



High School Guidance Counselors' Perspectives on Supporting Grieving Students

Senior Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of a
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Honors

Alexander Pereira

Advisors: Dr. Zine Magubane & Dr. Nora Gross

Boston College

May 2023

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Day in the Life	5
Literature Review	8
Geographical and Demographic Background	8
Boston & Boston Public Schools (BPS)	8
Philadelphia & The School District of Philadelphia (SDP)	9
Roles and Responsibilities of School Counselors in Urban Education	9
Counselor-to-Student Responsibilities	9
Racial/Ethnic Matching between Faculty and Students	11
The Trauma of Gun Violence:	11
Proximity to Neighborhood Gun Violence and Its Impact on Mental Health	11
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	12
Death and Neighborhood Gun Violence	13
Support Systems:	15
Research Question	15
Methods	16
Study Participants	16
Participant Recruitment	16
Recruitment Email	16
Data Collection	17
Participant Demographics	17
Results	18
Hierarchy Communication Struggle:	18
Emotional Support and Understanding:	19
Constraints and External Support:	21
School Preparedness on Trauma Management	22
Theory	25
Moral Distress	25
Discussion	26
Conclusion/Implications	29
Acknowledgments	30
Funding	31
References	32
Appendix	37

Introduction

The career of a high guidance counselor can range from topics of teenage drama, college decisions, and the annual class selection meeting; however, what are they to do when gun violence is currently the number 1 cause of death for children 1-19 (Everytown, 2022). Legally, students are expected to spend 49% or 180 days of the year within the walls of a school for at least 6 hours, in turn, the institution of schools has become a place for making friends, connections, and experiences, whether they be good or bad (Pew, 2023). When gun violence plagues the walls of a school, support generally falls to counselors to help students navigate their emotions and grief. However, schools and counselors do not necessarily have the resources or training to provide that support. Particularly in under-resourced urban neighborhoods, counselors may already be spread too thin in their responsibilities, worsening the effects of gun violence and unresolved grief. Further, some counselors cannot understand their students' lived experiences because the differences in their racial, financial, and geographical upbringing promote a culture of misunderstanding and inability to solve root issues with cultural competency (Englert-Copeland, 2019).

In this study, we aim to examine how schools and counselors support students impacted by gun violence, focusing on two major metropolitan areas on the East Coast: Boston and Philadelphia.

The problem the project is addressing is the way schools situate themselves in helping students' grief, given the increase in adolescent gun violence throughout the United States. Philadelphia has seen a particular increase in gun violence over the past decade (Philadelphia Police Department, 2022). Per the Philadelphia Office of the Controller, they found that 10.9% of all gun deaths within the city were people under 19 years of age for the 2023 year to date (2023).

Everytown Research found that in “Massachusetts, the rate of gun deaths increased 16% from 2010 to 2019, compared to a 17% increase nationwide; gun homicides increased 26%, compared to a 13% increase and 26% increase nationwide, respectively” (Everytown, 2021). On the other hand, the city of Boston has seen a decrease in the gun violence rate over the past few years (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2022) While Boston does have one of the lowest gun violence rates in the world, students there experience grief over losing loved ones from neighborhood gun violence. The state noted that gun violence deaths are the 3rd-leading cause of death among children and teens in Massachusetts (2021).

Through the research, we hope to identify best practices and strategies for schools and counselors to better support students impacted by gun violence and reduce the negative effects of unresolved grief. By examining the experiences of students in these two urban areas, we believe that we can contribute to the broader conversation about how to address this critical issue in schools and communities across the country.

Day in the Life¹

The blaring sound of the alarm awakens Taylor Drew, a dedicated high guidance counselor at Cedar High School, scheduled to take on a new week. She knew the week would be busy, but Taylor's passion for helping students navigate the wild journey of adolescence made her role all the more rewarding and challenging.

After completing her morning routine, Taylor embarked on her daily 30-minute commute into the heart of downtown Philadelphia, her car radio tuned to the morning news. Each day, she holds her breath, dreading the possibility of hearing about yet another young life tragically cut short by gun violence. Last night, she had heard of a student that was from the neighborhood who went to a charter school; however, a majority of his friends remained within her school.

Upon her arrival at the school, she took the opportunity to respond to her never-ending email inbox, bombarded with questions that range from college recommendations to domestic violence situations with her caseload. Her caseload sits at 350 students, a number that has slightly improved from last year's 380.

“Hey, Miss Drew. Why did I get a note saying I need to take summer school?” a ninth grader interrupted her email back to a mother concerned about her son’s recent behavior in coming back to school after being victim to gun violence.

Taylor smiled warmly at the concerned ninth grader, Amari, who stood at her office door, clutching the note in her trembling hand.

¹ Below is a story of the day in the life of a Philadelphia Public school counselor. It is a compilation of the interview data collected from the interview specifically with the question, “What’s a typical day like?” Although this chapter is a work of fiction, it reflects the stories told by real counselors on the frontlines helping the students with their academic, personal, and emotional development.

"Come in, Amari. Let's take a seat and talk about this," Taylor said, gesturing toward the chairs in her office. She motioned Amari to sit down, offering a reassuring smile as she took a seat opposite her.

"I know this might feel overwhelming, but summer school can be a great opportunity to catch up on certain subjects," Taylor explained, her tone gentle.

Amari's shoulders relaxed a bit as Taylor spoke, and she began to open up about her struggles in math. Taylor listened attentively, nodding empathetically as Amari shared her concerns about falling behind and feeling lost in class.

"Well, Amari, we can set up some extra tutoring sessions or find alternative methods to approach math class and math in general," Taylor suggested, scribbling down notes about topics to update Amari's internal files.

Throughout their conversation, Taylor made sure to express that needing help or extra support wasn't a sign of weakness and that everyone needed help eventually.

As Amari left her office, a bit more at ease and armed with a plan, Taylor glanced at the clock and realized it was time for the morning assembly. She ran towards the auditorium, where the principal was informing the student body about the significance of community and being safe because of the uptick in gun violence within the city and its impact on the school.

Taylor couldn't help but feel a swell of sadness as she knew some of the students were sad grieving the loss of their friend from another neighborhood school across the city. Some were gossiping about Elijah, the school's quarterback, coming back to school after having been in the crossfire of a local gang shootout. She remembered that when she got back to her office, she had to email his mother back.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the principal:

“Let's give our attention to Ms. Drew as she informs us of some of the resources available to you all.”

“Thank you, Principal Fried, for spreading awareness on being safe and aware of the environment outside. So over these next few days, we will be bringing in 2 counselors who will be available for any students who want any kind of support. Obviously, I am still here for each and every one of you. We, as a community, wanted to ensure you are all able to have a person if you do need it.”

In between back-to-back counseling sessions, Ms. McNeill rushes into the office and asks, “Can you reach out to Maria’s parents because they're failing my class?”

“Oh, Sure. I can try reaching out before I leave for the day.”

Logging into the school database with student information, Taylor comes to find out that Ms. McNeill has never checked or called the family to begin communication.

After a few rings, a woman's voice answered the call.

"Hello?" the voice spoke slightly without breath.

"Hi, this is Ms. Taylor Drew, a counselor here at Greenfield High School," Taylor introduced herself. "I'm calling in regards to your daughter, Maria. She's currently in Ms. McNeill's class, and I wanted to discuss her academic performance with you."

After a moment of silence on the other end, she responded, "Oh, yes. I’m Susana. Is everything okay?"

“Yes, everything can still be resolved, but I wanted to inform you that Maria is struggling in Ms. McNeill's math class and she currently has a failing grade. What I am calling you about is finding out where she needs more support to improve her grades.”

“I had no idea.”

“Well, I think we can schedule a meeting Monday morning for all three of us to make a strategic plan of how to better Maria’s Grade. Are you free at 8 or 9 am tomorrow?”

“Yes, I am. I will talk to her tonight and I will see you then.”

“Okay, see you tomorrow.” Taylor hung up the phone and marked her calendar with the meeting for Maria just as the final bell rang, signaling the end of the school day. Taylor found herself thankful for being able to make it another day. She did not know how many days she had left, especially given her lack of personal experience with the violence and inequity her job presented to her. Her upbringing was in a suburb of Philadelphia with a relatively low poverty rate and extremely low violence rate, she went on to attend an elite ivy league university where she graduated magna cum laude in educational counseling. To her, her education made her ill-prepared to truly handle any aspect of her job that went beyond the scope of a normative death, like a grandma dying of old age or a student dying from cancer, what they did not prepare her for was how do you support a grieving student body if the bandage is stripped off with every bullet sound, every firework pop, and every obituary that is constantly going up.

Literature Review

Geographical and Demographic Background

Boston & Boston Public Schools (BPS)

Boston and its metro area have a population of approximately 675,647 people (United States Census (2020). Boston is the Massachusetts state capital that boasts being the hotspot for some of the world leaders in higher education, as well as being home to many tech and medical innovation companies. According to the BPS website, they currently “educate more than 54,000

students in 125 schools” (BPS, 2024); further the city currently has a poverty rate of 17.5% (US Census, 2023). The district has a majority of White teachers and counselors currently on staff; however, the student population is majority Black and Hispanic as shown in Figure 1. According to the BPS website, they currently “educate more than 54,000 students in 125 schools” (BPS, 2024); further the city currently has a poverty rate of 17.5% (Census, 2024).

Philadelphia & The School District of Philadelphia (SDP)

The city of Philadelphia has a population of approximately 1,603,797 people (United States Census, 2020). While Philadelphia is home to many Fortune 500 headquarters and an abundance of universities, 23.1% of the population is in poverty. In the 2021-2022 academic year, Philadelphia Public Schools had approximately 198,645 students enrolled (figure 2). As with BPS, the proportion of students and staff racial backgrounds are not equal and a large majority of faculty continue to be White.

Roles and Responsibilities of School Counselors in Urban Education

Counselor-to-Student Responsibilities

According to the American Guidance Counselor Association(ASCA), the role of a high guidance counselor is to “provide education, prevention and intervention activities, which are integrated into all aspects of students’ lives.” Taking a look at the job description provided by Philadelphia’s school district this year, they highlight that the job of a high guidance counselor is to “provide counseling services that foster[s] the academic, personal, social, and career development of all students” (figure 3). The 2023 Boston counselor job description overviews the position as “help students to understand their aptitudes, capabilities, and limitations in making personal decisions, educational plans, and occupational choices... is also responsible for

developing, organizing, directing, supervising, and evaluating guidance and related programs” (figure 4).

Counselors are expected to hold licensures in their state of employment with regulations shifting contingent on the state (American Guidance Counselor Association, 2023). In the Boston Public Schools district, a counselor is required to hold a master's degree within either counseling or educational fields, and a valid Massachusetts counseling license at the level of school they are applying for (Figure 4). The district holds some preferred qualifications, including meeting the BPS standards of effective counseling² and experience with urban youth in educational settings, and they prefer counselors with foreign language skills. The BPS standards of effective counseling follow four guidelines, which include curriculum, planning, and assessment; teaching all students; family and community engagement; and professional culture.

Per the Philadelphia counselor job application description, the district requires that applicants hold a master's degree in counseling or education and a valid Pennsylvania counseling licensure or certification at the level of school they are applying for (SDP, 2023). Both were demarcated as entry-level positions for people entering the counseling profession.

Another note to make is the recommendation provided by the American Guidance Counselor Association regarding the ratio of student to counselor which is 250 students to 1 counselor (Kearney 2021). Philadelphia currently has an average of 374 counselors per counselor, an extra 174 students per counselor (SDP, 2023). Boston has an average of 252 students per counselor, an extra 2 students per counselor (BPS, 2022).

² The BPS standards of effective counseling is Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation, Part III: Guide to Rubrics and Model Rubrics for Superintendent, Administrator, and Teacher: Appendix D. Specialized Instructional Support Personnel Rubric.

Racial/Ethnic Matching between Faculty and Students

Dr. Cleveland and Scherer from Brown University researched the social-emotional development of students who had racially matched their school staff members (2022). They discovered that students “exposed to about one additional demographically matching teacher “had positive effects on both inter- and intrapersonal” (p.16). Furthermore, the study found that matching racial and gender representation from those in an academic setting leads to an improvement in “behavioral outcomes associated with social-emotional measures” (p.16). With the ability to understand cultural customs because of the racial/ethnic matching of support staff to students, the results have shown that students are receptive to hearing the advice and the counselor can understand the actual lived experience of their students (Englert-Copeland, 2019; Holland, 2015).

Multiple researchers have found that Black males benefited significantly from cultural matching and a culturally responsive approach to postsecondary preparation (Hines et. al., 2022; Owen et al., 2010). This cultural matching was crucial as Black school counselors were able to provide their students with various culturally responsive supports, including social and emotional support, high expectations for success, strong relationships and connections to students’ interests, and the identification of challenges and their abilities to address them (Hines et. al, 2022).

The Trauma of Gun Violence:

Proximity to Neighborhood Gun Violence and Its Impact on Mental Health

Living close to scenes of gun violence can have a detrimental impact on broader community mental health and emotional well-being. Several studies have highlighted the increased risk of adverse mental health consequences among people who live near the sites of

shootings, particularly in neighborhoods regularly affected by such incidents (Abba-Aji, et. al, 2024).

With the prevalence of gun violence in many urban cities across America, urban youth report significantly higher exposure to violence, especially those involving firearms, compared to their non-urban counterparts (Borg et. al., 2023). Also, it has been researched by many scholars, that many urban youth experience higher levels of depressive symptoms relative to their non-urban counterparts (Borg et. al., 2023). These research studies continue to emphasize the importance of holistic interventions and prioritize long-term community efforts to halt gun violence before it gets to any neighborhood (Abba-Aji et al., 2024; Borg et al., 2023).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood experiences, otherwise known as ACEs, are a child's traumatic experiences in childhood, including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction (Rajan et al. 2019). In a study of the ACE experiences of Low-Income Urban Youth, the researchers noted two³ distinct ACE responses that these youth experience, the first being this disconnect and harmful familial dynamics (Wade et al. 2014). The second experience that was noted in the study was this idea of a common community stressor, which is the violence occurring throughout their neighborhood.

Taking a look at Dr. Nadine Burke Harris', current Ted Talk discusses the concept of ACEs which are Adverse Childhood Experiences, which can range from violence, poverty, neglect, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (2014). According to her research, if a person experiences four ACEs, they are twice as likely to get hepatitis; four times more likely to get

³ It was noted that their economic hardship was selected to participate in the study, thus their ACE score for that domain remained consistent to all.

depression; and 12x more likely to attempt suicide. If someone has seven or more ACEs, they are three times more likely to get lung cancer and heart disease.

Research provided by Wade, Shea, Rubin, and Wood (2014) shows the two distinct ACE reactions that the urban youth faced, one being the harmful family dynamics, including abuse and neglect within the family environment. The second reaction was the exposure to common community stressors, such as neighborhood violence, which exacerbated the trauma experienced by these youth. Given these two instances and the coupling of the study studying exclusively low-income families, these children before reaching adulthood already hold a minimum of 3 ACEs. A marker that may lead them to experience mental health challenges and increased vulnerability to health conditions later in their life; with data showing that with 3 ACEs, a person is double the chance more likely to experience heart disease and potentially even have a stroke (Wade et al. 2014; Rajan et al. 2019; Dong et al. 2004).

Death and Neighborhood Gun Violence

According to data collected by The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, they noted that the leading cause of death for people aged 1-19 and the most common type of firearm death is homicide (2022). “Nearly 4,000 children and teens (ages 0 to 19) are shot and killed, and 15,000 are shot and wounded—that’s an average of 53 American children and teens every day” (Everytown Research, 2023).

Taking a look into a recent study conducted by Barboza (2018) examined shooting incidents, specifically in Boston. Between 2012 and 2015, there were 678 shooting incidents in Boston. Of the 678 shootings, 56% of the shootings had a school within 400 meters. It was noted that their economic hardship was selected to participate in the study, thus their ACE score for that domain remained consistent.

Barboza analyzed how “most shooting incidents took place in two neighborhoods, Dorchester (43.5%) and Roxbury (27.9%). Dorchester (67.0%) and Roxbury (68.4%) residents primarily identify as persons of color, either Latino or African-American (Barboza 2018). According to the State of Massachusetts in 2019, the age-adjusted homicide rate for persons 15-24 in Massachusetts was 43 per 100,000—and the third leading underlying cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

According to a map analyzing geo-located deaths by neighborhood, based on data from the Philadelphia Police Department spanning from 2019 through April 19, 2024, it was revealed that certain neighborhoods experienced higher rates of violent incidents than others within the city. Police District 25, which includes the Kensington and Harrowgate areas was the most dangerous district within the entirety of the city. In another study with a focus specifically on the year 2022, the area with the highest frequency of shootings was 19134, predominantly comprising Kensington, where 270 shootings were recorded (Action News Data Team, 2024; Petrillo, 2023). Following the Kensington area, the zip code 19140 and or Police District 22, which consists of North Philadelphia, Nicetown-Tioga, and Hunting Park reported the second most shootings (Action News Data Team, 2024; Petrillo, 2023).

Bereavement/Grief

The DSM-V defines bereavement as:

Intense yearning or longing for the deceased, intense sorrow and emotional pain, and preoccupation with the deceased or the circumstances of the death are expected responses occurring in bereavement (p.194).

Grief’s reaction in youth is highly impacted by the developmental stage that the person is in and it can change contingent on their emotional and mental development (Alvis et al., 2022).

The study found that in the case of adolescents, they tend to rely on the behaviors and environment of adults around them.

Jakoby investigated how grief should be viewed as a social emotion, they found that a person begins by framing the loss, in which their families and cultures impact with setting a model of grief (2012). The study found that “when the ‘other’ dies, the social nature of the self becomes painfully obvious and makes grief a social phenomenon.” (Jakoby, 2012). With this loss of self and the death of the actual person, the person is publicly experiencing the loss which is being impacted by the social world and social structure, which changes and stabilizes their grief ability. The final step of the model is coping where the person relies on social and personal resources to understand and move past the grief.

Support Systems:

The American Guidance Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends that counselors take a multitiered system of support (MTSS) when they are navigating how to handle any counseling situation (2021). Tier one of the system is to provide support and services schoolwide and classroom-wide. Tier two is a more direct approach where counselors collaborate with students, family, teachers, and other professionals to individually help and provide counseling to a student. The final tier is when a counselor is unable to provide a service to the student, so they write them a referral to see the proper professional to handle the situation.

Research Question

Our research question for the project is “How do counselors perceive the support systems available to students regarding the death of a classmate from neighborhood gun violence?” The project will be primarily focused on counselors from the Boston and Philadelphia areas; however, the data collected should be generalizable to the broader gun violence epidemic and its influence on public city high schools across America.

Methods

Study Participants

The population under review in this study comprises counselors employed in public high schools in Philadelphia and Boston's urban settings. Districts require a master's degree in counseling, education, or a related field and a Massachusetts or Pennsylvania guidance counselor license. Teachers and other staff were excluded from the study because the nature of their position does not cover counseling and/or grief support from a job description perspective. Further, I chose not to study students because of the potential negative impact of retraumatization and the inability to provide counseling support.

Participant Recruitment

In both the case of Philadelphia and Boston Public Schools, the email addresses of counselors were obtained by accessing the official Philadelphia Public School database, which systematically houses contact information for all counselors and their respective affiliated schools. Participants were email recruited through systematic purposive sampling and then subsequently through snowball sampling. The incentive of a virtual 50-dollar Amazon gift card was provided to any counselor who participated in the interview study.

Recruitment Email

Email will serve as the primary method for soliciting participation from the counselors. It will include a detailed introduction to our research objectives and a direct link for counselors to schedule interviews directly into the researcher's calendar. The exact recruitment email is attached as Appendix A.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted individually via the Zoom platform, allowing for an audio-recorded format. Specifically, the Zoom audio recording feature to document the interviews. The interview questions will cover a spectrum of topics, encompassing the educational backgrounds of the counselors, their daily work routines, and their schools' responses to incidents involving student fatalities due to gun violence (Appendix C).

Participant Demographics

At the end of the interviews, counselors were asked to answer demographic questions for writing and analysis purposes. In total, twenty-two interviews were conducted with times ranging from 43.55 to 1:00.09 minutes. Nineteen of the counselors identified as female and three identified as male. Fourteen identified as White, six as Latinx, and two as Black/African-American. All of the participants held a master's degree with a few holding PhDs and one had a non-graduating degree certificate.

Results

Hierarchy Communication Struggle:

A central theme that presented itself early on in my interviews was the challenges counselors face in communicating effectively with other staff members, particularly teachers and principals within the school hierarchy. She expressed frustration with teachers who prioritize academic performance over students' well-being. Throughout our conversation, she emphasized the importance of establishing boundaries and advocating for students' needs despite potential pushback from certain faculty members. At one point, she stated, "They want you to tell them what's going on with the kids, but at the same time, I'm not gonna betray... sometimes it's like, it's none of your business, like stop being a news bag, and just stop being an asshole."

Later in her discussion, Samantha told me about the dynamic between counselors and teachers, highlighting the expectation for counselors to handle tasks outside their designated roles, such as contacting parents regarding failing grades, without following through themselves. This perspective felt by multiple counselors of instances of being treated as secondary assistants rather than essential members of the school support system truly showcases the communication struggle within the school hierarchy. About mid-way through the interview, she stated:

"Oh, can you reach out to so and so's parents because they're failing my class? And then I'll go in, and I'll see like the contact log, and they haven't called the parents. So they think like, um, I don't want to say secretary, but they feel like I'm like their personal assistant, to do all the dirty work that they don't want to do" (Samantha: Philadelphia Public Guidance Counselor).

Looking at the case of Melissa, a Boston Public guidance counselor, she found that "people are leaving... It's more work than I think a lot of people signed up for... Not that they

don't want to do the work. It's just they, it's more work than I think a lot of people signed up for" portrays the challenges counselors face within the school hierarchy. Melissa explains that the high turnover rate among counselors is a clear indication that the above-recommendation workload pushes young professionals quickly off the career of guidance counseling. This quote reflects the struggle of counselors whose expectations may not align with the reality of the workload with many counselors finding themselves in situations like "I don't even have time to remember who needed what, because it's constant like the ER in here"(Mary: Philadelphia Public Guidance Counselor). The reality of counselor workload truly underscores the need for better support structures and resources to address the challenges counselors face in providing comprehensive care to students.

In a conversation about support for staff following the death of a student, the principal said in a crowded hall: "Well, I don't care about the adults. I'm only here for the kids, literally, verbatim. That's what he said" (Landy: Boston Public guidance counselor). However, these counselors are stuck with dealing with caseloads that simply go beyond the means of one person. Michael, a counselor in Philadelphia said "My caseload is really only, maybe 160. But it's, but it's really not enough time to meet with, with, with everybody" (Michael: Philadelphia Public Guidance Counselor).

Emotional Support and Understanding:

Counselors across both districts advocated for a deeper understanding of counselors' roles through shadowing experiences to foster better support systems within schools. Melissa, a Boston guidance counselor found that "The ship keeps going and the day keeps going and that's hard... That's hard... We have to talk about the loss's impact... but we don't need to be sharing the name" This quote and an overarching theme within the interview was the emotional toll of

addressing traumatic events within the school community and the need to provide support while maintaining confidentiality and sensitivity to the student's experiences.

The job description of the counselor role in both Boston and Philadelphia public schools states that a counselor's job is to “provide counseling services that foster the academic, personal, social, and career development of all students” (Figure 3: Philadelphia Counselor Job Description). With the expectation of being a counselor for students in all aspects, counselors felt like “it's literally like you haven't walked in my shoes... Come sit with me and deal with all the things” (Samantha: Philadelphia Public Guidance Counselor).

Counselors, because the population they are working with is under 18, many times it requires parental approval

“I was thinking about this student who got shot during the summer. He wasn't my student per se. But when he became a 10th grader, he became my student. We offered mental health counseling, but the parent wasn't receptive. I know it's not just the Latino community; it's all communities who don't believe in therapy” (Demi: Boston Public Guidance Counselor).

These lived experiences where some educators lack the empathy and training to be able to understand the reality that their students experience, many times push students to be unable to find a person they can connect with and find solutions to the grief or sadness they are experiencing from neighborhood gun violence. In one interview, a counselor elaborated on the experience a student faced in coming back after being shot:

“I had two students shot while they were walking to school. One of them was a football player, and he was shot in the stomach when he was coming to football practice. He was out for like, a month or something. And he came back. And I'm

like, you know, ‘welcome back. Like, I hope you're feeling okay.’ And he went to chemistry class, and his chemistry teacher gave him a test. And he's like, Well, I don't know any of this information. I was out for a month. And the teacher said, ‘I don't care.’ So there's like, like, there's zero empathy happening.” (Brittney: Philadelphia Public guidance counselor).

With counselors already existing workloads and the severity of a 15-year-old boy being shot and traumatized from that instance when educators fail to acknowledge the lived experiences and trauma faced by their students, it shows to the student that the school is not a supportive environment. As she continued with her story, she informed me that the young man and this one experience with a chemistry test pushed him down a horrible trajectory that ultimately led to him dropping out.

Constraints and External Support:

Samantha discusses the financial constraints counselors face due to limited budgets provided by the district for supplies. She highlights the role of external support systems like DonorsChoose.org in filling the gap by allowing teachers to crowdfund supplies for their classrooms. Samantha's experience with securing resources through such platforms illustrates the challenges counselors encounter in ensuring adequate support for their students amid budgetary limitations. In asking her how she plans and is supported by the district, many counselors were quick to tell me about the DonorsChoose platform because “[the district] gives us personally \$200 to buy what we need, but you blow through that in September... donorschoose.org is going to be your best friend.”

When asked about the question of the impact of outside counselors, some counselors across Philadelphia stated that they would sometimes be sent to “other school[s] just to be there

as a resource during the day, and that's something that we'll do very often if there are deaths due to gun violence or some other kind of tragedy, you know, a suicide, something like that. They'll pull us from across the city just to be available to have extra bodies (Patricia: Philadelphia Public guidance counselor). In the aftermath of these tragedies, counselors become vital "extra bodies," providing support and resources to the students and staff grappling with the aftermath of traumatic events. These expectations of assisting in a city-wide violence response system highlight a new issue of who is to remain the counselor at the school left now without a counselor. When counselors are pulled from their assigned schools to provide support elsewhere, it leaves behind a gap in the continuity of care for students who rely on their counselor's presence and support.

When discussing how outside counseling was for the student's ultimate success and coping with death from neighborhood gun violence, it was commonly noted that:

"We have at least two people from outside who provide school-based counseling every year. But it shouldn't just be that; some students need support from both school and outside. Some parents won't sign forms for counseling, even when it's offered at school" (Demi: Boston Public guidance counselor).

Demi and many other counselors stated the importance of addressing the cultural and systemic factors that play a factor in the mental health support students in marginalized communities will be willing to work with.

School Preparedness on Trauma Management

A final theme that will be discussed is that in both Boston and Philadelphia school districts, counselors like Demi, a Boston public high school guidance counselor, shared that even

though trauma and violence are increasing situations schools are forced to deal with, with Demi even saying:

“One thing that I continue to repeat is that we need to work on strategies to be more proactive instead of reactive. I find that in our district, and I am sure that it is because of the many layers of issues that this doesn't happen. Society, the world is not the same as it was 10 years ago, 20 years ago.” (Demi, Boston Public guidance counselor).

Demi's response, as well as the voices of many other counselors, pleads to district and elected officials to reevaluate their regulations for trauma management and prioritize the development of proactive strategies that address the ever-changing needs of students.

With educators across schools forced to help students manage their trauma, counselors begin to experience second-hand trauma, especially given that “the teachers who are you know, like for me, not from the city, they're from, you know, the suburbs. So just having people just kill... just is almost it's so foreign to them.” (Michael, Boston Public guidance counselor). Given that the professional staff are not from the area and many came from suburban backgrounds in the study, these experiences that have become a norm to their students eventually make “The staff is very traumatized in our district, and they don't have any training” (Landy: Philadelphia Public guidance counselor).

Landy sentiment provides the understanding that many educators are experiencing trauma without adequate training and the district and broader board of education need to prioritize the mental health and resilience of school staff members.

Ultimately, the experiences shared by Michael, Landy, Demi, and so on, clearly portray the need for comprehensive training and support for educators to effectively address trauma in schools without getting burnt out or traumatized themselves.

“I’ve called out multiple times this year, and I never call out. Yeah, but I’ve called out for mental health days. Because I have to. The burnout is real.” (Aleah: Philadelphia Public guidance counselor).

By providing educators with the necessary tools and resources, districts can better equip them to support students and foster a safe and nurturing learning environment for all. Aleah's story of needing to call out multiple times in an academic year for mental health days shows the hardships of addressing trauma for counselors without proper support from their district. This presents, again, this overarching story from counselors of the reality of burnout and the importance of prioritizing their own mental well-being, especially since 86% of counselors in this study had stated some form of timeline of their departure from the school district for something “more suburban” and “definitely more calm.”

Theory

Moral Distress

The late Andrew Jameton, an ethics professor and scholar, developed the concept of moral distress (MD) to explain a phenomenon experienced by nurses and the moral toll that the career imposes on them. He deemed that moral distress “arises when one knows the \ right thing to do, but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action” (1984). In the nursing profession, research has shown that moral distress is influenced by many factors and restrictions that professionals in the career experience, such as lack of staffing, lack of inter-colleague support, and lack of emotional and educational support (Atashzadeh-Shoorideh, et al., 2021). Further, there has been growing evidence that moral distress directly impacts a nurse’s performance with the quality of care a patient receives; even suggesting that moral distress has a consequential impact on medication errors. In attempting to find a solution to help alleviate some of the moral distress on their nursing staff, researchers have noted employers need to implement preventive measures that include “managerial support, professional independence, and mandated description of specific tasks” (Salari, et al., 2022, p.9).

Using this theoretical framework to understand education, researchers can gain insights into the ethical questions and dilemmas that educators and counselors face in attempting to do their job responsibilities. While there may not be much research on directly applying moral distress theory to the guidance counselor position, Walls and Seashore-Louis conducted a study with a focus on the perspective of the superintendent of districts with their moral distress (2023). They found that while upper district leadership may have “the best interest of students” in mind, policies become so generalizable that they are truly only able to help the students in the most ideal and particular situation.

Discussion

In this study, we studied and tested the perspectives of counselors and their experience with the support systems available to students impacted by neighborhood gun violence. Through interviews with Boston and Philadelphia public high school counselors, we found four themes, including (1) hierarchy communication struggles, (2) emotional support and understanding, (3) constraints and external support, and (4) the impact of school preparedness on trauma management.

The reports of hierarchy communication struggles present the power dynamics present within school support systems. Samantha's experience of feeling mismanaged and treated as a secondary administrative assistant reflects the broader organizational power and authority issues. Weber's theory of bureaucracy found that hierarchical structures often result in role ambiguity and conflict among employees and leadership (Weber & Parsons, 1947). As described by Samantha and other counselors, the hierarchical communication struggles present the ethical tensions arising from the mismatch between counselors' professional expertise and the expectations placed on them. Counselors through their time find themselves constrained by administrative tasks and expectations, such as being the first person to call parents for students failing class, which removes them from their actual role of addressing students' emotional and psychological needs with some having principles openly stating that staff mental health was not a single priority to them. These experiences continue to place counselors in positions of being unable to effectively support their student's well-being and mental health within the school system.

Comparing the Jameton theoretical framework of moral distress to the experiences of counselors has provided an understanding of the ethical difficulties they face in handling

institutional limitations to provide adequate support to students affected by neighborhood gun violence (1984). Similar to nurses experiencing moral distress in healthcare settings as Jameston delved into, counselors experience moral distress when they have the potential right treatment plan or therapy referral note, like Demi and Michael, but are constrained by institutional policies and resource limitations.

Furthermore, the counselors provided an understanding that sometimes when a death occurred they would be removed from their home school and placed as a “helper” to the school directly dealing with the gun violence death. Reflecting on the information that their caseload is already 160+ students specifically in this study, we can understand their ethical dilemma (Patricia, Michael, & Stephen). They must choose between remaining at their school to support their students or going out to the new school and helping these students. Ultimately, this puts an unwarranted amount of pressure and trauma onto these counselors who are left to support multiple students at multiple schools on a day’s notice. These counselors' debate reflects the pressure between their moral obligations to provide all-encompassing support to their students affected by trauma and the structural constraints imposed by the underfunded educational system.

The emphasis on emotional support and understanding in the counselors' perspectives showcases the significance of identifying and managing the emotional needs of students affected by trauma. Demi's experience of encountering parental resistance to therapy highlights the influence of cultural norms and beliefs on mental health counseling support systems within communities. In health lifestyle theory, the counselors' experiences reflect broader patterns of socialization and cultural transmission that shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward mental health (Cockerham, 2005). These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive

and trauma-informed approaches to counseling that take into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students and their families.

The counselors in this research study noted that their own moral distress came directly from the policy not bending to accommodate each student, instead the policies in place were meant for a one-off case. However, with death from gun violence becoming a continual pattern in urban communities and districts alike, counselors are perpetually dealing with having to follow district policies in helping their students. Papachristos and Bastomski found that crime and violence transcend beyond the person to its impact being felt in the whole community and city (2018). One counselor, Sapphire from a Philadelphia public high school, asserted that “I don't even have time to remember who needed what because it's constant like the ER in here” (Sapphire: Philadelphia Public guidance counselor). Her claim was shared by many of the participants in the study who expressed these feelings of burnout and a lack of adequate staffing to address all the issues that the district regularly faces. These findings, therefore, tie directly to the moral distress theory because of its parallels with the parameters set forth by the moral distress, especially given that these counselors are limited by policies that often fail to accommodate the diverse and complex needs that this violence brings to the communities.

Lastly, a limitation of this study was the lack of comprehensive interrogation excluding students, principals, and teachers. By limiting the study exclusively to counselors, the study may provide an incomplete or biased understanding of the dynamics at play within the school environment.

Conclusion/Implications

This sociological study of counselors' perspectives about the support systems for students impacted by neighborhood gun violence in Boston and Philadelphia public schools reveals critical knowledge of the challenges and difficulties inherent within the public secondary educational system. The findings show the pressing need for staff across high schools to develop a deeper understanding of counselors' job responsibilities, particularly in addressing the emotional and psychological needs of students impacted by trauma.

The findings urge for a better understanding of the lived experiences of counselors who are often overworked and are expected to continue to assist the youth gun violence epidemic within their schools. This warrants a systemic change within educational institutions and public health crisis calls by elected officials to make counselor workload manageable for a human and provide adequate support to students to effectively promote their holistic well-being and development.

Future research should aim to expand upon the number of interviewees and geographical locations, especially considering the significance of these questions in understanding the broader social dynamics and structural factors influencing support systems for students affected by gun violence given that it is currently the number one cause of death for adolescents in the United States. By further exploring this issue, researchers and society can implement and find new interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of gun violence and halting the increase of violence via guns.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to take a moment to acknowledge all those who have fallen victim to the gun violence epidemic. May every soul lost to this crisis be remembered and may their memories serve as a call to action for us to make effective change to ensure that no more life is lost.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the high school guidance counselors who generously shared their perspectives and experiences for this research. Their willingness to participate and provide the ability for this study. Also, a thank you to all public school counselors and the endless work they do to better our current youth.

I extend my gratitude to my advisors, Dr. Nora Gross and Dr. Zine Magubane, whose guidance and support were so needed in the completion of this senior thesis. To Dr. Gross: Thank you so much for allowing me to join as your research assistant freshman year, opening my eyes to this research area and helping me understand where my interests lay in expanding to this project. To Dr. Magubane: I truly appreciated the knowledge you provided me to better understand social theory, especially in your CRT course, and how complex the application of theory is. Both of you provided me with the tools to continue to better both this project and myself as a sociologist and researcher.

And to all my friends, thank you for all the laughter and just coming out to the streets with me to enjoy the college experience. DALs, The Folks, and Friendship, and any other group that helped me get through, I would have appreciated no one else's company to be in the trenches and lollygagging with.

Finally, I have just so much love for all my family who have been here for the entire journey. To my siblings and my nieces, may you all be on the way to getting a degree and being

the best at what you do. I truly do believe that each of you can capture whatever dreams and aspirations you hold. To Chica, I know you are no longer here but your energy and perseverance continue to inspire me every day. Mom, thank you for being a constant that I can turn to when I need to chat or complain about the craziness that is life. You truly are your kid's number one fan who would move any mountain you could for us. I truly do love you for all that you have done for me.

I truly do love every one of you because we all in the community have gotten to this moment, may we all prosper and have an abundance of success in all future endeavors.

Funding

First and foremost, I would like to give my deepest gratitude to Mr. Ronald McNair and the McNair Scholars Program at Boston College for their generous support in providing me with housing and a stipend to be able to conduct my research.

Also, the Frontier Fellowship was awarded by Boston College. The funding was used for interview incentives for the counselors who participated in the study.

References

- Abba-Aji, Mohammed, Shaffi Fazaludeen Koya, Salma M. Abdalla, Catherine K. Ettman, Gregory Herschel Cohen, and Sandro Galea. 2024. "The Mental Health Consequences of Interpersonal Gun Violence: A Systematic Review." *SSM - Mental Health* Volume 5, June 2024, 100302
- Action News Data Team. 2024. "Neighborhood Safety Tracker for Philadelphia." 6abc Philadelphia. Retrieved April 22, 2024 (<https://6abc.com/feature/philadelphia-safety-tracker-crime-stats-how-safe-is-my-neighborhood-zip-code-statistics/12455998/>).
- Alvis, Lauren, Na Zhang, Irwin N. Sandler, and Julie B. Kaplow. 2022. "Developmental Manifestations of Grief in Children and Adolescents: Caregivers as Key Grief Facilitators." *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 16(2):447–57.
- American Guidance Counselor Association. 2023. "State Requirements & Programs." *State Requirements & Programs - American Guidance Counselor Association (ASCA)*. Retrieved December 18, 2023 (<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/State-Requirements-Programs>).
- Atashzadeh Shoorideh, F., Moosavi, S., & Balouchi, A. (2021). Incivility toward nurses: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of medical ethics and history of medicine*, 14, 15. <https://doi.org/10.18502/jmehm.v14i15.7670>
- Barboza, Gia. 2018. "A Secondary Spatial Analysis of Gun Violence near Boston Schools: A Public Health Approach." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 95(3):344–60. doi 10.1007/s11524-018-0244-8.

Borg, B.A., Rabinak, C.A. & Marusak, H.A. Violence exposure and mental health consequences among urban youth. *Curr Psychol* 42, 8176–8185 (2023).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02141-4>

Boston Public Schools. (2024). Data and Reports: Facts and Figures. Data and reports: facts and figures. <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/689>

Burke Harris, Nadine. 2014. "How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime." TED.

Cockerham W. C. (2005). Health lifestyle theory and the convergence of agency and structure. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 46(1), 51–67.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/002214650504600105>

Dong, M., Giles, W. H., Felitti, V. J., Dube, S. R., Williams, J. E., Chapman, D. P., & Anda, R. F. (2004). Insights into causal pathways for ischemic heart disease: adverse childhood experiences study. *Circulation*, 110(13), 1761-1766.

Edgar, Lynn V., and Mary Howard-Hamilton. 1994. “Non-Crisis Death Education in the Elementary School.” *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling* 29(1):38–46.

Englert-Copeland, J. (2019). Privilege, Bias, and Cultural Competence: An Examination of How Lived Experience Shapes Academic Advising Practices.

Everytown for Gun Safety. 2021. “Gun Violence in Massachusetts - Everystat.org.” *Everytown*

for Gun Safety. Retrieved March 31, 2023

(<https://maps.everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Gun-Violence-in-Massachusetts-2.9.2021.pdf>).

Hines, E. M., Fletcher, E. C., Moore, J. L., & Ford, D. Y. (2022). Culturally Responsive Postsecondary Readiness Practices for Black Males: Practice and Policy

- Recommendations for School Counselors. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, 4(1), 11-25. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25774/teyc-zk40](https://doi.org/10.25774/teyc-zk40)
- Holland, M. M. (2015). Trusting each other: Student-counselor relationships in diverse high schools. *Sociology of Education*, 88(3), 244-262.
- Holland, John. 2008. "How Schools Can Support Children Who Experience Loss and Death." *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 36(4):411–24. doi 10.1080/03069880802364569.
- Jakoby, Nina R. 2012. "Grief as a Social Emotion: Theoretical Perspectives." *Death Studies* 36(8):679–711.
- Jameton A. 1984 "Nursing Practice: The Ethical Issues." Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Jenkins, Richard A., and John C. Cavanaugh. 1986. "Examining the Relationship between the Development of the Concept of Death and Overall Cognitive Development." *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 16(3):193–99. doi 10.2190/PK34-53QA-9CEE-W22E.
- Kearney, C., Akos, P., Domina, T. and Young, Z. (2021), Student-to-School Counselor Ratios: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Evidence. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 99: 418-428. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12394>
- Kennedy, David M., Anne M. Piehl, and Anthony A. Braga. 1996. "Youth Violence in Boston: Gun Markets, Serious Youth Offenders, and a Use-Reduction Strategy." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59(1):147–96. doi 10.2307/1192213.
- O'Connor, Mary-Frances. 2019. "Grief: A Brief History of Research on How the Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt." *Psychosomatic Medicine* 81(8):731–38.
- Owens, D., Lacey, K., Rawls, G., & Holbert-Quince, J. (2010). First-generation African American male college students: Implications for career counselors. *The Career*

- Development Quarterly, 58(4),
291-300.<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2010.tb00179.x>
- Petrillo, Matt. 2023. "Epicenter of Philly Gun Violence Found in a Few Zip Codes." CBS News.
Retrieved April 22, 2024
(<https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/philadelphia-gunviolence-zip-codes-2022-shooting-incidents/>).
- Philadelphia Office of the Controller. 2024. *Mapping Philadelphia's Gun Violence Crisis*.
Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Office of the Controller.
- Philadelphia Police Department. 2023. "Crime Maps & Stats | Philadelphia Police Department."
Retrieved January 24, 2023 (<https://www.phillypolice.com/crime-maps-stats>).
- Rajan, S., Branas, C.C., Myers, D. et al. Youth exposure to violence involving a gun: evidence
for adverse childhood experience classification. *J Behav Med* 42, 646–657 (2019).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-019-00053-0>
- Rodríguez Herrero, Pablo, Agustín de la Herrán Gascón, Gregorio Pérez-Bonet, and Juan Carlos
Sánchez-Huete. 2022. "What Do Teachers Think of Death Education?" *Death Studies*
46(6):1518–28. doi 10.1080/07481187.2020.1817176.
- Ruel, E., Allen, A., Tracy, M., & Galea, S. (2021). Understanding the Impact of Non-Fatal
Shootings on Urban Community Members: A Qualitative Study. *SSM - Population
Health*, 15, 100759. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100759>
- Salari, N., Shohaimi, S., Khaledi-Paveh, B., Kazeminia, M., Bazrafshan, M. R., & Mohammadi,
M. (2022). The severity of moral distress in nurses: a systematic review and
meta-analysis. *Philosophy, ethics, and humanities in medicine: PEHM*, 17(1), 13.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13010-022-00126-0>

- Stylianou, Polyxeni, and Michalinos Zembylas. 2018. "Dealing With the Concepts of 'Grief' and 'Grieving' in the Classroom: Children's Perceptions, Emotions, and Behavior." *Omega* 77(3):240–66. doi 10.1177/0030222815626717.
- US Census. n.d.-c. "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Boston City, Massachusetts." Retrieved January 24, 2023 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/bostoncitymassachusetts>).
- US Census. "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States." Retrieved January 24, 2023 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/philadelphiacitymassachusetts>).
- Wade, R., Jr, Shea, J. A., Rubin, D., & Wood, J. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences of low-income urban youth. *Pediatrics*, 134(1), e13–e20.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-2475>
- Walls, J., & Louis, K. S. (2023). The Politics of Belonging and Implications for School Organization: Auto Photographic Perspectives on "Fitting In" at School. *AERA Open*, 9.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221139766>
- Weber, M., Henderson, A. M., & Parsons, T. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization* (1st Amer. ed.). Oxford University Press.

Appendix

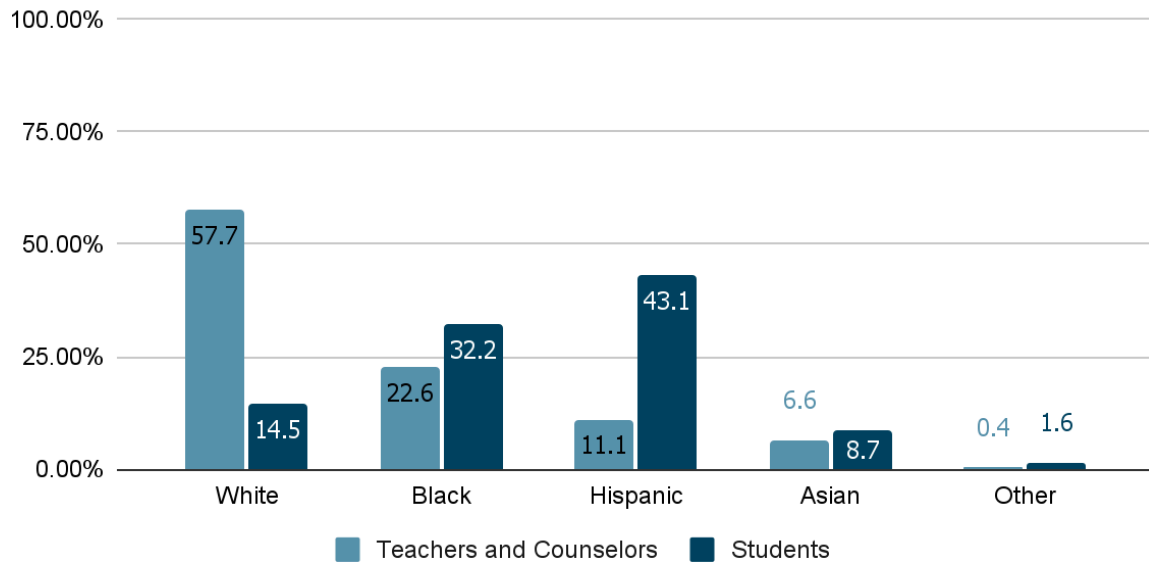
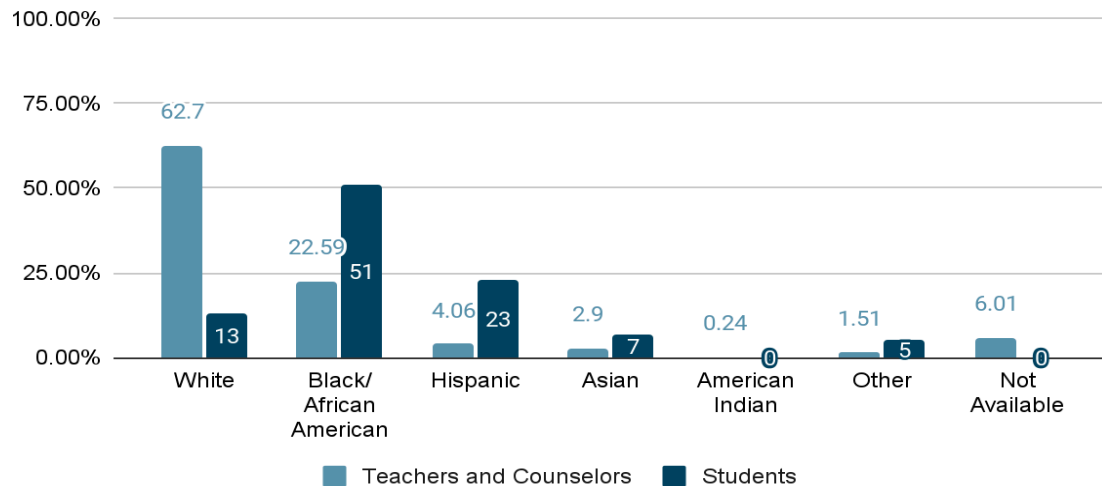
Figure 1: BPS staff and student demographics**Boston Public School Teacher and Counselor vs. Student Demographics****Figure 2: SDP staff and student demographics****Philadelphia Public School Teacher and Counselor vs. Student Demographics**

Figure 3: Philadelphia Counselor Job Description

Our District
Schools
Families
Careers

**OFFICE OF
Talent Support Services**
215-400-4600 Portal: D Suite 222

Job Description

School Counselor Eligibility Application 23-24 SY - (50012420)
Description

Job Summary

Provides counseling services that foster the academic, personal, social, and career development of all students. Provides individual/group counseling and guidance for students and implements broad based programs that deal with decision making, conflict resolution, self esteem, coping strategies, and other issues. Serves as both the primary agent for addressing issues that impact students at risk of failing to attain their full academic potential and the school-based resource for dealing with child abuse/neglect and crisis prevention/intervention. Acts as a liaison between the school and various community/governmental agencies that may provide services to students and their families and participates on the school's multidisciplinary committee.

NOTE: School Counselors have, at least, two-steps to complete in order to determine eligibility. First step is completion of this application to ensure minimum requirements are met, and the second step is an interview with members of the District's Prevention and Intervention office. Bilingual School Counselors must go through a third-step, which is a language assessment to confirm the bilingual skill.

Essential Functions

- Provides general school counseling and guidance programs/services including individual and group counseling and guidance;
- Implements broad based programs dealing with decision-making, conflict resolution, self esteem, coping strategies, and other issues;
- Plans and provides classroom guidance focusing on social and emotional issues, family and/or peer relationships, and decision-making;
- Provides formal and informal counseling services to students and their parents concerning issues that are affecting or may affect the students' school adjustment;
- Serves as the primary agent for addressing issues that impact students at risk of failing to attain their full academic potential;
- Serves as the school-based resource for dealing with child abuse/neglect and crisis prevention/intervention;
- Participates in team interventions with other staff to support students;
- Participates on the school's multidisciplinary committee that includes other staff members;
- Collaborates with parents, teachers, and other staff members in the planning and implementation of a comprehensive educational program for students;
- Makes referrals to outside agencies as needed and provides ongoing follow-up services to students and their families;
- Gathers and disseminates information on critical issues such as student substance abuse, child abuse/neglect, suicide prevention/intervention, preteen/teen pregnancy, and homelessness;
- Keeps abreast of current techniques and trends in school counseling and guidance for elementary, middle, and/or high school students;
- Prepares and maintains student counseling records;
- Prepares reports on students, correspondence, and statistical summaries;
- Establishes and maintains effective working relationships with representatives of various community/governmental agencies to facilitate the availability and accessibility of services to meet the needs of students and their families.

- The functions and resources of community/governmental agencies that provide support services for students and their families;
- For bilingual School Counselors, both English and the specified world language or English and American Sign Language or Signed English, including history and culture.

Demonstrated ability to:

- Provide counseling and guidance on an individual/group basis, and to conduct group support/guidance sessions;
- Employ tact, diplomacy, and sound judgment in dealing with sensitive or personal problems and hostile attitudes;
- Work effectively with students and their families and aid them in the constructive use of their capacities to address their specific problems;
- Identify the signs of substance abuse and students at risk for suicide;
- Understand and interpret standardized test scores, making guidelines and promotional policies;
- Participate in crisis intervention;
- Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing;
- Prepare and maintain student-counseling records, reports, correspondence, and statistical summaries;
- Establish and maintain effective working relationships;
- For bilingual School Counselors: fluently speak, read, and write both English and the specified world language, or English and American Sign Language or Signed English.

PLEASE NOTE: Salary is commensurate with experience in education and educational attainment. Both prior experience and educational degree must go through the District's verification process in order for final salary to be confirmed. [Please click this link to read through the process and download the verification forms for your previous employer\(s\) to complete.](#)

Disclaimer: The above statements are intended to describe the general nature and level of work being performed by people assigned to this classification. They are not to be construed as an exhaustive list of all responsibilities, duties, and skills required of personnel so classified.

Nondiscrimination: The School District of Philadelphia provides to all persons equal access to all categories of employment in this District, regardless of race, color, age, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry, national origin or handicap/disability, gender identity, or genetic information. Please refer to Board Policy 104 for further information regarding the District's commitment to Nondiscrimination in Employment Practices.

Primary Location The School District of Philadelphia

Job Instructional

Organization The School District of Philadelphia

Schedule Regular

Employee Status Entry Level

Posting Date Nov 16, 2022

Union Affiliation: Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT)

Unposting Date Ongoing

© The School District of Philadelphia
440 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130
215-400-4000

- [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Notice of Nondiscrimination](#)
- [Website Accessibility](#)
- [Accommodations](#) • [Philasd.org](#)

Figure 4: Boston Counselor Job Description



SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR (SY23-24) (#00064475-SY2324)

Boston Latin School
 Boston Public Schools Office of Human Capital
 Boston, Massachusetts

Job Details

Job ID: 4149258

Application Deadline: August 26, 2023

Re-posted : March 1, 2023

Starting Date: Immediately

Job Description

Boston Latin School (BLS) is one of three exam schools in the district, serving over 2,400 scholars in grades 7-12. We seek to ground our students in a contemporary classical education as preparation for successful college studies, responsible and engaged citizenship, and a rewarding life. Educators at BLS are expected to teach, lead, and collaborate with high levels of content expertise, cultural responsiveness, care for children's social and emotional needs, and commitment to engaging instruction for all learners.

The **Guidance Counselor**, through the process of individual and group counseling, helps students to understand their aptitudes, capabilities, and limitations in making personal decisions, educational plans, and occupational choices. The Guidance Counselor is also responsible for developing, organizing, directing, supervising, and evaluating guidance and related programs.

Reports to: Principal/Head of School

Responsibilities

- Plans, develops, and implements all guidance programs in cooperation with the Headmaster and the Program Director for Guidance and Support Services.
- Counsels students individually and in small groups.
- Implements and interprets for students, faculty, and parents' evaluative appraisals of students.
- Assists in the programming, record keeping, placement, and discharge of students.
- Develops a positive working relationship with other support service personnel to identify problems, share information, and design programs.
- Provides college counseling and support for students in the college search and application process.
- Designs and implements a program of educational and vocational information.
- Performs other related duties as requested by the Principal/Headmaster.

Core Competencies: Using the Rubric of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP), the Office of Human Capital has identified priority skills and abilities that all BPS SISP should demonstrate.

1. Accountability for Student Achievement

(II-A-1 Quality of Effort and Work, II-D-2 High Expectations, I B-2 Adjustments to Practice)

- Sets ambitious learning goals for all students, uses instructional and clinical practices that reflect high expectations for students and student work; engages all students in learning.
- Consistently defines high expectations for student learning goals and behavior.

- Assesses student learning regularly using a variety of assessments to measure growth, and understanding.
- Effectively analyzes data from assessments, draws conclusions, and shares them appropriately.

2. Communicating Professional Knowledge

(I-A-1 Professional Knowledge, I-A-2 Child Adolescent Development, I-A-3 Plan Development)

- Exhibits strong knowledge of child development and how students learn and behave, and designs effective and rigorous plans for support with measurable outcomes.
- Demonstrates knowledge of students' developmental levels by providing differentiated learning experiences and support that enable all students to progress toward intended outcomes.

3. Equitable & Effective Instruction

(II-A-3 Meeting Diverse Needs, II-A-2. Student Engagement, II-B-1. Safe Learning Environment, II-B-2 Collaborative Learning Environment, I-D-3 Access to Knowledge)

- Builds a productive learning environment where every student participates and is valued as part of the class community.
- Uses instructional and clinical practices that are likely to challenge, motivate and engage all students and facilitate active participation.
- Consistently adapts instruction, services, plans, and assessments to make curriculum/ supports accessible to all students.

4. Cultural Proficiency

(II-C-1. Respects Differences, II-C-2. Maintains a Respectful Environment)

- Actively creates and maintains an environment in which students' diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected.

5. Parent/Family Engagement

(III-A-1. Parent/Family Engagement, III-B-2. Collaboration)

- Engages with families and builds collaborative, respectful relationships with them in service of student learning.
- Consistently provides parents with clear expectations for student learning behavior and/or wellness and shares strategies to promote learning and development at school and home.

6. Professional Reflection & Collaboration

(IV-A-1. Reflective Practice, IV-C-1. Professional Collaboration, IV-C-2. Consultation)

- Regularly reflects on practice, seeks and responds to feedback, and demonstrates self-awareness and commitment to continuous learning and development.
- Consistently collaborates with colleagues through shared planning and/or informal conversation to analyze student performance and development, and to plan appropriate interventions at the classroom or school level.
- Regularly provides advice and expertise to general education teachers and the school community to support the creation of appropriate and effective academic, behavioral, and social/emotional learning experiences for students.

Qualifications Required

1. MA DESE School Guidance Counselor License at the appropriate level.
2. Master's Degree in counseling, education or related field.
3. Ability to meet the BPS Standards of Effective Practice as outlined above.
4. Experience working with urban youth in an educational or human services setting.

Qualification-Preferred

1. Experience with database management.
2. Demonstrated writing ability.
3. BPS values linguistic diversity and believes that candidates who speak another language bring added value to the classroom, school, and district culture and diversity. BPS is particularly interested in candidates who are fluent in one of BPS' official languages: Spanish, Creole (Cape Verdean), Creole (Haitian), Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, & Somali.

Terms: BTU, Group I

Please refer to www.bostonpublicschools.org/ohc (<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/ohc>) (under "Employee Benefits and Policies") for more information on salary and compensation. Salaries are listed by Unions and Grade/Step.

The start and end times of BPS schools vary, as do the lengths of the school day. Some BPS schools have a longer school day through the "Schedule A" Expanded Learning Time (ELT) agreement.

The Boston Public Schools, in accordance with its nondiscrimination policies, does not discriminate in its programs, facilities, or employment or educational opportunities on the basis of race, color, age, criminal record (inquiries only), disability, homelessness, sex/gender, gender identity, religion, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, genetics or military status, and does not tolerate any form of retaliation, or bias-based intimidation, threat or harassment that demeans individuals' dignity or interferes with their ability to learn or work.

Position Type: Full-time

Positions Available: 1

- Job Category : Student Services > School/Guidance Counselor

Equal Opportunity Employer

Boston Public Schools Office of Human Capital is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/civil union status, ancestry, place of birth, age, citizenship status, veteran status, political affiliation, genetic information or disability, as defined and required by state and federal laws. Additionally, we prohibit retaliation against individuals who oppose such discrimination and harassment or who participate in an equal opportunity investigation.

Job Requirements

- No experience required

Contact Information

Boston Public Schools, Office of Human Capital
2300 Washington Street
Roxbury, Massachusetts 02119

The content you submit, offer, contribute, attach, post, or display (each a "Submission") will be viewed by other users of the service who may or may not be accurately representing who they are or who they represent. Do not include any sensitive data in your submissions. Any submission or any use or reliance on any content or materials posted via the service or obtained by you through the use of the service is at your own risk. "Sensitive data" for purposes of this section means social security or other government-issued identification numbers, medical or health information, account security information, individual financial account information, credit/debit/gift or other payment card information, account passwords, individual credit and income information or any other sensitive personal data as defined under applicable laws.

Learn more at <http://www.schoolspring.com/job?4149258>

Figure 5: Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Paid Research Opportunity from Boston College Undergraduate Student

Dear [participant/name],

My name is Alexander Pereira and I am an undergraduate student in the McNair Scholars Program at Boston College. I am conducting research regarding school support for high school students following the loss of a loved one from gun violence. **I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study due to your experience as a high guidance counselor in Boston or Philadelphia public high schools.** I am conducting this original research as part of my McNair Scholars project and the completion of a sociology honors thesis.

I invite you to participate in a 1-hour Zoom interview to share your experiences. You can express interest on a form linked **HERE** and the interview will be scheduled at your convenience between February and June. **As a token of my appreciation, participants will receive a 50 US dollar virtual Amazon gift card following the interview completion.**

If you do not have an hour to spare, I am also conducting a brief survey which can be accessed HERE. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

I hope to use this research to further our understanding of the support systems counselors can provide to youth experiencing loss and grief. I will share my anonymized findings at Boston College's annual McNair Scholars Symposium next summer and would be happy to share a summary of the findings with any interested research participants.

If you would like more information about this study, you can contact me, Alexander Pereira at alexander.pereira@bc.edu or my faculty mentor, Dr. Nora Gross at nora.gross@bc.edu

If you know a counselor who may be a good fit for this study, please feel free to forward this email to them.

Find the survey here:

https://bostoncollege.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9GEFCUksQk6LXjU

Find the paid Interview sign-up form here: <https://forms.gle/C1CVG6tU7wcCuuwU9>

Thanks so much for your participation,

Alexander Pereira

Figure 6: Interview Protocol

Hello. My name is Alexander Pereira, a current junior at Boston College partaking in this project for my senior thesis and McNair Scholars Program. The research is to obtain the perspectives of counselors following the death of a student from neighborhood gun violence. Thank you so much for sparing your time to participate in this study and for taking the time to look over and digitally sign the consent form. Before we start, I understand that this topic is quite heavy and personal for you. If you want to skip any questions or need a minute, just let me know!

I, again, just want to affirm that you will be completely confidential throughout this entire project. Following the transcription of the audio film, I will be replacing any words or names with pseudonyms to ensure this can never be traced back to you. Then, for a completed interview, a token of appreciation will be a 50 dollar Amazon gift card

Inform them about:

- Confidentiality – pseudonyms in any written or oral presentations

1. Questions about them and their path and their connection to the school

- 1.1. Just to start us off. What pushed you to go into counseling and come to this specific district?
- 1.2. Tell me a bit about how you grew up.
- 1.3. Thinking about your current students, what are some similarities and differences to how they are growing up

The role they think they have

- 1.4. Number of students?

- 1.5. Number of counselors?
- 1.6. Moving on to discuss your role as a counselor, I want to start with you by explaining from your perspective what being a counselor entails in your district and at your school.
 - 1.6.1. What's a typical day like?
 - 1.6.2. Tell me about your caseload and how much time you think you have to spend with each of your students...
- 1.7. What kind of training did you receive that has been most useful to you?
 - 1.7.1. Is there training you wish you had?
 - 1.7.2. Aspects of your job that are harder than you expected or that you don't feel trained for?
- 1.8. What are the biggest challenges you face in doing your job?
 - 1.8.1. Do you encounter red tape or bureaucratic obstacles? Tell me about some.

2. **The Trauma of Gun Violence**

- 2.1. In your time as a counselor, have any students at your school(s) been killed due to neighborhood violence?
 - 2.1.1. If not, in what ways has gun violence impacted your students?
 - 2.1.1.1. How does the school deal with the death of a student not enrolled directly in the school, but whose friends are at your school?
 - 2.1.1.2. What is the main source of how you find out about the death of an unenrolled and/or external student?
 - 2.1.1.3. How do you feel about outside counselors coming in by the district?

2.1.1.4.

- 2.2. Thinking about the most recent time this happened, could you elaborate on how the day after was?
 - 2.3. How was the atmosphere in the hallways?
 - 2.4. How did you perceive what your students were doing?
 - 2.4.1. What kind of students do you find to come to talk to you
 - 2.5. Does the district provide any resources or therapy sessions for students following the death? Can you share some examples of this?
 - 2.5.1. Also, how many students who attend these programs stay in the school?
 - 2.5.1.1. Do they view these programs as effective?
 - 2.6. Did the school ever go back to normal? What is normal now?
 - 2.7. Tell me about how the cause of death changes the response that the district provides.
3. **Next Steps?**
- 3.1. What can be done to ensure these students' needs are met?
 - 3.1.1. What would you hope to see happen differently at your school if this happened again?
 - 3.1.2. What are the tools you would need/want to do your job better?
4. Anything else you want to share? Anything I didn't ask you about that you think is important?

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this interview. I am just going to put up a Zoom questionnaire with a few demographic questions. Could you just take the last few minutes to complete it?