some of us need to go to community college before we ever think about university. Whether they know it or not, the connection is huge. The implications of your future are right there. Are they going to end up homeless? In my head, I’m always thinking how did they end up like this? What happened? What have you done*
for work that you end up homeless? Where is your family? All these things in my head, what happened? Do I know the answers? No, but I do [know what the] question is.

These views around education creating options for students as they decide their postsecondary paths touches on notions of successful futures and adulthood that counselors have either experienced or perceive in the communities they serve. And they tried to convey to students that whatever future they choose is up to them, but that it is important that they are prepared and have a plan before they graduate. There is a pressure to have things in place before students leave high school. Mr. Huntington also expressed that students can and should find something that they are interested in or that is meaningful, while recognizing that students do have to consider choosing something that is valued or viewed as needed to be able to earn a living.

Other points that are raised by Mr. Weather’s comment is that there are implications if students cannot or do not go to college. And that the implications for their life outcomes seem to rest primarily on the student alone or be some kind of failure on the family if the student does not pursue college after high school. At the same time, counselors expressed that college is not the only path, but there are some false connections or assumptions about education: that college ensures a bright future and if students don’t pursue it they and their families are at fault. But there is no mention on the type of responsibilities that schools as institutions hold to develop the requisite capacities for students to have security in their future after high school.

Institutional Influences

Counselors tend to many responsibilities, and this requires them to be flexible to respond to whatever the needs seem to be at a particular moment. Mr. Weathers referred to the role of a counselor as a “Jack of all trades” and both him and Mr. Huntington shared that a good portion
of their work was bureaucratic and administrative, but what they value is the time that they get with students. Like Centerville, the counselors shared about having a calendar for the year and helping students with courses, scheduling, credits, examinations, and assisting with financial aid and applications.

There were some points that the counselors raised about these responsibilities. Mr. Weathers shared that his primary focus is to be there for the students. He shared, “As a rule for me, I’m the counselor that is with the students. Counselors are known to be in the offices, but I want to be out with them.” Similarly, Ms. Cooper expressed misconceptions or a lack of appreciation for the work that counselors carry out. In all the instances where non-charter school counselors expressed people doubting their contributions or not understanding their roles, they never stated where these voices were coming from. Ms. Cooper shared that counselors are:

... so much a part of, like, every aspect of the school. Like, you know, people don't even really appreciate the value that we bring to schools because we're in everything, you know, we're in the nitty gritty decisions. We're just so behind the scenes that people just think we sit in our office all day and eat bonbons, I think because, you know, teachers are, you know, they have a full classroom, but if they walk in and we're not seeing a student, they just think, Oh, this is how it is all day... Being a counselor, I think it's more like you have to be really good versatile, and you have to be very unselfish with your time. We are called upon for so many different things that you know, just, you know, and constantly be willing to change it up and try something new and but, you know, having the background being in at an alternative school and then working here, I see that, you know, we miss out on so many students, because I think a lot of education is geared towards those four year college bound students. But, you know,
kind of finding those students that fall through the cracks and connecting them or reconnecting them to education. I think that that has helped me tremendously working back into the comprehensive school, like going back. You know, and especially after COVID, since we’ve lost so many kids who have dropped out or gone to other programs.

Ms. Cooper’s point about the nature of her work with students touches on the nuances of the job of a counselor that go past tending to three domains and schedules, and credits. And it provided a better picture around how students are assisted to think about their postsecondary aspirations. These views the counselors hold about helping to support students includes helping them think about the type of people they’ll become. And though there is a focus on helping students to graduate, meet their credit requirements, and attend college, the counselors’ ultimate aims are wanting to ensure that students have opportunities as well as contribute toward the society around them.

Mr. Huntington had shared that his earlier conceptions of his work was trying to get as many students into college as possible, but he realized that college isn’t for all students and there are fulfilling opportunities that students can pursue outside of that. The counselors tried to convey certain information that is required of them, such as graduation requirements, to students, but they try to alter their approaches and conversations to reflect the needs and interests of the students. Part of the institutional influence is that all students must graduate with the A-G requirements which makes them eligible to apply for college. Ms. Cooper acknowledged that this aspect of working for Madison Unified has meant that:

the emphasis is really on getting students to a four-year university even though we know that that's not going to be the case for a great deal of our students. But getting
Them to then to community college is, I guess the next emphasis and getting them to connect, you know, with those programs there for transfer options and, and then the next one would probably be, you know, vocational slash military. But like I said, I don't care what they do, I just want them to have a plan, and be able to execute that plan, have choices and options, rather than, “Oh, we waited till the last moment.”

Though counselors expressed that they are not attached to a certain pathway, by nature of students being eligible for college and university means that if they have the “grades” and met the requirements, institutionally counselors do promote or encourage that opportunity before others. And counselors are mindful that they would never say anything to discourage students unless they are pursuing certain paths like becoming an athlete. For this type of pursuit, they felt comfortable to help offer a different perspective and the likelihood of the student’s success, but they wouldn’t feel comfortable to do the same even if they thought the student was not demonstrating the capabilities for a certain path because they don’t want to disempower the students. Mr. Huntington expressed that his first:

rule that I try to operate under is to… not get in anybody's way. I don't want to be the reason why somebody is not successful…. And secondly, ... I want students to understand that they can be successful, and that their success is going to look different from somebody else's success.

Mr. Weathers echoed this sentiment of never wanting to “crush students’ dreams” but rather he tried to convey a clearer picture of the reality before the student.

So much of this, including the mental health difficulties that arose from the pandemic were falling on the counselors and sharing these responsibilities with others helped a great deal. But it is unclear the extent of that distribution of responsibilities compared to the other schools.
Oakfield did have a law academy, that Mr. Fisher would oversee and support students to have access to additional projects, exposure to fields, and mentorship. And it seems that the school intervention counselor and AVID coordinator have been very helpful in sharing responsibilities.

*Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families*

The pandemic seemed to offer the counselors an opportunity to learn more about their student populations. Mr. Huntington described how many of his top students barely graduated and were difficult to get a hold of during distance learning. But through home visits he saw a different reality of his students which helped him understand them and their possibilities. There were certain perceptions that the counselors held of the population like in terms of their grade level and academic performance. And now they were learning that there were other realities to learn about and understand about their students. Because of the pandemic, there were more mental health difficulties and students were more fragile than before.

Another view that counselors seemed to hold was based on the pathways that they could take which relied on credit completion and grades. And lastly, there were perceptions about the community or populations from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and/or historically marginalized populations. This came across in Mr. Weathers comments about having “*trouble reaching the parents or if I reach them, I may not speak their language. I briefly over the summer worked at [another] high school and I had no trouble reaching the parents,*” or his earlier comments about things he sees like homelessness in the community. Or it might connect to Mr. Huntington’s comments about not feeling like the educational system serves their student populations. The emphasis of these sentiments about parental involvement seem to give focus to the counselors’ ability to access parents when they require it. The barriers to reaching parents might include their work schedules or differences in languages, but this in no way should be of
fault of the families. School resources could be dedicated to having translation services for families to be able to speak and share what they hope to express (as well as counselors), and hours for reaching parents could extend to times that work well for them. This does not have to fall solely on the counselors if the distributed counseling resources are in place.

While they acknowledge that there are barriers that might impact the way parents can be involved in school, or inequities that exist in the educational system, there would be more to explore for how parents or the community can be seen as a potential resource that can be tapped into for more support for the work of assisting students. It is unclear where these views have come from around the community, like if perceptions have formed over the years because of inability to connect with or want to collaborate with families, if the desire to reach out to families is only when concerns arise for students, and/or if counselors are being stretched thin and unable to share the responsibilities in reaching out to families. More will be analyzed in the subsequent chapter.

Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings and Influential Factors on Counselors Advisement

Three major themes arose from this study, to understand how high school counselors assist their students with their postsecondary aspirations. For the first theme, the views counselors hold about education and work seemed to correlate to the fact that they are working with students in the last “chapter” of their K-12 career. Counselors’ views on the purpose of education and work related to how they felt students should be prepared for life after high school, as they entered adulthood. In these instances, counselors expressed ideas around education and work being connected to a person’s interests, passions, and happiness as well as the students’ ability to live independent and successful lives. At times, counselors expressed that
education and work, and what students pursue after high school should be something meaningful. Counselors’ views, especially those at the non-charter schools, were continually evolving, and for many counselors their personal experiences from when they were students, and their understanding of their students’ realities especially during the pandemic impacted how they saw education and work.

At times, counselors seemed to both express that education is not synonymous to advancing to a college pathway and is meant to provide opportunities, but they primarily promote college as a means of obtaining “acceptable” careers or professions. Counselors acknowledged that they support what students want to pursue, and they tried to ensure the student is aware of the path and the implications they choose to advance toward. For some of the counselors, there was some views around meritocracy that if students try, they can do well, while for others there was some recognition that the resources provided for students could be what plays a role in their “success.” One point around resources, is that most of the resources provided for students was focused on college preparation and advancement; it seemed less about have equitable and rigorous options for all students, but mostly for the goal or aim of advancing to college or university.

Within the second theme around institutional influences, there were similarities across the charter and non-charter counselors regarding their focus on trying to support students to achieve their goals and aspirations, trying to help students understand the reality of the pathways they express a desire to pursue, and how to access resources to help students on their path. There are some differences between the structure non-charter school counselors work in, mainly their relationship with the district, compared to the charter schools having very specific aims and mandates influencing their work with students. Another aspect regarding these differences is the
extent of the distribution of responsibilities or collaboration counselors have with others and organizations to carry out their work with students. The demands of the pandemic also introduced new elements or exacerbated certain aspects of the institutional environment and support for the work of counselors. Needing to draw on teachers who know students well, mental health services, and college-preparation organizations are key to their work; in some cases, there are more resources through mentors or academies. These points, in addition to student caseloads, the years of experience, the type of institution they serve, and at times age and gender seemed to play a role in how counselors can or view being able to help students with their postsecondary aspirations.

The last theme around the views counselors have toward their students and their parents touches on the counselors’ perceptions of the student populations and their families or the communities they are connected to. Counselors, as all people do, come with certain values that they carry forward in their work, and this forms over the years because of the points mentioned above in the previous two themes. At times these values seem, even from the counselors’ perspectives different than the students and families they serve, and this was highlighted during the pandemic. The ages of the counselors and their views on this age group (e.g., views of grade-levels, student demographics, and academic performance levels) at times leaves counselors grappling with how best to assist and share information for students’ postsecondary goals. While many counselors, though not all, expressed that college is not for all or shouldn’t be pushed for all, there is some hierarchy amongst the options students have, and this does not always align with how counselors feel families might approach their child’s future. Counselors have more experience and clarity for how to help students to pursue college, compared to assisting students
with trade or vocational opportunities. More will be said and analyzed about this in the subsequent chapter.

The following figure, Figure 7, is below to provide an overview of the findings from this multi-site case study. It highlights some of the points above and has the context in which counselor-student interactions take place, which is through the institution of the school and with consideration to the global health pandemic. The counselors (whether at a charter or non-charter school) provide direct or indirect encouragement, support, and information, to high school students about the different pathways they can pursue after high school, which leads them toward a certain trajectory during their adult lives.

Figure 7

Influential Factors for How Counselors Work with Students

The themes from this finding, as mentioned earlier included counselors’ views on education and work in light of how they viewed the transition into adulthood for the high school students; the institutional climate and resources of working at a charter compared to non-charter school; and how their values and perspectives compared to their students and the community,
which also related to how counselors perceived these populations. Figure 7 shows the factors influencing these counselors for how they work with students, meaning how they directly or indirectly encourage, support, and provide information were impacted by: the views, assumptions, and values counselors held about education, work and the students and/or community; their job expectations and the reality of what they were tasked with carrying out; the institutional resources and culture of their schools, which included how their work was distributed and/or shared with others; and the counselors’ demographics such as gender, age, and their years of experience in the field and/or with the student populations they worked with.

Their views about education and work were connected to how counselors felt the purpose of education and work were connected to the transition into adulthood, and their emphasis on being prepared and picking a path (typically one with more education or training after high school) or having a plan helped them to be better suited for a “successful” and “independent” life and to do something that makes them happy or they have a passion for. But some counselors also acknowledged the differences in these views they hold with students’ families or the privilege that comes with this way of thinking. These views, also the reality of the institutions that the counselors work at have implications for what they emphasize when working with students, as well as the resources available for directly or indirectly working with students, and how much of their work is distributed or shared with other faculty or entities. In this study, the charter schools have a specific mandate targeted at certain socioeconomic and ethnic populations and had smaller caseloads (though still many responsibilities) but were integrated in ways throughout the schools and with additional resources to help them work alongside teachers, mentors, and higher education institutions to support their work.
The pandemic impacted all students and counselors were tasked with trying to maintain and build relationships with students (whether they knew them well or had met in person), and all had to rely on additional mental health and social services to assist with the challenges their students continued to face. Institutional responsibilities grew greater for counselors, and many discussed the challenges they faced in their work with helping students adjust to transitioning back to being in-person, and this left more students uncertain about their future. Non-charter school counselors seemed more open to express the institutional challenges they faced within their schools, with the perceptions from other faculty about their work, and tensions or differing views they held with the district or how resources were distributed and provided.

These frustrations were because of the impact the district has on the work counselors do and came more from the male counselors who had been working in the field for a longer period. Counselors acknowledged that amidst these challenges, there are certain factors that allow them to reach as many students as they do, though the non-charter school counselors expressed not being able to reach all given their caseloads. Distributed responsibilities or counseling then is an integral part of how counselors can work with as many students as possible; and this varied across the non-charter schools and compared to charter schools. All schools did seem to change and lessen credit requirements for students and adjusted the rigor of what was required of students during the pandemic, but students still seemed to primarily be encouraged to apply for and pursue college compared to other pathways after high school.

Throughout these themes, a few points emerged that are worth noting and analyzing further in the next chapter. Counselors truly desire to be of service and help their students, and because of this they never want to do anything that dampers their students’ hope for the future. Another point is that most of the counselors in this study are working with students coming from
historically marginalized populations; so, they are trying their best to promote equitable opportunities and not to perpetuate the injustices that exist within the educational system. However, this does make it difficult to work through some of the nuances of supporting students because promoting the same opportunities for all students, especially when certain capabilities (skills, attitudes, abilities) are not nurtured, can further perpetuate the gaps that exist within their education and set students up to pursue avenues that are not attainable next steps or goals. It encourages everyone to pursue the same path, without considering what type of support or preliminary steps need to be taken for students to achieve their aspirations.

This might also even influence what students are “aspiring” to accomplish. For example, if college is primarily promoted then students might be focusing on “college” as their goal; feeling institutional and peer pressure to follow what the majority are pursuing, without being helped to identify their talents and how they can develop their interests and abilities through the appropriate programs. Counselors are also challenged to help students focus less on just the next step of the “program” they might choose and give real thought to the possible types of professions they can truly know about. They tried to help students to know their options and really understand what is demanded or required and what type of life they can live within that career.

Promoting the same path for most or all does reinforce that certain opportunities are valued over others or seen as more meritorious such as going to college as opposed to pursuing a trade. Or that all students are capable of the same things and will have the same results if they all just try their best to meet the requirements. But counselors at times do not get to know students as well as teachers and must rely on utilizing measures like grade point average or how they perform in classes as indicators of a student’s “readiness” and capability for postsecondary
pathways. But this can limit what counselors may share or convey to students because it is using one measure of ability to encourage students to pursue a specific path like college or trades. It also can leave out opportunities for students who perform “well” academically to learn about trades that they might be quite talented at and contribute meaningfully toward just because there is an assumption that they should go to college and study and/or pursue certain types of fields or disciplines.

**Similarities and Differences Between Charter and Non-Charter Schools and Counselors**

In Table 10 below, there is an overview of the schools by the type of school (charter versus non-charter) to show the similarities and differences with their mission and aims, as well as key points that arose from the interviews with the counselors. Institutionally, the charter school counselors had less students to assist, and had specific aims and populations they served compared to the non-charter school counselors who were mandated to help all students. And at times, they also had stronger distribution of counseling responsibilities built into their schools. While many of the schools, regardless of charter or non-charter, promoted college, there was more tension for the non-charter school counselors on encouraging this because of their familiarity with this pathway over trade or vocational options and the district aims or favor for this pathway.

**Table 10**

*Cross-Site Analysis (Charter and Non-Charter Comparison)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter Schools</th>
<th>Fairview</th>
<th>Westfield</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website: Mission/Aims</td>
<td>&quot;To prepare low-income, first-generation students to succeed in college and career. [They] do this through a unique partnership with a world-</td>
<td>&quot;A world-class education in a safe and supportive environment. [It] is a home away from home, an open door, and a place of rigor and academia-</td>
<td>&quot;To provide an excellent neighborhood based and college preparatory education for the middle and high school students who reside in [Clinton]. Our vision is to see</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
class university, longer learning times, experiential internships, and a college mentorship program where students earn a diploma that matters. We…see no limits on our potential to learn and grow. Here, we are all family...

our graduates succeed in the college or university of their choice and become community leaders who work for positive change in our world.

Theme: Education and Work

Education is to prepare for the next stage of life, builds skills, and enriches minds. Students should prepare for a career.

Education is "an outlet to independence" and to gain and maintain employment. It is important to promote opportunities and expose students, to pursue what they are interested in and passionate about.

Education and work should be something that students are passionate about and while it is a privilege, that money should not be the motivation.

Theme: Institutional Influences

The school is for sixth through twelfth grade students, and counselors have roughly 284 students. Students have longer instructional time, higher credit requirements than state, mentors, and partnership with a university. Counselors tend to the "whole" child and try to assist with the difficulty of building relationships while transitioning back into person.

Counselors work with students in classrooms and not separately in offices, and though the school has transitional counselors they work with all students based on grade. Counselors and staff have mentees that they work with. Students can take college courses on campus. The pandemic made it difficult to develop relationships and that was a major part of the transition back to school.

There has only been one counselor since the school opened, and it is for sixth through twelfth grade. Being an AVID school means the students receive support from teachers and staff for college-going culture and preparation. The counselor has a caseload of 123 students and carried out mostly administrative work during the pandemic.

Theme: Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families

The potential students possess is for collegiate pathways.

The focus is to help students with their transition and making school like a home for the students.

The counselor feels a struggle with families of students and does not feel they value education like she does.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Charter Schools</th>
<th>Centerville</th>
<th>Jefferson</th>
<th>Oakfield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website: Mission/Aims</td>
<td>The language for the school website closely reflected the district’s mission for students to</td>
<td>It is “an ethnically diverse neighborhood”, with “first-generation college students.” They</td>
<td>The school website was like the district and other websites to promote “Skills, motivation, curiosity and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| Theme: Education and Work | Education helps with the type of abilities and characteristics you develop. The structure of education fell apart because of the pandemic. | Counselors changed views on “college only and for all”. They won’t discourage students from pathways, and feel education provides opportunities that students should pursue based on their interests, and for some as an opportunity to change their current circumstances. | Education was a means of having opportunities for the type of work that students are interested in. There were correlations between the student populations they served as overcoming homeless and remedial jobs through education to have options for what they want to do. Counselors were not in favor of college only, but it was primarily promoted. |
| Theme: Institutional Influences | The high school had six counselors, with 470 students each. Much of the work was administrative but increase attention to mental health because of the pandemic required outsourcing. District mandates made it hard to sometimes help students. | The high school has academies that each of the five counselors is associated with. These provide support for students from teams of teachers and counselors. The school has partnerships with a local university and a lot of support for students to attend high school. There is a big push for college, even though there are students who are grade levels behind. Counselors had to deal with a lot more mental health crises because of the pandemic. | Counselors felt there were perceptions and lack of appreciation for their work. They had many administrative duties and pressures, especially because of the pandemic. They felt they had to tend to many things, which stretched them. |
| Theme: Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families | Most of the students are from the community that the school resides in, and there are some differences between Asian and white families. Most are “higher achieving” students. | There was some tension between views around families giving anxiety and being abusive during the pandemic and linking that to part of the mental health of the students. | Some counselors felt they had a better understanding of students during the pandemic, and others expressed low parental involvement. But there was no mention of |
Counselors try to understand the families and values, and assist students based on interests.

There was a recognition how some student populations were not provided equitable educational opportunities and were just being pushed through the system. It felt out of the counselors’ scope and ability to address.

opportunities or strengths that parents and families offered.

Some counselors felt this tension in how they helped students, with some stating that they were not attached to what students pursued as long as they were clear about the path and that the students tried their best to have as many options before them. But alongside this, was: a recognition by counselors, like Mr. Leo, that his students were not prepared in terms of literacy and were many grade levels behind; or like Mr. Carter, saw that students were unable to make decisions and very unmotivated because of the pandemic; counselors who felt it was important for students to understand the implications of their choices but would not stand in students’ way, even if it seemed unlikely that they would be successful at what they pursued; and lastly that families or parents can play a less desirable role in students futures (as stated by Ms. Burlington alluded to by Mr. Weathers, and referenced for families of higher socioeconomic status by Mr. Carter), or that families are a measure for what to not aspire to or escape, like some counselors at Oakfield and Jefferson alluded to.

The starkest difference in how deficit views of populations can impact how students are assisted, compared to recognizing and acknowledging the values of families, was between Ms. Burlington from Clinton charter school and Ms. Woodland from the Centerville non-charter school. Ms. Burlington expressed that aside from language differences, and that families did not value education. Which she felt made it harder to work with and help the students to aspire to collegiate postsecondary aspirations. While there is a diversity of the student population that is
advertised on their school website, it seemed that Ms. Burlington was seeing this as a barrier compared to Ms. Woodland who expressed that being in education required one to understand the students and families, and the values they hold. And that while values might be different, you must respect the families. Ms. Chandler from Westfield even alluded to differing values from the students she worked with but hoped that her students knew that she cared and just wanted what was best for them. This theme and points will be analyzed more in Chapter 5, as they have major implications for how counselors assist students.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand the views of counselors around the purpose of education and work, the institutional impact on counselors’ responsibilities and their views, and the relationship these have with how different student populations are assisted with their postsecondary aspirations and plans across six high schools. All the information shared and explored considered the impact of the global pandemic on education. The findings of this study are presented as themes that arose from: interviews with counselors; participant demographic information; an analysis of their school and/or district websites to consider the institutional environment that counselors worked within; and memos to acknowledge, reflect on, and/or analyze personal biases, observations, questions, and possible insights to explore further.

This chapter begins with Table 11, which restates the research questions for this study, the correlating themes that emerged from the data, and brief analysis of those themes. Table 11 is followed by a more in-depth analysis of the findings by theme, which utilizes the literature review, conceptual framework, and positionality of the researcher. Each theme offers the opportunity for a cross-case analysis, and a few points are shared at the end as an overarching analysis about the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations, future possibilities and questions, and finally a summary and conclusion.

Analysis of Findings of Research Questions by Themes

The complexity of the work of high school counselors assisting students with their postsecondary plans, especially during the global health pandemic, includes many nuances for their day-to-day efforts and their overall approaches. Table 11 shows the correlation between themes and research questions, and a brief description about the findings. The analysis of the themes is provided in the subsequent sections following the table.
Table 11

Themes by Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Correlating Theme(s)</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose</td>
<td>Education and work &amp; Through whose eyes?: how counselors view students and families</td>
<td>Counselors’ views around education and work influenced by their perspectives around adulthood. They emphasized that education provides opportunities for students to pursue a path that they choose, and only if they prepare for it. Some shared that work can be meaningful, but many counselors expressed certain types of work or careers versus a job can help students be &quot;independent&quot; in the future (or not rely on and living with family or doing the same kinds of work as their family members), and in some cases counselors reference that education gives students an opportunity to leave home and &quot;get out&quot; of their current life situation. Many counselors emphasized the value of students pursuing paths that make them happy and are their passions, though some acknowledged that viewing education and work in this way is a privilege. Pursing something that makes students happy and doing something meaningful align with religious connotations of vocation, but overemphasis on the individual bears resemblance to more postmodern and relativistic ideologies and assumptions. Counselors see students and their possibilities for education and work differently, depending on students’ academic performance and at times counselors expressed that they hold differing views or values than the families of the students they serve. The formulation and evolution of these views have come from the counselors' personal experiences as students and trying to figure out their own paths, their experiences in the field with the student populations they are serving (which also has some relationship to the counselors' age, gender, and years in the field), and what they have been encountering during the global health pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of work and education?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) What concepts or Experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a vocation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is the impact of the institutional environment of the schools on</td>
<td>Institutional influences &amp; Through whose eyes?: how counselors view students and</td>
<td>Counselors are responsible for carrying out the mission or mandate of their schools and those at non-charter schools seem to have a more difficult time with the amount of work they carry and perceptions they express that others hold of counselors not having much to do. At the charter schools, counselors work with specific populations geared toward certain aims (e.g., low income, first-generation to attend college or university), compared to the non-charter schools. All counselors think about of the three domains of counseling, whether shared explicitly or not, and see it as part of the work to help the &quot;whole&quot; child, but this can only be done when the responsibilities are &quot;distributed&quot; or shared with others. Many schools have resourced out for mental health services because of the increased need from the pandemic, and in other cases, schools have additional resources like mentors, dual enrollment strategies, and academies or pathways, alongside organizations focused on college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counselors?</td>
<td>families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the</td>
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<td>shared or distributed responsibilities for counseling?</td>
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</table>
applications and financial aid resources to help students. This is integral to helping counselors "reach" more students; especially non-charter school counselors who carry much larger caseloads. Some male non-charter school counselors expressed feeling that their institutions, especially the district, have differing views or understandings for what students need or how counselors should spend their time, but this was not expressed as much among the female counselors nor about the administration at the charter schools. Non-charter and charter school counselors seemed to encourage college more because of the district criteria for graduating for all students to be qualified to apply to college, as well as the mission or aims of the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Correlating Theme(s)</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?</td>
<td>Through whose eyes?: how counselors view students and families</td>
<td>Counselors want to encourage, never discourage students; they want students to feel supported and not to lose hope. For some of the non-charter school counselors, they felt their role was to have students go to college but over years have felt that there are many different opportunities that are possible for students to pursue. Still, many counselors encourage college as the first option for students because students are required to complete their A-G requirements to graduate, they consider students' academic performance, and/or counselors encourage college because of the focus of the charter school. Vocational options are often secondary for students, aside from Westfield, and often counselors try to help students see how going straight into work will limit their opportunities if they don't receive additional training or education. In this light, encouraging college seemed to be something that corresponds to academic performance or GPA and A-G requirements, and trades were for lower performing students (though in interviews counselors expressed they value in both). Many counselors grappled with the changes they saw in students because of the pandemic and how they have tried to assist them. Some counselors at the non-charter schools expressed that their schools give more attention to two tiers of students: students who perform very well academically and ones who require intervention. Often the &quot;middle tier&quot; is lost. And some counselors expressed holding different values or beliefs around education and work compared to some of the ethnic cultures of the families of the students they serve, and encouraged different options than they feel parents would.</td>
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**Theme One: Education and Work**

The analysis of this theme pertains to the following research questions:

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?

b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?

There were instances where counselors seemed aware of their views and compared their values to others. These instances included when they recognized that their views had changed over time; if their views were in agreement or not with the institution they served and/or the educational system as a whole; and lastly comparisons to the populations they served, which included students and their families. The framework for this study emphasized that the nature of the interactions between counselors and students (the concentric circles) was influenced by the assumptions and beliefs that people hold. What varied was how counselors chose to act on the similarities and differences in views, and that is explored in this and subsequent themes.

_Adulthood and Independence: Creating Distance with Families_

Counselors’ views around the purpose of education and work were correlated with the values they upheld around adulthood and the type of lives they felt students should strive to live. This view correlated with certain assumptions that with adulthood comes more responsibility, independence, and the need to have certain skills and attitudes to be employable. Counselors expressed that high school was one of the last opportunities for students to be more prepared for adulthood and that it was very important for there to be a plan in place so that students were making choices for their future versus being stuck because they weren’t ready for the transition. Ms. Chandler, from Westfield Charter, seemed to view independence more specific to the populations of students with disabilities that she served and compared this type of life to what neurotypical developing individuals experience living life. But for some of the non-charter counselors, the value of independence they attached to the purpose of education and work
seemed more culturally influenced (either by race and/or ethnicity, and/or by socioeconomic status). Mr. Carter from Centerville school in the Madison School District praised students from “Asian” cultures for having “pro-school” and “pro-independence” childrearing. And lastly, for Ms. Collins from Jefferson there was a relationship between education and being able to leave one’s home.

Mr. Carter’s views around education and work were compared to what he generally referred to as “Asian” parents. These comments suggest that he might view “Asians” as one homogenous group when there is a lot of diversity in languages, cultures, and lived experiences amongst Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). These types of comments can seem like praise but they can have negative implications on Asian American groups to feel “pressure to conform to this stereotype… and this pressure can constitute a stressor that functions to impeded Asian American students’ willingness and desire to engage in learning processes” (Chan & Hune, 1995; Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lewis et al. 2000 as cited in Museus & Kiang, 2009) and has been used “strategically by opponents of equal opportunity policies and programs to support the notion of meritocracy with evidence that racial discrimination does not exist or impede the educational and occupational progress of racial/ethnic minorities” (Suzuki, 2002; Uyematsu, 1971 as cited in Museus & Kiang, 2009). These views around Asians valuing independence within education and work could lead to assumptions that AAPI students need less support from counselors and that they should be taking more rigorous coursework. And could result in students not receiving the resources and support they truly require, and stress to take steps or go on a path that is not aligned with where they are at.

The promotion of education to lead to work that allows for a more independent life reinforces cultural values of life within the United States, and which might conflict with some of
the cultures and values that students and their families might hold. Views around becoming an adult in the United States that some counselors have internalized tend to suggest a separation of the individual from their family or promote certain ideas around “independence” which emphasize a person having to support themselves and not receive any help; that responsibilities are burdensome because they relate to finances and staying with your family can be seen as a sign of being unsuccessful. Some of the non-charter school counselors brought up that students can go to college and move away or get out of their house. This view measured success in terms of living or not living with one’s parents, and/or posing questions to students regarding if they want to end up doing similar types of work as their parents. The value of education providing opportunities was at times related to changing students’ circumstances and adulthood meaning shouldering life and responsibilities separate from family and community. This conflicted with some of the views around the aims of education and/or work that the counselors in this study expressed, which was related to work being something meaningful, and that education helps raise responsible citizens, and future generations to contribute toward the community and/or society through their work (von Wahlde, 2004; Farid-Arbab, 2016).

Some of the assumptions around these values or views might be connected to how counselors themselves experienced their elementary and secondary education; that they saw things or felt there was a lack of equality, equity, and choices about their school, their family situations, and/or community and that they incorporated into their views around the purpose of education and work; these then extended into their conversations with students. For example, some counselors at Oakfield and Jefferson schools expressed that they thought at one point in their career that the goal for education was to help students get into college but overtime their interactions with students showed that it was a narrow view of their work and there are many
possibilities for students. These counselors were trying to expand their views of education and understand a greater purpose and bigger picture about it. But many of the charters and even the non-charter schools have aims or missions for students to be eligible for and should go to college. Programs like AVID that are present at the non-charter schools and Clinton, and the creation of Fairview, all emphasize and promote college over other options.

The school populations represented in this study and who the counselors work with are primarily comprised of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Counselors seem aware and sensitive to historically marginalized populations being tracked, and so they might view the purpose of education as offering independence so students can choose what their life is like as an adult (Holzer & Baum, 2017; Oakes, 1986; Oakes & Lipton, 1992; Rose 2012). Some counselors, who touched on the aspect of pursuing passions and what makes one happy, acknowledged that this is a privilege that only certain groups of people might have. Something to note is that some of these terms (e.g., happiness, passion) might have certain connotations or meanings, which could differ depending on the person. For some counselors, their understanding of the historically marginalized populations they were serving resulted in their desire for students to be prepared to have options, so that they would not get tracked into a path they did not want or choose. Though not explicitly stated, the act of “detracking” for these counselors might have been connected to viewing education as providing opportunities and giving people choices, and if individuals are prepared for or have clarity on what they will pursue and what it entails, then they can be in control of their futures. The students can decide instead of someone else deciding for them or forcing them into something that does not reflect what they would otherwise choose for themselves.
The points around the individual, their happiness and passion could be linked to different ideological movements, such as postmodern and relativistic notions of truth and knowledge being unique to the individual; these ways of thinking are more individually centered and sometimes self-serving such that they separate the individual from the collective. These views differ from earlier views of vocations that did not create a dichotomy between the advancement of the individual and collective together (Williams, 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Wineberg, 2006; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Weil, 2002). As mentioned in the conceptual framework, the individual and collective are interconnected, and it is not truly possible to separate the influence these spheres have on each other, nor their progress.

These individualistic views of adulthood make their way into views around the purpose of education and work and have been more widely accepted in the contemporary American culture (Arnett, 1998). While other cultures might view transitions into adulthood to include marriage and a growing family, American views are more individualistic in nature. Arnett (1998) found “three individualistic criteria that emerged repeatedly in studies of young Americans’ conceptions of the transition to adulthood […] … accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and financial independence” (p. 296). Part of these views emerged as industrialization and population grew, and the sense of community began to diminish because more young people left their homes, and this individualism was seen as a strength (Arnett, 2018).

*The Myth of Meritocracy: Why Students Won’t be “The Exception”*

Another difference from the more individualistic views versus the religious conations of vocation were that a vocation emphasized the contribution a person makes toward others (Williams, 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Badock, 1998; Wineberg, 2006; Schuurman, 2004; Bellah, 1985; Kolden, 1983; Hermansen, 2004; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Weil, 2002). Even in instances when
students are encouraged to think about others, there were some aspects connected to how it can be self-serving. For example, the portion about community service on Centerville’s school website recommends a certain hour requirement that students should offer for community service, but it does so by stating it is a main component of applying for college (Centerville High, n.d.). This suggests that one should help people and do so for personal advancement and acceptance.

There are a few ideas that are connected in this section. One is that there is a view that if someone tries hard enough, they can succeed and be “successful.” This myth of meritocracy overlooks and takes a blind eye to the privileges and/or lack of resources people have. Another point is that it paints a certain picture of success which might not be the true aspirations of all people and reflect or only represent a subset of values amongst groups of people. Lastly, it can seem self-serving; that if a person works hard enough they can achieve their “goal” and that they can be insincere about what they do as long as they are on their way to being successful. So even these points that are mentioned around community service and college follow those lines of thinking. That you can get into college if you accomplish a checklist of things, such as community service. Getting into college means you are being successful. And that it is not important for you to do community service to help others; you only need to do it to advance down the path that you are headed on.

Some of the counselors at Jefferson shared that even though students might go to college, they know that not all will complete it (McDonough, 1997) and Ms. Chandler shared her personal example of being a student that took honors and AP courses, advanced to a highly ranked school in the UC system in California but was not able to keep up her first year; this made it difficult to continue and she had to reevaluate her options and approaches for her
educational career. Though counselors want students to be prepared in terms of plans, the bigger question seems to be around preparation in terms of capacities and looking at how to help students receive the resources and support to develop requisite (and over time, more universally agreed upon) skills, knowledge, qualities and attitudes. This form of preparation would allow for more stability and advancement in the future because one is capable to take the next steps they hope to take.

Another reason why this view of hard work and progress is a myth is because schools clearly see the impact that additional resources and support offers students. Though it is geared toward collegiate success, Fairview utilizes so many resources for their students specifically to ensure academic advancement. Though resources should not be only for collegiate success but something all students should have equitable access to, it demonstrates that students require these supports. It also touches on Mr. Wright’s comment, who works at the Madison School District, about student advancement being an opportunity gap versus an achievement gap. There was no analysis done for how Fairview students fare in college, but the point is to show the myth of meritocracy.

*Education As More Than Academic Attainment*

Some of the views that the counselors have about education and work, and the preparation that comes before adulthood, connects to the notion of developing capabilities. Some of the participants in this study referenced that education is not just about the academics but it helps to provide the development of skills and abilities, like critical thinking, problem solving, as well as the development of qualities such as being responsible, hardworking, and demonstrating the willingness to learn and listen. And that these are at times even more valued for work than
the “grades” one produces; so then nurturing capacities includes all of these things around knowledge, skills, qualities and attitudes (Farid-Arbab, 2016; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1985).

Counselors do see that students have potential and education seems to be a way to unlock the potential that is within them so that they can find work that they would enjoy and can financially support themselves and their future families. The assumption of individuals, which is woven into the framework for this study, is that the potentialities mentioned are latent within all individuals (Farid-Arbab, 2016). But the degree to which these potentialities are able to come out and be actualized is greatly dependent on the type of education people receive. And this education is something that schools and those within the community are able to both contribute meaningful toward. Work can also be meaningful or a way to contribute. For the charter school counselors, it seems their views around education and work were somewhat related to or were translated into working for institutions with very specific aims for subsets of the student populations; they tried to use education to help students attain certain goals. At Fairview and Clinton, the goal was college and university, and at Westfield it was advancing in the field of health. The counselors and distributive counseling faculty at the non-charter schools seemed to grapple with their perspectives around education and work to offer equitable opportunities for students who have not been well-served by the educational system.

Theme Two: Institutional Influences

The analysis of this theme pertains to the following research questions:

2. What is the impact of the institutional environment of the schools on counselors?
   a. How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?
b. How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the shared or distributed responsibilities for counseling?

The responsibilities and work of counselors is to help students with their academic progress, social-emotional well-being, and college and career preparation and plans. Not all of the counselors directly referenced these three domains or the ASCA model for counseling ([ASCA] “The role”, n.d.), but they tried to assist the students with these areas to varying degrees. The ways that counselors work with students is through one-on-one counseling; classroom presentations, student groups, and sharing or distributing counselors’ responsibilities through collaboration with organizations, post-secondary institutions, and school staff; and/or through certain school structures like internships and certifications, dual enrollment strategies or the academies and pathways, and mentors. Differences seemed to arise between the charter and non-charter school counselors when it came to the resources and distribution of responsibilities, as well as how aligned counselors’ views were with the institutions they served. There were differences in tone and language with the relationships that non-charter school counselors held with the institutions that they served compared to the charter school counselors. In Table 12, some of the nuances of the institutional environment of the charter and non-charter schools are outlined to provide an overview of the analysis below.

Table 12

Institutional Environment at Charter and Non-Charter Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charter Schools</strong></td>
<td>Most of the schools promote college over vocational or trade pathways. These schools mostly served student populations from lower socioeconomic and linguistically diverse populations. All schools, though they varied, Charter school counselors have smaller caseloads, and each has a unique mission or aim, with specific student populations that are targeted. Some charter schools had mentors, in addition to the school resources they could access, and two of the</td>
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Non-Charter Schools had either programs or college partners to assist collegebound students. And all were impacted by the global health pandemic. Charter schools included middle and high school grades. Counselors have a mandate to the district, as well as their specific school. They have much higher caseloads of students, and their distributed counseling resources varies depending on the schools. All the schools received additional resources for mental health support for students, but it was not enough to meet the demands of the number of students who required services. The focus of counselors at non-charter schools was not just to promote college for all students, but that is what they are most familiar with and feel they should do because of the district. The academies and pathways provided the most opportunities for distribution of counseling responsibilities.

**Charter Versus Non-Charter: Resources and Distributed Counseling**

The support and resources that existed at the charter versus non-charter schools varied and the funding that the non-charter schools receive impacted the nature of the resources that existed for students. Another aspect of charter versus non-charter influences were the mission or aims of the institution, and who the counselors received their “mandate” from. There seemed to be more tension or disagreement that existed for some of the counselors at the non-charter schools, while the charter school counselors made no mention of challenges they experienced with their work because of the school or management. The counselors from the charter schools who participated in this study, all of whom were female, expressed similar ideas and language to what their schools presented online through their websites. Although all counselors were impacted by the pandemic, and they touched on the difficulties of helping students who had
struggled because of isolation and navigating peer and faculty relationships and expectations, the charter school counselors seemed to express more support and joy for their place of work.

There wasn’t as much conversation about bureaucratic or administrative work, except briefly from Clinton’s counselor who shared that it increased while distance learning took place. The non-charter school counselors expressed a lot more time and responsibility than the charter school counselors for overseeing and administering assessments and exams; this doesn’t mean that the charter school counselors are removed from this, but it might not be as large of an emphasis for their role. Ms. Collins shared how it was important for counselors to be intentional with their time, but this seems difficult to do when schools utilize assessments and testing to measure and analyze their student populations (Kennedy, 2008; Duffy et al., 2008; [ASCA] “Appropriate and Inappropriate”, n.d.). It would require clarity on behalf of the counselor and administration, as well as resources for collaboration, to ensure that counselors can use their time wisely (Oakes, 2014; Allen et al, 2006; [ASCA] “Appropriate and Inappropriate”, n.d.). Some counselors at the different non-charter schools expressed that there was not an appreciation for the work they do or an understanding of it, so there is much that is expected of them, or their time gets filled with things that become more administrative and bureaucratic as opposed to being with the students, which is not supposed to be a primary function for their role ([ASCA] “Appropriate and Inappropriate”, n.d.).

There seemed to be differing relationships between the counselors and the district; some of the male counselors at the non-charter schools had more “tension” with what the district would ask of them or how the district would approach the work with students. This was because of the way the counselors felt that it impacted their work and because of their views on the challenges and needs of the student populations they were serving. Mr. Weathers, Mr. Carter,
and Mr. Leo (from Oakfield, Centerville, and Jefferson), all commented (to varying degrees) on some differences in views they held or approaches they took compared to the district. Sometimes this meant that there was work that took them away from being with the students, which counselors viewed as much of their work, and other times it was that the district might not understand or have approaches to help the students and it falls on the counselors. Some of the female counselors, like Ms. Cooper from Oakfield, and Ms. Summers and Ms. Collins from Jefferson, were part of district wide programs or teams, or felt encouraged by the support of the district for their work.

Given that I am not a counselor or someone that the participants know well, some of them may have just been more mindful of what they shared or spoke about compared to others. Another point to consider is what is doable given the responsibilities that counselors hold. According to ASCA ([ASCA] “Appropriate and Inappropriate”, n.d.), and the district website (Madison Unified School District, n.d.) for the non-charter schools, and one of the charter schools, there are roles and responsibilities that are clearly articulated. But still counselors have so much to tend to, and without being able to either share these responsibilities or strengthen informal or formal structures for collaboration (Oakes, 2014; Allen et al., 2006), it is not plausible for one person or a counseling unit to ensure that all student populations are tended to.

There were differences between the charter and non-charter schools in terms of the distribution of the responsibilities and resources available for students. This is where distributed counseling approaches, models, or principles help counselors to work toward reaching an increasingly larger percentage of students to make sure they “have a plan” for after high school (Allen et al., 2006; Oakes, 2014). The counselors at the charter schools may have had the opportunity to work more intimately with students and that might allow them to work on the details for students’ futures.
Also, for Clinton and Fairview charter schools, they have students from sixth to twelfth grade which allows for an additional three years to work with students toward their postsecondary professional and educational aspirations.

There have been a growing number of efforts to show the importance of middle school aged students benefitting from earlier exposure, curriculum and conversations about college and career opportunities (Curry et al., 2013). When students have a clearer understanding about the options, careers linked to different postsecondary pathways, and understanding about the skills and abilities that are valuable for their future work earlier on, it can help shape the way they approach the remainder of their secondary education. Another difference across schools was that charter school counselors had much smaller caseloads, which were closer to the recommended ratio of students to counselors ([ASCA] “School counselor roles”, 2022).

Counselors felt more confident in student support services when they shared the responsibilities with others. These additional supports came from: teachers, mentors, partnerships with universities and/or colleges, exposure through internships or other mediums, dual enrollment strategies, organizations or academies, and mental health professionals or services. The academies, at non-charter schools, seem to help with possibilities for students to explore more CTE and/or trade options, and community colleges. But one of the non-charter schools shared that they need to be better about helping these students.

Something to note about distributed counseling or responsibilities is that it goes beyond just trying to give away responsibilities. To have an increasing effective distributed counseling program requires the institution to “define what purposes the program will serve” and some of the common purposes include following and supporting academic progress, giving attention to and preparing students for college, “developing… work habits and behaviors [...] building a
common school culture focused on student achievement [and] developing relationships with students to promote their progress” (Allen et al., 2006, p. 28). This requires collaboration and building a vision amongst administrators, teachers, counselors, parents and students in order to think beyond current roles, focus on articulating a common purpose or goals, and seeing how to develop the skills and approaches to advance toward those goals. These points are raised because it seemed that institutionally, the charter school counselors in some ways seemed clearer about their goal because of their mandate from the institution they served. And then there were teams of people around the students to accomplish these goals. Non-charter schools offer more complexity when it comes to distributed counseling. They have to consider the district and schools, and that see how to define a common goal or vision to work toward when trying to address certain areas for student advancement. Non-charter schools would also have to see what configuration of individuals and/or approaches would be needed.

**Institutional Impact and Response to Global Health Pandemic**

Most counselors in this study expressed the increased challenges of their work with students during the pandemic (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021; Strear et al., 2021). Institutional responses to the pandemic focused largely on providing more mental health therapists; these efforts and resources helped counselors to have additional individuals thinking about and tending to the students. But the numbers were so high, that often there was a waiting list to receive services. And Ms. Sofia, the only mental therapist interviewed for this study, expressed there was a grey area for how these mental health therapists and (non-charter) school staff could work together since they worked for different entities. Their responsibilities and approaches were different and at times that would create some friction with the therapist and other school staff. Some counselors, from the non-charter schools, were also frustrated by some of the institutional
responses to the difficulties students were facing and that had implications for their work with students.

Lastly, there was a laxity toward attendance and learning, essentially the structure of school, that some of the non-charter school counselors felt was more harmful than helpful for students. Mr. Carter felt the laxity made students less accountable and it distanced them from the reality they would face in the future around expectations in the workplace and what they would encounter at postsecondary educational institutions. Mr. Wright at the district shared that instructors and employers had expressed that even more important than a grade was the attitude and effort that students would uphold, because that had implications for having someone they would be able to work well with and would strive for progress and good work. In Fairview’s example, Ms. Cobbs stressed that the rigor and standards they hold their students to was greater than other schools and this could be possibly because they believe that students can, with support and resources, aspire to meet the expectations and it will help them in the long run.

For some of the charter school counselors, it seemed like they felt some of the students continuing with online learning versus returning to the school was fine and they were doing well. But according to some of the non-charter high school counselors some of the changes to excused or unlimited absences, reduced assignments and instructional hours seemed more harmful than helpful. These approaches might have put more on the work of the counselors to try to help students make progress and be prepared for their transition to life after high school.

The counselors were of course understanding of the difficulty the students had and were continuing to face. But these institutional changes might have added more for counselors to work through with students to help them be more prepared for life after high school. There are challenges that counselors face to assist students in their preparation and transition into
adulthood; these challenges relate to the counselors’ beliefs around the purpose of education and work and includes institutional influences. These are barriers as well as areas that counselors are still trying to learn how to navigate to better assist students. The pandemic can also be viewed as an opportunity to try to address some foundational ideologies that counselors adopt, or strategies and approaches they employ.

Mr. Huntington shared that visiting his students during the pandemic opened his eyes to their reality, and others, like Ms. Woodland shared that the uncertainty and trauma from the pandemic made many students unsure about what they wanted or would pursue for their postsecondary aspirations. This could have been an opportunity for stepping back and considering the approaches when working with students, and to see opportunities for growth that might have not been present before (e.g., the concept of constructive resilience will be shared below as one tool to address trauma). Some points for evaluation include the types of resources that students need and the level of collaboration required to agree on the approaches for how to help students and their families to consider, learn about, and pursue educational and professional opportunities; and it could have been an opportunity to consider the nature of the relationships between the students and the staff at the school. If students were not comfortable to share or think through their plans for their futures, then counselors and staff could try to learn what it would take to help support them in those efforts, while acknowledging the challenges that most people faced in isolation. And while there were organizations to offer services and support, little was shared about opportunities for drawing on community members to take creative measures for support. This could have included peer mentorship as well as other family members in the community.
Theme Three: Through Whose Eyes?: How Counselors View Students and Families

The analysis of this theme pertains to the following research questions:

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?
   b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?

2. What is the impact of the institutional environment of the schools on counselors?
   a. How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?
   b. How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the shared or distributed responsibilities for counseling?

3. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. How do counselors assess who is college-bound, vocational bound, goes straight to the workforce, or pursues other post-secondary options?
   b. How do high school counselors work with students who are pursuing vocational education or training in comparison to students who are college-bound?
   c. How do high school counselors work with students who don’t plan to pursue additional education/training or are unsure of their postsecondary plans?
   d. How do counselors work with student populations from different demographic groups?
The way counselors view or define student populations and their families has implications for how counselors feel their personal and institutional views align with the students, and plays a role for what information they convey and how they share it with students (Dabach et al., 2017; Martinez, 2018). Some of the counselors expressed that they try to understand the values and motivation for students’ decisions and try to see how to assist students to learn about opportunities that they could pursue. The different ways that counselors view students included: 1) the changes in students from the pandemic (e.g., that they are experiencing trauma, depression, anxiety, and lack motivation); 2) by grade level and that different grades require different type of support and information; 3) by academic performance; and 4) by demographics such as their economic status, race and ethnicity, and family educational experience or history. In general, they see that their students are younger than them and trying to figure out what is possible for their future; counselors are older figures that students need to trust and feel comfortable with so that they can speak about what is going on in their lives and what is possible.

*Seeing Students Impacted by the Pandemic*

The pandemic influenced the way counselors saw students and how they worked with them. This was because students were isolated and developing difficult habits and not learning much while at home. And counselors recognized that the transition back to being in person was something many students wanted but was quite difficult to assist students with. Mr. Huntington from Oakfield had shared how the pandemic and home visits gave him more insight on the lives of his students. And most counselors and support or distributed counseling staff shared that they saw a great deal of anxiety, depression, isolation, and lack of motivation in students because of the pandemic (Lewis et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 202’ Huck & Zhang, 2021). And this changed
many students’ postsecondary plans, which required counselors to reevaluate how they help students.

Counselors seemed to be clearer for how to help students who were performing well academically; they were able to encourage or help them to apply to college. But even some of those who had performed well academically before the pandemic, fell into the category of students who had lower grades and were unsure about what they should do after high school. If students were questioning college, it could have made it more difficult for some counselors to be able to investigate more details about other possibilities for students. Counselors also would need to tend to the “whole” person; to ensure that the social-emotional needs were being tended to just as much, if not more, than the academic and the college and career domains.

The pandemic exacerbated existing difficulties that students, counselors, schools, and districts were dealing with or had come across before (Pincus et al., 2020; Jackson-Cherry & Erford, 2018). This made it challenging for counselors to figure out how to work with students to help them with their postsecondary plans. More students had mental health challenges than counselors had dealt with before. Cases of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and trauma were unmanageable for school counselors to deal with or refer out to other organizations (Dorn et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021; Huck & Zhang, 2021). And in turn, motivation, and the ability to adjust, to change or plan for their future had greatly decreased and suffered. Students had difficulty with their peer relationships, and counselors were unable to form relationships or build trust with students as easily as they were before. The suffered relationship between counselors and students made it harder to get to know students to help them figure out their postsecondary plans. Students were also more entrenched or addicted to technology, which challenged their ability to focus and build relationships to connect with others.
Many counselors touched on how the uncertainties created by the pandemic contributed toward feelings of anxiety and depression for students, as well as a decrease in motivation toward their current and future endeavors. And it seems like that gaps that were present for these student populations in education were only further widened. But maybe these difficulties or challenges could provide opportunities to look at and think about the whole student and the different aspects of their lives. The three areas or domains of counseling seem to try to tend to or acknowledge that it is important to support and know a student past their grades. That there is more of a story than what counselors can see on a computer for the classes they’ve taken and the grades they received.

A question that the pandemic raised or brought to light is how counselors can become increasingly aware or attuned with where a student is at in terms of their capabilities. Often counselors expressed that they didn’t feel they were the one that should encourage or discourage a path and raised that there might be examples of students who really excel later so a person can’t really know what the student is capable of. And while it is true (e.g., that we can never fully know our own or other people’s potential), the mission and vision of schools and what counselors seemed to touch on in their views around the purpose of education and work is that there are certain capabilities (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and qualities) that education can help with nurturing and that all students should be taught to develop. And that most or all students are capable of developing or demonstrating these capabilities.

This relates to Farid-Arbab (2016), Sen (1985), and Nussbaum’s (2011) points around capacities and capabilities, which are in the conceptual framework for this study. That as people we have certain potentialities that are within us that are part of our purpose that we need
to develop, and there are things we are capable of doing if they are nurtured. The extent to which a person demonstrates or can demonstrate these abilities might be unknown to us, but certain conditions allow these capacities to be nurtured and developed. For example, most neurotypical developing children can walk.

However, they don’t start to walk just on their own. They must develop certain abilities to build up to it, and the environment they are in might also contribute to the timing of when they are able to walk. And once they do learn to walk, the ability to do increases over time. Parents won’t encourage the child’s first attempt at walking, or even crawling, to include climbing up and down the stairs because it’s not a first or natural next step for children. Most children must learn how to develop the abilities to roll over, sit up, pull themselves up, and crawl before walking. And parents must help them feel encouraged, to try and not get frustrated, to be eager to learn and be motivated by a challenge. But not to present them with tasks they are unable to do and leave them to eventually figure out that they are unable to do it.

Similarly with students, they have capabilities or potential that are latent within them. And one big aspect is recognizing that all people have these latent potentialities. If these potentialities aren’t nurtured, it is unfair to expect a person to skip steps and do something that requires certain foundational understandings and qualities. It is also unfair to expect that a counselor with such a large caseload of students would be able to really understand where each student is at if the standards have been lowered and if counselors don’t get to develop the same relationships with students as teachers do, considering all the time that they spend with the students. These complexities that counselors encounter are not for the faint at heart. And there are several interrelated issues or challenges that might warrant attention to explore possibilities for how to better serve these student populations.
See Students Based on Graduation Requirements

Much of the work of non-charter school counselors seemed more heavily influenced by their work with juniors and seniors. While they do assist all students with being informed about what is required of them to graduate, their general postsecondary options and how to figure out what to do, credit checks, and picking classes, a lot of their time is spent either on those who are at risk of not advancing and/or the upperclassmen to make sure they have things in place to graduate. This view of students based on what grade they are in or their ability to graduate or not is connected to the institutional requirements for students to complete the A-G requirements (Betts et al., 2013 & 2016; CDE “Courses required”, 2022) and how this is emphasized also depends on the charter or non-charter structures or resources. The non-charter counselors and the Westfield counselors expressed that they were not attached, nor did they feel that college was the only option for students. This connected with their views about the potential that students have and that any extra training or education would provide students with opportunities for a career where they could be independent, provide for themselves and their families.

However, counselors seemed to have the most experience still helping students who are “college-bound” because of the graduation requirements, and/or the mission or mandate of the charter school, as well as the counselors’ personal experiences when they were students. And counselors mostly used academic performance or student voice for wanting to pursue a particular path as a way to determine if students receive help to apply for college, pursue a trade, or the military. Ms. Cooper from Oakfield expressed that college is what is encouraged first because of the district A-G requirements, and then trades or vocational education is encouraged. And this seem to be directly and indirectly expressed by the other non-charter school counselors: that if a student is academically performing “well”, that they are encouraged to go to college and those
who aren’t, are encouraged to pursue the trades. But counselors do not discourage students if they express a preference for a certain path (Rosenbaum et al., 1996), except for students expressing plans to work right after high school without training or education or pursuing something like an athletic career. In these specific instances, it seemed clear to some of the non-charter school counselors to inform students that they should have a backup plan because the likelihood for people to advance on a path toward being a professional athlete was unlikely. But the same was not present for someone who wanted to advance to college, even if counselors knew they would not be successful.

It seemed that counselors started for ninth and tenth graders sharing how students can register for and approach their classes, to express what is expected of them for the remainder of their high school years, and then they worked more closely with juniors and seniors for being prepared to choose and apply for college(s). Reinforcing college as a primary option seems to be related to the A-G graduation requirements for the non-charter school counselors, as well as wanting there to be equitable opportunities for their students from historically marginalized populations (Betts et al., 2013 & 2016; Holzer & Baum, 2017; Rosenbaum et al., 2016). Even if students share a plan that counselors can recognize that it is not a realistic choice for them to be successful in, they shy away from discouraging students and rather try to think through options with them (Rosenbaum et al., 1996). Charter school counselors have more specific mandates about the paths they help students with; Fairview and Clinton promoted college, whereas Westfield emphasizes that they are a career and technical school that promotes all options. But the non-charter schools still encouraged students, because of the district and state graduation requirements, to apply for college.
Counselors tried to make sure that students are connected to the appropriate resources to help them learn about or take the steps needed for their postsecondary plans. Sometimes the charter structures or academies at the non-charter schools would draw on teachers, mentors, and/or organizations to connect students with. This seemed to be stronger for students who were going to go to college. Ms. Woodland shared explicitly that students who want to pursue college receive the clearest support compared to vocational or CTE trade opportunities. Though it was said explicitly by most counselors, one counselor shared that students who receive better grades would go to college, and then following would be vocational options and then the military. There is an association, even though “tracking students” is discouraged and not formally in place to have more students go to college, especially the ones who have performed well academically (Oakes, 2005; Holzer & Baum, 2017; Truong, 2022; Rosenbaum, 1996).

Mr. Leo from Jefferson High was the most direct about the differences in his views about education and work considering the reality he sees with the students at his school and the approaches of the district. As shown in the previous chapter, these issues relate to the policies which impact all students, but he sees they won’t meet the needs or address the issues that need to be resolved for the student populations at Jefferson. This seems to be related to policies that have been implemented at a district level, connected to the A-G requirements but also ideas around “preparing” students to be able to go to college, that didn’t seem to touch on helping students at an earlier point to develop the requisite faculties and capacities needed to take that next step. This relates to some of Farid-Arbab (2016), Sen (1985), and Nussbaum’s (2011) points around capabilities and capacities. At times there might be, within education, superficial or surface level treatments of understanding, and instead there needs to be a very conscious effort to
nurture skills, attitudes, and knowledge within students for them to learn and be able to develop the requisite capacities needed to take their next steps in their education.

And the capacities they develop are not to solely be self-serving; they are things they can share and offer to others, and that they develop because of their service and interaction with others. One last point this raises about the views around the purpose for education and work, is that it is important to try to understand how to have a more coherent view of the role education and work plays in a person’s life and how that gives way to helping students with transitions.

By this, I mean that students and those around them are trying to grapple with how they can have clarity on what kind of education and work they can pursue after high school. And this is because life after high school seems and sometimes is so different from what they have experienced in their K-12 education. Ideas of learning and understanding, or even motivation, might be overly tied to conceptions around how students are performing or able to demonstrate specific types of knowledge on exams or assessments (Duffy et al., 2008; Kennedy, 2008; NCLB, 2002; Chadd & Drage, 2006), which of course does not translate to intellectual capability. But at times, there is not as much nurturing to encourage a life of learning, where one is motivated by trying to understand more. It ends up being cut short or is a shorter-term view of “you should go to college” or “career and technical education is good, and you should go for it.” Counselors would have to learn how to converse with students to draw out their values and aspirations for their future lives and see how to support them in a more coherent way by talking through the possibilities that exist to help them advance. This goes beyond an emphasis on college or no college, and helps to deconstruct the path they’re on for the life they hope to live.
**Seeing Students and Families Compared to Oneself**

A few counselors and school websites emphasized the diversity of their student populations, or that students come from low-socioeconomic and first-generation backgrounds, or that students and families were from cultures that held differing values than counselors themselves. This impacted the views around education and work that counselors promoted and how they would utilize students’ home lives to justify or contextualize the counselors’ views around education and work, and what they would express to students (Dabach et al., 2017; Martinez & Huerta, 2018). Counselors shared that the purpose for education and work, especially work, was that students should pick something they are passionate about and will make them happy. But only a few counselors acknowledged that doing something that you’re passionate about and choosing that over money is a privilege; this was in recognition of the socioeconomic realities of their student populations. And there were mixed perceptions around the role families play in students’ education and if the counselors agreed or not with how parents were or weren’t involved in their children’s lives. It seems that one aspect of pursuing passion and happiness, for some counselors, might be connected to the counselors’ experiences or perceptions of parents and families. For example, Ms. Burlington from Clinton and Mr. Weathers from Oakfield, expressed that they felt the cultures the families of the students they assisted with promoted decisions that seemed to not value education or that families were not involved or harder to get a hold of (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Or Mr. Carter from Centerville expressed that he feels parents might push their kids toward certain careers because of the reputation or status it offers the parents, and it is less about what the students want.

It seemed like some of the counselors would promote ideas of education and work that made their school seem “safe” while home life was unsafe (which for many because of the
pandemic could not have been well functioning given the challenges with financial stability, family living situations, and isolation). But some counselors would also give messages to students that doing the same job as their parents, and living with family as an adult would be signs of being unsuccessful. Or that students could move out and leave if they pursued college. These allude to perceptions counselors might (un)consciously hold of the communities they serve. It overlooks some of the strengths that counselors might at times see but fail to be able to utilize or draw on to help students. It raises some questions around why some counselors use ideas of independence and students changing their current lives to promote certain pathways or types of work, to make it sound like opportunities would arise by continuing to college, but it implies that they look down on the type of lives that the families they serve live. These generalizations can also be quite harmful, and it is unclear how counselors might be conveying messaging to students that might create division, and distance students from their families and communities. They could make students adopt more narrow or false views about success, contributions, values, and create a dichotomy between individual and collective advancement.

It can reinforce ideas that students’ motivation for pursuing or continuing their education is to get away from and be different from their families. But this is very different than when counselors expressed that they try to understand what students are interested in and find motivating or meaningful. Most of the counselors seemed to pursue counseling because it touched on their talents and hopes to work with students, and though it is hard, it is clearly something rewarding. One counselor shared that what gives meaning and purpose to him would be different for someone else, or another counselor expressed frustration that parents might encourage certain paths or professions because he felt it might be more out of status or reputation compared to what the students would prefer to do. But it is unclear if parents might encourage
certain paths in the same way the society around them gives messages or shows that particular ones are of more valued, provide more stability, help to provide better financial futures and opportunities for one’s family, and/or they are given so little information about the many different possibilities and steps to get there that they are left with somewhat “generic” options for the future.

Views that counselors hold about families regarding linguistic differences, differing values, or lack of parental involvement can be harmful for a number of reasons. One is that this is more of deficit versus drawing on asset-based or culturally relevant and responsive models and pedagogy (Renkly & Bertolini, 2018; Ladson-Billings; 1995; California Department of Education, Asset-based pedagogies, 2022). Counselors, whether aware or not, might have narrow or false perceptions of families especially if they are only trying to reach families when there is an issue, or they feel that families are not promoting what the counselor is focused on. Families have many contributions to offer, and often work hard to make sure that members are supported and taken care of. Some of the counselors who adopted more negative views of the family and have different socioeconomic, racial-ethnic, and linguistic realities might be blindsided by the assets or strengths that families can bring. This can especially happen if there is not a desire for a collaboration.

**Implications For How Counselors Work with Students**

Based on the conversations with counselors and distributed counseling staff, all students are eligible to apply to college because of the A-G requirements (Betts et al., 2013 & 2016; CDE “Courses required”, 2022) to graduate and college is often what is first and foremost encouraged and this is related to academic performance. Non-charter school counselors shared that initially they thought their primary role as a counselor was to get students into college, and counselors do
play a major role with this (McKillip et al., 2012; [ASCA] “The Essential Role”, 2019; Rosenbaum, 1996; Martinez & Huerta, 2018). But overtime, it seemed that this was a limiting view and approach toward helping students. Students at all these schools come from racial/ethnic and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as from families of lower socioeconomic status and counselors want them to have opportunities and exposure to learn about the different possibilities after high school.

*Counselors As An Informational Resource and “Connector”*

Even if their grades are lower, if a student says they want to go to college, then counselors go with it. It’s rare for a counselor to challenge what a student wants, even if they don’t think all students should go to college. This is because counselors feel their role is to provide information for students, more so students can know where to get resources and feel informed to know what it takes to work toward their goal and know or understand more about the type of future work and education they are pursuing (McKillip et al., 2012; Rosenbaum, 1996). As seen in the excerpts from counselors, especially at the non-charter high schools, they try to be mindful about what they share and how they share it; they never want to discourage students from possibilities. And this relates to seeing themselves as listening to try to understand more about the students, their hopes, and aspirations, and helping them figure out the steps to reach their goals; or helping students make plans that account for their talents, interests, values, and what motivates them.

Counselors want students to have a future that they choose, and not one they end up with out of lack of preparation. But there were very few counselors who made an explicit comment about the student populations they serve not receiving the adequate or necessary resources and supports to develop the capacities needed to be “prepared” for adulthood. Counselors try to share
information so that students understand the choices they have and understand what is required and/or what they have to do on the path they choose. But with a large caseload it is difficult to know if counselors can be intimately informed about where students are actually at to know the type of support and steps to start with. Counselors don’t “solve problems” but connect and educate students so that they understand the reality of what they want to do so they know the path to get there. This approach draws on some of the principles of ecological counseling, where counselors try to understand the person’s “value system and meaning-making process” (McMahon et al., 2014, p. 461) to set goals and to help them work toward those aspirations (Bemak & Conyne, 2004). And this could alleviate some of the tensions certain counselors have created with their views around families.

One challenge that counselors run into when assisting students with their future aspirations is when they realize the students’ plans are not realistic nor attainable. Counselors do not want to have students feel discouraged or feel hopeless; instead, counselors allow students to think a path is possible. But some of the counselors try to help the students understand what will be required of them to achieve that goal, to help them reflect on what they need to do and if they are willing to do it, then to make sure students are connected to the right resources. They want students to also have a backup plan. A question this raises is if, at the risk of not discouraging students, information is internalized that is rooted in what is possible or actual clarity for their path forward is being developed or not? While counselors state it is common for students to change their mind or go down a different path, what is not considered is if they actually will be able to figure out what they will do later on, or if it will become another institutions’ problem to worry about. Not having clarity at the age of 22 is much more detrimental than at 17 years of age.
It could be possible that counselors, working with historically marginalized populations, are trying to promote “equity” and being “socially just” by encouraging a path they think all students should be able to pursue, or to overemphasize “student voice” to guide the process. But the inequity is still present if students are treated as if everyone is the same, when they are not, as well as if they are not being nurtured to develop the capacities so that they can be aware of the different pathways and prepared for one that they have thoughtfully been working toward. Mr. Leo spoke a great deal about this: that the district providing AP and honors courses for students who had fourth or fifth grade reading levels was out of touch with the reality of the support students needed. And once they graduated, they would fall on the shoulders of the postsecondary institutions.

One perspective to consider is that many schools try to promote college, change standards, and give more resources for students for going to college. However, it would be more equitable if more students increasing received support and resources to excel because that is what would be best for students and society. Then students would be more intellectually, emotionally, and morally prepared for each grade level and for life after high school. Some of these efforts to help students advance might be a façade and superficial approach to assist certain student groups from marginalized populations from receiving a more rigorous and higher quality education.

Distributed Counseling

Referring to distributed counseling merits reference to distributed leadership, and when looking at this in terms of schools, it is the interactions that are key to understand (Janson et al., 2009). More than the structure, it emphasizes how leadership is shared, spread or stretched while emphasizing the interactions between school “leaders” and others. Some literature in the past has explored distributed leadership in terms of counselors and administrators to contribute to
working toward certain aims around student performance and school climate. Janson et al. (2009) stated that leadership within schools doesn’t rest upon one person but is a “collection of collaborative practices among professionals within schools and the communities in which they are located… [T]here are limitations to focusing only on positional leadership capacity and leadership skills of school counselors…” (p. 100). Within this study, it touched somewhat on the notion from distributed leadership; that leadership is “a construct of relationships rather than roles… [and] focus of what people do within activities and tasks” (Firestone, 1996; Halverson, 2003; & Spillane et al., 2004 all as cited in Militello & Janson, 2007, p. 413).

This was most evident in the differences in relationships between counselors and the institutions that they served. In some cases, non-charter counselors seemed to have more difficulty (given their scope and caseload) to connect and collaborate with others outside of their unit and outside of the academies. They were the individuals that either stated some tension or differences between their views and the district or stated that people did not appreciate or understand the significance of their roles. These comments seemed to suggest that attention to these relationships and clarifying misunderstandings or assumptions about their roles might allow for stronger relationships which would give way to more assistance toward their work.

Given the history of the field of counseling, and how there was not always clarity on the role, counselors expressed the amount of effort they make to help students have clarity on their postsecondary aspirations, and certain factors played a role on the percentage of students they could reach. These included the number of students on their caseload, impact of the pandemic, mission and aims of the institution they served, as well as the opportunities they had to collaborate with others to contribute toward one of the three counseling domains. The structure of the non-charter schools seemed like it left counselors trying to figure out how to support larger
student caseloads compared to the charter schools, and also having to navigate their roles or relationship with the district. On one hand, the district sees the turnover in counselors and that the correct information is not reaching counselors to get to the students, and on the other hand the counselors feel like they’re not appreciated (though they don’t say by whom), or they disagree and are unhappy with how the district does things. The schools in this study were chosen because of their larger percentage of students from lower socioeconomic status realities, and many of them seemed to promote college as the primary pathway for students who graduated from high school.

Fairview school was very direct in their website and the counselor interview that they focus on getting students into college. And Westfield emphasized promoting career and technical pathways for their students. For many other counselors, though they expressed not being attached to a specific pathway, the mandate or vision of their institution seemed to influence their own promotion of college over other pathways. Counselors and support staff too mostly had experience pursuing college, so in some ways there was another limitation in being able to speak more specific and practically about other options like trades to students. It became unclear how much counselors are informed and aware of pathways outside of college, to be able to share the information to anyone (not just students with poor grades) whose talents and abilities would be well developed down that path.

And finally, it was undeniable that counselors were unable to be intimately connected to all the students they supported. Even the charter school counselors with smaller caseloads relied a great deal on the distribution of responsibilities that they shared (in)formally to support students. Though at one level, the culture and systems for collaboration are of importance, some thought might also need to be given to the necessary capacities for counseling programs to
nurture or encourage for the counselors they are training. Whiston (2002), Sink (2002), and Sears and Granello (2002), all as cited in Gysbers (2010), highlight that in some ways these issues might go beyond the caseload that counselors have, the emphasis on collaborative programs, and/or structures that are in place. But that there are skills and abilities that counselors might require to advocate for their programs and roles, and to be able to create certain conditions to establish and implement the programs to allow for a more focused role (Gysbers, 2010, pp. 174-175).

**Cultural Responsiveness Amongst Counselors**

The school counselors in this study primarily served populations from low socioeconomic communities, and culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Counselors seemed to recognize that within that came differences in language, communication, and values. In few instances, this recognition was not a barrier nor something the counselors shied away from but tried to incorporate into their interactions with students. However, for others, the differences were something that counselors used to compare to their personal values and views, with an emphasis on the differences rather than some recognition of the assets or strengths of the community and/or potential areas for collaboration. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2020) focuses on being able to identify and analyze the inequalities and problems, while students are helped to see their culture and themselves positively (and becoming increasingly fluent in that culture[s]) and advancing in their growth and development.

ASCA (2021) states that school counseling programs should be culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017), and that counselors have to understand the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of those they’re serving and that their work incorporates this into collaborating with stakeholders and helping students in their advancement. This would also mean that counselors
are not trying to change students to conform to another culture. They would be learning about and seeing the strengths of the students and trying to build on that and bring that out in their work with them.

Counselors are trying to move away from their student populations being tracked; they have to navigate recognizing the differences between themselves to students and families, while understanding the strengths others possess, and to be able to identify the influences on students. This would have to be integrated intimately within the information they provide and the exploration with the students about their choices after high school. It would also help moving away from promoting the same college-going path for all but to consider the unique talents within each person. And that there are strengths to draw on from the students and community in help to build on possibilities for their future.

There were few counselors who recognized these differences and made mention that they acknowledged and tried to be mindful how to navigate the diverse values of the communities they served. But there were no specifics shared on how this was done. Some other counselors who identified differences between themselves and the populations they served, created or based their views on assumptions of the populations, and/or articulated that it somehow made their work with students harder. This study shows that counselors need ongoing training and support for culturally relevant and sustaining approaches for their work. It was clear they were not being supported to identify the strengths and understand possibilities for collaboration, and in some cases even used their views of the purpose of education as a means to create a distance between students and their families.
Recommendations

The following recommendations come at the level of questions or conversations (discourse) to have amongst counselors, faculty and staff, and others who are at an institutional level for schools and boards or districts. These recommendations also include points for practitioners to consider how to implement, based on their reality.

Based on Findings

Though it would take more time, it might help to have more cross-school counseling collaboration, especially amongst schools with similar aims, student population realities and resources. This can give opportunities for counselors to support each other, but also move past trying to get through approaching the “tasks” in their work and create a culture of learning together. Another recommendation would be to see if there could be more dialogue and reflection on assessing on how the mission and views of counseling units, the schools and districts are aligning or not, and realistically being implemented and translated into action. And what kind of collaboration and/or support would be helpful to keep improving the vision and implementation of the vision for assisting students.

Questions around distributed counseling and adequate resources to support the work of counselors would be helpful to explore with key school and district staff, and to allot for it in district and school budgeting. This might include that school staff and faculty become more familiar with the role of counselors, if they aren’t so already. Many school faculty and staff members are quite overwhelmed, so consideration would have to be given so it doesn’t feel like extra meeting or training spaces are created that take counselors away from their work.

It would be helpful to evaluate the similarities and differences across the reality of the schools, student populations, and counseling staff across the schools in the district (including
charter schools), to identify best practices and common resources and support to implement across counseling programs. And this can be compared to ASCA programs and findings. This approach does not suggest a formulaic adoption of structure, but to consider certain principles and practices, in light of reflecting and consulting, that counseling units and other school faculty could consider how to apply or strengthen what is already in place.

One recommendation is at the level of the student population; it would be to draw on students and community members in assisting students. There could be peer support, with training for mentors, as well as community members in certain fields amongst different cultures who could offer mentorship across the various grades. These relationships exist outside of classroom walls, and students and those community members who participate could share their progress and think alongside the counseling unit for how to approach things. And schools could have a reach that extends beyond school walls.

*Ongoing Training or Spaces*

Another area that would merit attention is the continual training of counselors for the educational opportunities and careers that are available for students, and to help them become more familiar with career and technical education (CTE) opportunities for students. If they are becoming increasingly aware of what is available, it might be at the forefront of their minds to convey that information to students and offer it as a desirable possibility for students to pursue. Like other professional development opportunities, there would have to be consideration for how this information would be shared, how often, and how distributed counseling collaborations would clarify who would participate in these trainings.

Counselors should be supported to be regularly trained on culturally relevant or sustaining pedagogy, and to be supported by someone who if familiar with the pedagogy. And
this should of course extend to all staff and faculty serving the institution, as well as extending it to those organizations and partners they draw on for the various resources and support for students. One tool that can be incorporated into the process to help with counselors carrying out culturally relevant and/or sustaining practices would be community scans. Community scans (Alfaro et al., 2017) can help counselors understand the community they serve better and be incorporated into their daily practices with students. This can be a reflective process and practice as much as a practical one that requires exploring a number of questions about the community.

**Constructive Resilience**

Throughout this study, counselors emphasized the nature of their work with assisting students and how much the global health pandemic affected their work; that students were struggling because of traumatic events and transitioning back to school came with many challenges for students and staff. One counselor in this study shared that visiting his students during the pandemic really opened his eyes to understanding them more than he had before. It gave him a better sense of their reality. Though this is a small point, it opens the door for seeing possibilities for students that are rooted in their reality. And another counselor shared that though students had gone through difficult times, that having more structure and measures to hold them accountable would be more helpful for their growth than an extreme laxity.

These student populations have historically experienced a great deal of injustices, and as mentioned earlier in this study, these inequalities were exacerbated during the pandemic. The concept of constructive resilience is a “distinctively non-adversarial approach to social change under conditions of violent oppression” (Karlberg, 2010, p. 222). This approach is explored specifically with regard to the Baha’i community in Iran who has responded to “a sustained and systematic campaign of genocidal intent” (Karlberg, 2010, p. 222). However, it is included here
because there are principles in this approach to contribute toward the construction of something greater and more integrated; it attracts more people versus creating a divide, with the “objective…to build, to strengthen, to refine the tissues of society wherever they may find themselves…, seek to render service to [one’s] homeland and to contribute to the renewal of civilization” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Baha’i students, 2007 as cited by Karlberg, 2010, p. 235). The pandemic was in no way comparable to intended genocide; but it did create a great deal of trauma.

Mental health services were undoubtedly an integral response to help students with their well-being. And there was mention of counselors trying to strengthen relationships with students. However, there could be so many possibilities to consider by drawing on this notion of constructive resilience; for individuals to be helped to grow in numbers to work shoulder-to-shoulder to rebuild things that institutionally and communally began to crumble even more during the pandemic. This touches on the relationship between the individual and collective within the framework from this study. And that growth by assisting fellow students and striving to contribute toward and improve aspects of the educational experience would not only help with the healing and progress of individuals but assist with the continual advancement of the community.

Areas for Future Research

Some questions that arise that could give way to possible areas for schools and districts/boards to consider are: the possibility to have more discussions around what happens to students after they leave high school, and to be able to follow them to see what it looks like once students leave. These could be reported back to the districts, schools, and counselors to see how that translates to their day-to-day work. And another area to explore would be to see how it is
possible to have high standards or expectations for students, but be able to help them achieve those standards, so that students can be helped to think through what is possible based on their talents and reality. This would include needing a common framework and vision for students amongst counselors and other faculty and staff.

This would be related to capturing and understanding what capacities would be most helpful for students and have more of a united framework to operate under to support them to develop these capacities. A difficulty that seems to arise is so many individuals are working hard to support students, including but not limited to their families, teachers, and counselors. And there are so many different views or ideas about what will help them, and that can be confusing or conflicting for a young person. It would not be easy and touches on the age-old question of the purpose of education and work. But having more opportunities for individuals, the community, and institutions to discuss and explore these points might open the door for possibilities to build a more common or united vision for the future of these students.

It would be helpful to carry out an analysis of the history of counseling programs to understand the changes that have occurred with the training and preparation of those in the field, alongside what has been learned about the evolution of their roles. This examination of how counselors are prepared should touch on how they are trained to work with the diversity of student populations they will encounter in their work. And it could help to identify the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that counselors are required to develop in their work and how it has changed over the years. And then if there are any gaps, those could be identified to see what possibilities exist to address them.

**Future Possibilities and Questions**

There are a few possible future questions or areas of research following this study.
Students

This study was first supposed to include speaking with students to understand how they perceive or interpret the assistance they receive from counselors, and how that translates into the decisions they make for their postsecondary paths. It would be helpful to still speak with students but also follow them after high school to see the implications of their experiences after college. There might be possibilities for quantitative and qualitative data collection: to see how many students pursue which paths, how long they continue with those paths, to understand why they chose those paths and what contributed toward the change if they did change course. When looking more into the paths that students pursue, it would be helpful to understand the percentage of students who choose college, career and technical education, or work, and understand what led them to choose those paths. And to see if they can articulate their thought process for choosing that path, possible influences, and their understanding of the steps to take on that path. This could include a longitudinal study following a cohort of students: incorporating their families’ perspective, unpacking what challenges students encountered, and how much this matches with what counselors could anticipate would happen to students.

Administrators and/or District Counselors

There were some differences between the structures of the non-charter and charter schools, and the implications for the work and views of counselors. It might be worth exploring and speaking with administrators and/or district counselors to have them describe their understanding of the role of counselors, as well as understanding their views around the purpose of education and work and how that is implemented or extended throughout the schools. There could be comparisons explored between what counselors and administrators share, to see how much impacts the work of counselors.
Counselors

This study took place during the transition back to in-person learning or instruction, and many counselors expressed the challenges they were encountering with students since the start of the pandemic. It would be helpful to follow-up and see how their views and perspectives, and the nature of their work, has been evolving as more time has passed since the initial distance-learning instruction for the majority of the students. Another area that would be helpful to explore is looking more at the counseling training and programs, though it was not referenced often, and many counselors interviewed completed their programs a while ago. There could be a comparison to see how much of what is taught carries forward into the views and perspectives of counselors. And, to understand the real role that ASCA plays for counselors, outside of being referenced for the three domains that counselors implement. It would help to consider and look more deeply at the capacities that are most helpful for counselors to develop and understand what allows for the nurturing of these capacities, and if there are some more universal approaches to allow for their continual development and implementation. Lastly, it would be beneficial to look at examples of counseling units and see how others could adopt more asset-based or culturally responsive and/or relative approaches when working with students and their families.

Summary and Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to understand what views and perspectives high school counselors hold around education and work, the influences and views from the institutional environment, and how these informed the way counselors supported different student groups with their postsecondary aspirations. Given that high school counselors are working with students during the last phase of their K-12 educational career, much of their conceptions around
education and work are connected to how they view, and hope students will be prepared for “adulthood.” Naturally, the personal experiences of counselors hold a great weight in shaping their views and what they try to convey to students, as well as comparing their values and perspectives to the institutions and student populations they serve. The majority of counselors’ responsibilities to carry out the mission and policies of the schools they serve required a great emphasis on college as a preferred next step; though many non-charter counselors expressed there is merit to CTE paths, and the importance is for students to do something meaningful and that they are passionate about.

**Institutional Impact**

There are implications when comparing the experiences of counselors at charter schools and non-charter schools especially around the distribution of responsibilities and more resources, which help to ensure that students are receiving support. The sharing of the effort in helping students allows counselors to make sure that at least a certain percentage of the student population at non-charter schools, if not all of them at the charter schools, are being “tended” to. Collaboration through formal and informal structures support the need for distributed counseling strategies to ensure that the goal of supporting an increasing percentage of students would allow, especially non-charter school counselors, counselors to reach more of the population they serve. The global pandemic added additional challenges for counselors to navigate as students continued to struggle with mental well-being, experienced a lot of learning loss and stagnation in the development of their qualities and attitudes toward their future, and were more unsure than ever about their postsecondary plans.
Assisting Students

Concepts around pursuing a vocation, about a collective and individual contribution and the cultivation and utilization of one’s talents in a meaningful way, can help to relieve some of the stress and individualistic centered ways of thinking about adulthood. Meaning that helping students to think of their talents, aspirations, and helping students to understand the path toward their educational and work goals can be alleviated when there is more of a collective view around adulthood versus emphasizing a transitional time that separates and burdens them with only looking after their own well-being. While responsibilities do increase, these can also be met with a willingness and joy to contribute towards the wellbeing of students’ families and communities.

Counselors have noble intentions to help students; meaning that they want the students at their schools to have clarity on their future and live a “successful” life as an adult. However, there are many nuances to views around success and meritocracy that at times seem to promote a culture of individualism and separate the student from their family. Counselors grapple with how to support students with what to do after high school without crushing their dreams; wanting to make sure that students are informed about their choices and what is required to achieve their goals; at times navigating what they perceive as differences between themselves and families; and trying to address postsecondary aspirations in light of trauma from the global health pandemic and in light of institutional mandates.

The stress around helping students have a plan could also decrease if the conception of capabilities or capacities was further explored. Instead of having a checklist of things that students need to complete to graduate and have this viewed as being “prepared,” that considerable effort needs to be made, not just by counselors, to identify common or unified
qualities, skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will assist individuals in their lives, and to figure out how to assist students to nurture and develop these abilities and ways of being. Counselors are tasked with so much, and it is clear that their desire to see students succeed is at the heart of what they do. While it might be an impossible task to expect one counselor, or a counseling unit, to assist all students, possibilities might exist the more opportunities there are to share the responsibility of supporting students with other faculty and staff, and the community at large. Counselors believe in the potential of students, and the bigger questions are around the conditions that will help, especially these historically marginalized populations, tap into their latent potentialities to contribute toward their personal advancement while they contribute toward the transformation of society.
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Appendix A

Original Research Questions

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?
   b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?
2. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. How do counselors assess who is college-bound, vocational bound, goes straight into the workforce, or pursues other post-secondary options?
   b. How do high counselors work with students who are pursuing vocational education or training in comparison to students who are college-bound?
   c. How do high school counselors work with students who don’t plan to pursue additional education/training or are unsure of their postsecondary plans?
   d. How do counselors work with student populations from different demographic groups?
3. How do students conceive of their postsecondary options in light of their self-reported relationships with high school counselors?
   a. How might this vary across different student demographic groups?

Adjusted Research Questions

1. What are high school counselors’ beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. What concepts or experiences shape these beliefs and perspectives?
   b. How do these beliefs and perspectives compare to historical conceptions around a vocation?
2. What is the impact of the institutional environment on the schools on counselors?
   a. How might it shape their beliefs and perspectives around the purpose of education and work? And how might that impact their work with students?
   b. How might it impact the role of support staff for counseling, and/or the shared or distributed responsibilities for counseling?
3. How do high school counselors work with students, in light of the aforementioned beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?
   a. How do counselors assess who is college-bound, vocational bound, goes straight into the workforce, or pursues other post-secondary options?
   b. How do high counselors work with students who are pursuing vocational education or training in comparison to students who are college-bound?
   c. How do high school counselors work with students who don’t plan to pursue additional education/training or are unsure of their postsecondary plans?
   d. How do counselors work with student populations from different demographic groups?
Appendix B

Recruitment

Email Drafts to Administrators, Counselors, and Possibly Teachers

Administrators
Subject title: Participation in Study on Counselors

Dear Principal ____,

My name is Roya Tabrizi, and I am a doctoral student in education at San Diego State University.

I have been advancing through my doctoral studies while living in a community near the university and the two have helped me to identify certain questions that would be of interest to study. I am interested to learn how high school counselors are working with students based on what their post-secondary aspirations or goals may be.

I have had a recent experience connecting with one school site in the district and have had the chance to learn from a handful of counselors and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to connect with you and ask for approval to learn more from the counselors and a few students from your high school.

Could we set a time to connect and speak about this possibility?

Thank you!

Warmly,
Roya Tabrizi, M.P.A.
Doctoral Student | Education
Joint PhD Program San Diego State University & Claremont Graduate University | School of Educational Studies
Phone: 661-373-9815

Counselors
Subject title: Participation in Study on Counselors

Dear ____ High School counselors,

My name is Roya Tabrizi, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Educational Studies at San Diego State University.

I am contacting you to ask if you would participate in a research study to understand school staff and administration beliefs about the purpose and relationship between school and work, and how that influences their work with students. All participants will be asked to participate in interviews, and participants must be counselors who work with juniors and/or seniors.
The duration of the interviews will be about 60 minutes, and follow-up interviews will take place as needed. Interviews will take place at your school site, via video, or phone, at your earliest availability.

Please respond by ____ if you are willing to participate in this study, and times for the interviews will be arranged accordingly.

Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

Warmly,
Roya Tabrizi, M.P.A.
Doctoral Student | Education
Joint PhD Program San Diego State University & Claremont Graduate University | School of Educational Studies
Phone: 661-373-9815

**Teachers (if required)**

Dear ___ High School teachers,

My name is Roya Tabrizi, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Educational Studies at San Diego State University.

I am contacting you to ask for your assistance to identify students to participate in a research study to understand how school counselors work with high students. All participants will be asked to participate in focus groups, and the hope is to have a minimum of five juniors and five seniors with a diversity of students who are interested in career and technical (vocational) education pathways or academies, in college preparatory programs or classes, and those who have expressed a desire to go straight to working after high school.

The duration of the interviews will be about 60 minutes, and follow-up interviews will take place as needed. Interviews will take place at your school site, via video, or phone, as soon as student recruitment can begin.

Please respond by ____ if you are willing to assist with student recruitment for this study, and times for the focus groups will be arranged accordingly with the students.

Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

Warmly,
Roya Tabrizi, M.P.A.
Doctoral Student | Education
Revisions for Recruitment

Email Draft to Counselors

Counselors

Subject title: Participation in Study on Counselors

Dear ___ High School counselors,

My name is Roya Tabrizi, and we had the chance to connect this academic year for you to share more about how high school counselors assist high school students with their postsecondary aspirations.

I am contacting you to ask if there are any support faculty that you share some of the responsibilities of your work with, and if you could assist with connecting me with them. This could include any teachers, administrators, counseling interns, and/or anyone within pupil personnel services.

I would ask if they would like to participate in the same research study to understand school staff and administration beliefs about the purpose and relationship between school and work, and how that influences their work with students. All participants will be asked to participate in interviews, and participants must be counselors who work with juniors and/or seniors.

The duration of the interviews will be about 60 minutes, and follow-up interviews will take place as needed. Interviews will take place at your school site, via video, or phone, at your earliest availability.

I greatly appreciate your assistance. Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

Warmly,
Roya Tabrizi, M.P.A.
Doctoral Student | Education
Joint PhD Program San Diego State University & Claremont Graduate University | School of Educational Studies
Phone: 661-373-9815

Support Staff

Dear ___,

My name is Roya Tabrizi, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Educational Studies at San Diego State University.
I am contacting you to ask if you would participate in a research study to understand school staff and administration beliefs about the purpose and relationship between school and work, and how that influences their work with students. All participants will be asked to participate in interviews, and participants must be working with high school students.

The duration of the interviews will be about 60 minutes, and follow-up interviews will take place as needed. Interviews will take place at your school site, via video, or phone, at your earliest availability.

Please respond by ____ if you are willing to participate in this study, and times for the interviews will be arranged accordingly.

Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

Warmly,
Roya Tabrizi, M.P.A.
Doctoral Student | Education
Joint PhD Program San Diego State University & Claremont Graduate University | School of Educational Studies
Phone: 661-373-9815
Appendix C

Assent and Consent Forms

Counselors

You are invited to volunteer to be interviewed in a research project. Volunteering may not benefit you directly, but you will be helping researchers and practitioners to better understand how high school students are helped with their academic, vocational, and professional goals, and how their needs can be better met. If you volunteer, you will participate in an initial interview, and possible subsequent interviews for follow-up. This will take about one hour of your time and will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. You will also be asked to be observed in a few student counseling or advisement sessions that take place in-person, over phone or video, or via electronic communication. These will also be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

Volunteering for this study involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. Your involvement is entirely up to you. You may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

STUDY LEADERSHIP: This research study is led by Roya Tabrizi, a doctoral student of education at Claremont Graduate and San Diego State Universities, and supervised by Dr. Thomas Luschei, a professor of education at Claremont Graduate University.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand how different student groups are assisted with their post-secondary plans by high school counselors.

ELIGIBILITY: To be in this study, you must be a school counselor working with juniors and/or seniors at a high school in San Diego Unified School District.

PARTICIATION: During the study, you will be asked to participate in an initial interview that would take place in-person, over the phone or video, and possible subsequent interviews for follow-up. Each interview will last about 1 hour in length, and I will ask questions about your views around education, work, and the relationship between the two. Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

You will also be asked to be observed in a few student counseling or advisement sessions that take place in-person, over the phone or video, or via electronic communication. These will also be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Anything in-person will be scheduled at your school site.

You will also be asked to fill out a survey link after the interview, with background questions.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal and not higher than those faced in everyday life. This includes the possibility of being asked questions that you may not feel comfortable answering. You are free to pass any questions that may make you uncomfortable.

There is also a potential risk of breach of privacy, given the small population limited to one specific group of counselors in one school.
All practices for this study will adhere to county, state, and national health guidelines for COVID-19.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop participation at any time.

**Benefits of Participation:** There is no anticipation around personal benefit, however participation in this study will assist researchers and practitioners to better understand how high school students are helped with their academic, vocational, and professional goals, and how their needs can be better met. The study will benefit the researchers by allowing them to present and publish findings at national conferences and journals.

**Compensation:** You will not compensated for participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to answer any particular question for any reason without it being held against you. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at CGU or SDSU.

**Confidentiality:** Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. We may share the data we collect with other researchers, but we will not reveal your identity with it. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, I will assign you a pseudonym and remove all identifiable information. Interviews and observations will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Anything that takes place over videoconferencing will be through Zoom, where a separate audio recording will take place, in addition to the video recording. In these circumstances, the video will be immediately deleted afterwards and the audio recording will be kept only for transcription. Only the research team will have access to the audio recordings and your name, and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription. De-identified data may be shared with other researchers, but no researcher will obtain any additional informed consent for future research. Once the interviews are transcribed, they will be destroyed. All files will be kept in a password protected document.

**Further Information:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Roya Tabrizi at rtabrizi@sdsu.edu or 661-373-9815 as the primary point of contact, or Dr. Thomas Luschei at thomas.luschei@cgu.edu or 909-607-3325. The CGU Institutional Review Board has approved of this project, and you may contact them with any questions or issues at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.

**Consent:** Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and you voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant _________________________________ Date ____________
Printed Name of Participant _________________________________
You are invited to volunteer to be interviewed in a research project. Volunteering may not benefit you directly, but you will be helping researchers and practitioners to better understand how high school students are helped with their academic, vocational, and professional goals, and how their needs can be better met. If you volunteer, you will participate in an initial interview, and possible subsequent interviews for follow-up. This will take about one hour of your time and will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. You will also be asked to be observed in a few student counseling or advisement sessions that take place in-person, over phone or video, or via electronic communication. These will also be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

Volunteering for this study involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. Your involvement is entirely up to you. You may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

**STUDY LEADERSHIP:** This research study is led by Roya Tabrizi, a doctoral student of education at Claremont Graduate and San Diego State Universities, and supervised by Dr. Thomas Luschei, a professor of education at Claremont Graduate University.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to understand how different student groups are assisted with their post-secondary plans by high school counselors.

**ELIGIBILITY:** To be in this study, you must be a school counselor or faculty working with, guiding and/or advising students at a high school in San Diego Unified School District.

**PARTICIPATION:** During the study, you will be asked to participate in an initial interview that would take place in-person, over the phone or video, and possible subsequent interviews for follow-up. Each interview will last about 1 hour in length, and I will ask questions about your views around education, work, and the relationship between the two. Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

You will also be asked to fill out a survey link after the interview, with background questions.

**RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:** The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal and not higher than those faced in everyday life. This includes the possibility of being asked
questions that you may not feel comfortable answering. You are free to pass any questions that may make you uncomfortable.

There is also a potential risk of breach of privacy, given the small population limited to one specific group of counselors in one school.

All practices for this study will adhere to county, state, and national health guidelines for COVID-19.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop participation at any time.

**Benefits of Participation:** There is no anticipation around personal benefit, however participation in this study will assist researchers and practitioners to better understand how high school students are helped with their academic, vocational, and professional goals, and how their needs can be better met. The study will benefit the researchers by allowing them to present and publish findings at national conferences and journals.

**Compensation:** You will not compensated for participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to answer any particular question for any reason without it being held against you. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at CGU or SDSU.

**Confidentiality:** Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. We may share the data we collect with other researchers, but we will not reveal your identity with it. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, I will assign you a pseudonym and remove all identifiable information. Interviews and observations will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Anything that takes place over videoconferencing will be through Zoom, where a separate audio recording will take place, in addition to the video recording. In these circumstances, the video will be immediately deleted afterwards and the audio recording will be kept only for transcription. Only the research team will have access to the audio recordings and your name, and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription. De-identified data may be shared with other researchers, but no researcher will obtain any additional informed consent for future research. Once the interviews are transcribed, they will be destroyed. All files will be kept in a password protected document.

**Further Information:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Roya Tabrizi at rtabrizi@sdsu.edu or 661-373-9815 as the primary point of contact, or Dr. Thomas Luschei at thomas.luschei@cgu.edu or 909-607-3325. The CGU Institutional Review Board has approved of this project, and you may contact them with any questions or issues at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.
CONSENT: Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and you voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant _________________________________ Date __________
Printed Name of Participant _________________________________
Contact information (email and phone) ________________________

The undersigned researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of his or her questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher _________________________________ Date __________
Printed Name of Researcher _________________________________
Appendix D

Covid screening questions and procedures

The following are screening questions and procedures (provided by CGU IRB) which will be used for all in-person interviews, focus groups, and observations that take place, and will be administered via email or orally prior to in-person meeting, and orally when deemed safe for in-person research.

Health Screening

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study to learn more about how high school students are assisted with their plans for after high school. Each person will be required to follow safety guidelines for any in-person contact/engagement. This includes wearing a mask, social distancing, cleaning hands, answering the screening questions, and reporting any symptoms or positive results after having had in-person contact for this study.

Any indoor spaces for meeting will be thoroughly cleaned before each person and/or group uses it.

Any personal information that you share will be kept anonymous, and is only asked to be provided in the event that you need to be contacted regarding health concerns.

*Please note that if you experience any symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 after participating in-person, you are required to inform your healthcare provider and the researcher for this study immediately, and follow healthcare guidelines provided to you by a medical professional.

Questions

Personal information:
First and last name: __________________________________
Phone number: ______________________________________
Email: ______________________________________________
Best person and number to contact in case of an emergency to reach you:
______________________________________________________________
Date of pre-screening: __________________________________________

1. Are you fully vaccinated?

2. Symptoms
   a. Is forehead temperature <100.4° F? ☐Yes ☐No
   b. In the last 30 days, have you had a positive COVID-19 test? ☐Yes ☐No
   c. In the last 14 days, have you had sustained close contact (such as a household contact) with a person with a positive COVID-19 test? ☐Yes ☐No
d. In the last 14 days, have you had a fever, cough or diarrhea? ☐ Yes ☐ No

e. In the last 14 days, have you had cold or flu-like symptoms? ☐ Yes ☐ No

f. In the last 14 days, do you have concerns regarding other potential symptoms (loss of taste, loss of smell, eye redness or discharge, confusion, dizziness, unexplained muscle aches) related to COVID-19? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If the response to #1 is Yes AND all other responses are NO, the in-person visit may proceed.

PI/Sub PI who is providing approval: ____________________________

Enter the date approval received for in-person visit: ____________
Appendix E

Post-Interview Counselor and Support Staff Survey
Thank you for your participation in this study! Below are a few questions for you to answer, and your responses will remain anonymous. You can choose which questions you feel comfortable to respond to, and you can skip any questions you wish not to answer.

1. What high school do you work at?
2. What is your occupation?
3. How many years of experience have you had in this profession?
4. How long have you been working at this high school?
5. What is your ethnicity and/or race?
6. Please list all the languages you are proficient in.
7. What is your gender?
8. What is your highest level of educational attainment?
9. What is your age?
10. What is your zip code for your home address?
Appendix F

Revised protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for High School Counselors

I will provide a brief introduction to share who I am, where I go to school and that my reasoning for speaking to them is to learn more about their school and how counselors help students.

Background Questions
1. Please share about your experiences in the field of education.
2. How would you describe what you do as a counselor? How has or hasn’t this changed over the years?
   a. Do you feel the health pandemic with COVID-19 has impacted your work? If so, please share how.
3. How many students do you work with, and how do you manage your time with all those students?
4. Please share what the counseling unit at this school is like and how they operate.
5. How would you describe your counseling style or methods?

Conceptions around education, work, and vocation
1. How would you describe the purpose of education?
2. What do you feel is important to share with students about education? How do you share it with them?
3. How would you describe the purpose of work?
4. How often do your interactions with students include conversations around work? What do you feel is important to share with them and how do you share it with them?
5. I’m going to share a few words, and please describe what they mean or what their purpose is: work, job, profession, occupation, vocation. Could you please share any similarities and/or differences amongst these terms?
6. How would you describe the relationship that does or doesn’t exist between education and work? What is important to convey to students about this relationship, and why?
7. Do you have anything to read, listen to, or watch that you would suggest to someone that you feel captures the purpose and relationships between education and work?
8. Please share about your educational and professional (or work) background.
9. What was your postsecondary (college going) experience like?
10. How do these points relate to your ideas as a counselor?

Assisting students with post-secondary pathways and opportunities
1. Can you please share about the different post-secondary options or pathways that exist for students to choose from?
2. How do you navigate or determine what options exist for students after high school for education and/or work? And what steps are taken in assisting students toward these options or pathways?
3. What do you try to make sure that students know about education and work after high school? Why do you make it a point to help them understand this?
4. Please share if you have encountered these situations and if so, the thinking and steps behind it:
a. A student was encouraged to pursue a certain pathway or option for post-secondary education and/or work? Can you recall why?
b. A student was interested in a certain pathway or option but was encouraged to pursue a different one? Can you recall why?

The following are a few scenarios around working with different student groups. Please share about how you would work the students (for example: your thinking, approach and the steps you would take):

1. An immigrant or refugee student who has almost a 4.0 GPA, is taking mostly honors and AP classes, and struggles doing their classwork and understanding the material because of their English language ability though they have been reclassified as proficient.
2. A student who has never been assessed or diagnosed with a learning and/or speech disability but shows signs of it and struggles to advance in their coursework and expresses a desire to pursue college and/or more academic-based professions.
3. A student who has been doing well in school and is undocumented. Both in cases where they are fluent in English or they are an English language learner.
4. A student who took a Psychology class and thought it was interesting and states they want to study it in college.

Can you share if there are or aren’t opportunities for counselors to learn about the intimate realities of students?

Is there anything that you feel would be helpful for me to know about that I didn’t ask, about the relationships between students and counselors, or what counselors do or say about education and work?

Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak to, to learn more about this?

Backup questions for more information or probing:
1. How long have you been working in the field and at this school? What made you pursue this type of work? What has your experience been like?
2. What are the different student groups you work with or advise? Can you describe what distinguishes these groups from each other?
3. What is in place so that the counselors have support to think through things and assist with any problems that arise?
4. Why do you see this as the purpose of education?
5. Why do you see this as the purpose of work?
6. If your interactions don’t include conversations around work, who would students talk to about it and what would be shared?
7. Are there additional postsecondary options or pathways that students can pursue outside of college, vocational, and work?
8. Are there specific areas/focus that are usually encouraged within those pathways/options? Why or what not?
9. Please describe how you decide what you share with students, how it’s shared, and with which student groups.

How would you describe your beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education? What has been influential in shaping these beliefs and perspectives?
How do you work with students, in light of your beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?

*Shortened version*

**Background Questions**
- Can you please share about your experiences in the field of education, and include what you do as counselor?
- Please share what the counseling unit at this school is like and how they operate.

**Conceptions around education, work, and vocation**
- How would you describe the purpose of education, and the pursuit of work?
- What do you feel students should know about education and work?

**Assisting students with post-secondary pathways and opportunities**
- Can you please share what the different post-secondary options or pathways are that exist for students to choose from and how do you determine the best or more suitable options that exist for students?
- Have you ever encouraged students to pursue certain options, whether or not they were thinking about going for it? Please share the thinking and steps you took.

Do you feel the health pandemic with COVID-19 has impacted your work? If so how?

Is there anything that you feel would be helpful for me to know about that I didn’t ask, about the relationships between students and counselors, or what counselors do or say about education and work?

Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak to, to learn more about this?

**Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Those Who Guide/Advise Students**
I will provide a brief introduction to share who I am, where I go to school and that my reasoning for speaking to them is to learn more about their school and how counselors help students.

**Background Questions**
1. Please share about your experiences in the field of education.
2. How would you describe your role and what you do? How has or hasn’t this changed over the years?
   a. Do you feel the health pandemic with COVID-19 has impacted your work? If so, please share how.
3. How many students do you work with, and how do you manage your time with all those students?
4. Please share what guiding, advising, and/or counseling students at this school looks like and how the faculty operate.
5. How would you describe your style or methods for working with students?
Conceptions around education, work, and vocation
1. How would you describe the purpose of education?
2. What do you feel is important to share with students about education? How do you share it with them?
3. How would you describe the purpose of work?
4. How often do your interactions with students include conversations around work? What do you feel is important to share with them and how do you share it with them?
5. I’m going to share a few words, and please describe what they mean or what their purpose is: work, job, profession, occupation, vocation. Could you please share any similarities and/or differences amongst these terms?
6. How would you describe the relationship that does or doesn’t exist between education and work? What is important to convey to students about this relationship, and why?
7. Do you have anything to read, listen to, or watch that you would suggest to someone that you feel captures the purpose and relationships between education and work?
8. What was your postsecondary (college going) experience like?
9. How do these points relate to your ideas for the work you do with students?

Assisting students with post-secondary pathways and opportunities
1. Can you please share about the different post-secondary options or pathways that exist for students to choose from?
2. How do you navigate or determine what options exist for students after high school for education and/or work? And what steps are taken in assisting students toward these options or pathways?
3. What do you try to make sure that students know about education and work after high school? Why do you make it a point to help them understand this?
4. Please share if you have encountered these situations and if so, the thinking and steps behind it:
   a. A student was encouraged to pursue a certain pathway or option for post-secondary education and/or work? Can you recall why?
   b. A student was interested in a certain pathway or option but was encouraged to pursue a different one? Can you recall why?
5. What are your experiences in helping students who are going to college (four year or community), vocational programs, or work right after high school? Can you walk me through the steps you take to help a student in each of those situations. Please share the thinking and steps you took:
   a. Apply or go into workforce
   b. Apply or go to a vocational program
   c. Apply or go to college (is there a difference between community college)

Can you share if there are or aren’t opportunities for counselors and/or faculty to learn about the intimate realities of students?

Is there anything that you feel would be helpful for me to know about that I didn’t ask, about the relationships between students and those who support them with these decisions, or what people do or say about education and work to students?
Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak to, to learn more about this?

Backup questions for more information or probing throughout interview:
1. How long have you been working in the field and at this school? What made you pursue this type of work? What has your experience been like?
2. What are the different student groups you work with or advise? Can you describe what distinguishes these groups from each other?
3. What is in place so that the counselors have support to think through things and assist with any problems that arise?
4. Why do you see this as the purpose of education?
5. Why do you see this as the purpose of work?
6. If your interactions don’t include conversations around work, who would students talk to about it and what would be shared?
7. Are there additional postsecondary options or pathways that students can pursue outside of college, vocational, and work?
8. Are there specific areas/focus that are usually encouraged within those pathways/options? Why or what not?
9. Please describe how you decide what you share with students, how it’s shared, and with which student groups.
10. How would you describe your beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education? What has been influential in shaping these beliefs and perspectives?
11. How do you work with students, in light of your beliefs and perspectives around the purpose and definition of work and education?