

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH
GEORGIA'S CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM AND THE IMPACT ON COUNSELING
DECISIONS AND PRACTICES

by

JAMES RICHARD WOODARD

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. The study was also designed to identify how high school's counselor's work with career pathways impacted counseling decisions. Given the primary purpose, the study sought to determine if counselors valued the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System from a career development and student achievement perspective.

A qualitative research design using a case study framework was used. The study included four high school counselors with five or more years of experience and who were highly involved in the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview process and during one-on-one tours of the building where the counselors showed artifacts and evidence of Georgia's Career Pathway System within their buildings. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, and three themes emerged.

The three themes are 1) school counselors value relationships and partnerships that foster the successful implementation of career pathways; 2) school counselors embrace new practices to positively impact students' decisions about career pathways; and 3) developing a school culture conducive to implementing career pathways successfully requires consistent communication. From the findings and the themes, recommendations and implications were identified for state policymakers, school officials, high school counselors, and researchers.

INDEX WORDS: Career and technical education; Career pathways; College and Career Readiness Performance Index; High school counselors; High school counselor job responsibilities; Georgia's Career Pathway System; Planned behavior

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JAMES RICHARD WOODARD

A.S. Agriculture, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, 1985

B.S. Agriculture, The University of Georgia, 1987

M. Ed., Education, The University of Georgia, 1990

Ed. S., Education, The University of Georgia, 1993

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
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JAMES RICHARD WOODARD

Major Professor:	Sally J. Zepeda
Committee:	Juanita Johnson-Bailey
	Frank B. Flanders

Electronic Version Approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May, 2015

DEDICATION

“An education is the only thing a person can’t take away from you. So get all you can.”

I heard my mom utter these words over and over as I was growing up. Therefore, the first dedication goes out to my mom, Mary Lee Greer. Thank you mama for giving me the foundation of education. My second dedication goes out to my dad, William Greer. Daddy taught me the value of hard work and basics about a work ethic. Daddy would say, “Give a man a dollars’ worth of work for a dollars’ worth of pay. And never be ashamed of doing the lowest of work. In all that you do take pride.” Thank you Daddy for being a model of a strong work ethic. I definitely needed those principles during this dissertation. I wish you were here to celebrate this success for our family.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Business and industry leaders have pressured state and federal officials to increase efforts to prepare students better for future workforce requirements (Feller, 2003; Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, 2008; Stone, Kaminski, & Gloeckner, 2009). Cavanagh (2012) emphasized, “Many U.S. leaders say that the performance of American students on a handful of high-profile international tests and measurements—while mixed—underscores the weaknesses of the American education system” (p. 6). The article further links the weakness of the American education system to challenges with preparing the future workforce. A skills gap exists between employer needs and employee skills, as a Harvard Graduate School of Education report, *Pathways to Prosperity Project* (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011), noted:

Focusing more precisely on future employer demand illuminates part of the challenge, but there is also a problem at the supply end of the equation. U.S. employers complain that today’s young adults are not equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century workforce. (p. 4)

Employers are apprehensive about the lack of 21st century skill preparation. Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) reported, “the gap between 21st century labor-market needs and current student preparedness means the nation’s economic reality is lagging behind its potential” (p. 35).

A direct connection exists between future workforce development and the economic growth of the United States of America (Bartik, 2012; Bell, Hartgrove, Elkins, & Starnes, 2014; Uhalde, 2011). State and federal policies in the past decade have responded to calls for a more prepared workforce (Georgia House Bill 186, 2011; American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia’s Economy The BRIDGE Act

2010; Workforce Investment Act of 1998). Federal policy supports the need for Americans to pursue post-secondary education (Carl D. Perkins IV, Public Law 109-270). President Obama (2009), in the 2009 State of Union Address, stated:

...tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college, a four-year school, vocational training, or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. (Para. 66)

Post-secondary education has been directly linked to creating a stronger workforce (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; *Pathways to Prosperity*, 2011). *The Pathways to Prosperity* report underscored, “Education beyond high school is the passport to the American dream” (p. 2).

Education policy and reform have also called for higher accountability to increase the educational achievement of all students (Dimmitt, 2003; House & Hayes, 2002; *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*). Despite a focus on closing the achievement gap in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, state measures have been developed to focus on workforce development. *The 21st Century Skills Education and Competitiveness Resource and Policy Guide* (2008) emphasized the following:

To prepare students to be competitive, the nation needs an “NCLB plus” agenda that infuses 21st century skills into core academic subjects. This is not an either-or agenda: Students can master 21st century skills while they learn reading, mathematics, science, writing, and other school subjects. (p. 8)

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a national coalition consisting of business community members, education leaders, and policy makers—identified skills necessary for the next workforce generation. The “NCLB plus” agenda refers to the inclusiveness of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and communication. Employers agree schools need to take a more aggressive role in the development of 21st century skills as these skills are equally important to skills developed in the core

academic areas such as English and history, for example (ACT, 2006; Brand, 2003; Grossman, Reyna, & Shipton, 2011; Hall & Rogers, 2014).

Georgia's new accountability system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index, (CCRPI) supports "exemplary student achievement that prepares each student for success in college and career" (GADOE, 2012, p. 1). Career readiness is measured through indicators such as career pathway completion, industry certificates, and dual enrollment in college and high school courses. The new accountability system provides local schools with the opportunity to earn points in educational achievement, progress, and closing the achievement gap. These points are important because they demonstrate the success of overall student achievement of students in their school. Schools will receive an annual report card based on these measures.

In addition, Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) created a system of career pathways. In 2005, the GADOE reengineered the Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education Division to develop more than 50 pathways as prescribed by industry and teacher advisory committees. The career pathways developed by GADOE focused on meeting the demands of industry by fostering high-quality, career-focused education for all students. GADOE recently aligned Georgia's Career Pathway System with the United States Department of Education's Federal Cluster Model. USDOE Federal Cluster aims to help students of all ages to explore different career options and better to prepare for college and career (Career Clusters Initiative, 2001).

A change in GADOE's leadership occurred in 2012 with the election of State Superintendent of Schools Dr. John Barge, who campaigned on the slogan, "Making Education Work for all Georgians." *The Making Education Work for All Georgians Report (2011)* written

by William R Daggett, International Center for Leadership in Education for the Georgia Department of Education stated:

Georgia has good reason to embrace its bold vision for 21st century education: career exploration and real-world experience in current and future pathways to ensure that ALL students have the opportunity to be successful in our rapidly changing and evolving digital world and global economy. (p. 1)

In addition to the 21st century skills critical for workforce development as defined by the 21st Century Partnership, the *Making Education Work for All Georgians Report (2011)*, the GADOE expects that all schools will provide career pathway choices for the changing job market. In summary, the report sets the expectations that secondary education should provide opportunities for students to be engaged in career pathways based on the local, regional, and state workforce development needs.

While it is admirable to institute policies which encourage an inclusiveness of workforce development, do local school officials understand the need of business and industry to possess a qualified workforce? The accountability measures found under the reauthorized *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), currently known as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), did not account for the workforce readiness expectations of business and industry. NCLB specifically focused on academic achievement measured by specific state assessments. However, acts such as the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006* (Perkins, 2006), have required a blending of academic and workforce development performance indicators. Additionally, Perkins (2006) requires local systems to create programs of studies which lead to an industry credential or to certification.

High school counselors are instrumental in the implementation of career development and guidance programs. Despres (2008) stated, “One third of the framework contained in the National Standards for School Counseling Programs of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) consists of career development” (Despres, 2008, p. 274). The ASCA (2005) National Standards for Career Development guide school counseling programs to provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job. State-level comprehensive developmental counseling program models should include significant emphasis on the preparation of high school students for post-high school decision making career pathways (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). Dahir (2004) reported, “School counselors more readily agreed that career development activities were more important than employment readiness activities for national standards” (p. 350). Similarly, Scarborough and Luke (2008) stated, “Comprehensive, developmental school counseling programming has been associated with numerous benefits for students and is considered current best practice” (p. 404).

However, high school counselors have limited experience and training in the area of career development and implementing career pathways. Viaero (2010), referencing a poll conducted by Public Agenda, noted: “sixty-two percent said their counselors were just as unhelpful in giving career advice, and nearly half reported that they believed their counselors saw them as another face in the crowd” (p. 4). According to Anctil, Smith, Schenck, and Dahir (2012), “About 75% of participants said they [counselors] need more training to effectively help students develop career goals and skills” (p.118). A strong case can be made for improving the role of high school counselors in providing career counseling. Symonds (2012) stated, “Many counselors are more concerned with addressing students’ pressing personal, psychological, and

social problems than with career counseling. As a result, students are not well informed about career options, let alone the best pathways for pursuing them” (Symonds, 2012, p. 36).

This study examined high school counselor’s perspectives about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System impacted their decisions and practices. Results from this study could possibly provide direction and guidance about the efforts to improve the current implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System and how high school counselors contribute to the process.

Background of the Study

Educational policy in Georgia has shifted becoming more prescriptive about integrating career and college readiness skills in K-12 (Georgia College and Career Readiness Performance Index, 2012). The role of the high school counselor needs to be clarified so that they have appropriate direction and allotted time in providing career pathway guidance.

As economic growth slowed, many efforts were initiated through the efforts of Georgia’s Governor’s Office of Workforce Development to improve the workforce readiness of high school students. Georgia Work Ready was one credentialing example intended to better prepare students for the workforce. Many industries, companies, and businesses were struggling to find a qualified workforce to facilitate economic growth in high-skill areas. Jacobe (2013) summarized a recent Gallup Poll (2013) reported, “In spite of the slow economy and associated high unemployment rate, 53% of U.S. small-business owners in January reported finding it very (23%) or somewhat difficult (30%) to find the qualified employees they need” (p. 1).

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV; Public Law 109-270) supports the development of academic as well as career and technical skills among secondary education students and postsecondary education students who elect to

enroll in career and technical education (CTE) programs, sometimes referred to as vocational education programs. Relative to this act, the development of Programs of Study (POS) was the most significant new requirement in the 2006 reauthorization of the federal legislation for career and technical education (Perkins IV). Dortch (2012) stated, “Under the Perkins IV Basic State Grants, local education providers are required to implement the relevant elements of at least one Program of Study” (p. 9).

The development and implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System was stimulated by three significant developments: the 2005 reengineering of the Georgia Department of Education’s (GADOE) Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Department, the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins), and state initiatives conducted through Georgia’s Workforce Investment Act. In response to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Georgia’s Career Pathways system was initiated by the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) in 2005. Over the next 3 years, more than 50 career pathways were created by developing, aligning, and sequencing standards for career, technical, and agricultural education courses.

After an initial focus on creating Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for academic courses, the GADOE embarked on efforts to provide a resurgence of interest in Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) with the creation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The development of Georgia’s Career Pathway System was already underway by GADOE’s Division of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education through their curriculum revision project launched in 2006. These revisions were a major component of the reengineering of CTAE.

Paralleling and supporting the effort of redesigning CTAE was the reauthorization of the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006* (Perkins, 2006). The federal legislation mandated an alignment of performance indicators with those of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. McCaskey and Johnson (2010) described, “The revisions to the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006* require career and technical education (CTE) programs provide students with a clear pathway from secondary to postsecondary education into high-wage, high skill and high demand careers” (p. 48). In addition, the Perkins Act provided the impetus for the development of programs of study which led to an industry credential for program completers. The requirement for students to attain an industry credential was a new direction for secondary schools. Industry credential requirements increased the level of accountability for career technical students, teachers, and school leaders receiving Perkins federal funding. The purpose of the Perkins Act requirements and the reengineering of Georgia’s CTAE program were to improve career and technical education programs at the secondary level.

Local school systems were required to create local plans describing the implementation of career pathways. The local plan also had to demonstrate alignment to programs of study, with students receiving industry-recognized credentials as required by the Perkins legislation. These new policies impacted multiple areas of the local school organization. Local Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) administrators were charged with the implementation of the career pathways, programs of studies, and industry-recognized certificates. Teachers received rigorous professional development to begin teaching the new standards and assessing student performance relative to Career Pathways. Implementation also required the engagement of high school counselors; as a result, high school counselors had to redefine many of their career guidance practices and/or an additional job was added to their already stretched workload.

The change to Georgia's new accountability system adds to the importance of the role of high school counselors in career development. High school counselors play a key role in career guidance. Schwallie-Giddis, Creamer, and Kobylarz (2005) in the book, *Career Pathways Education with a Purpose*, recognized the importance of high school counselors in career pathway counseling, "In the Career Pathways process, high school counselors must wear many hats. Of course, their first priority is to advise students, but they must also be involved in public relations, marketing, and labor market research" (p. 193). The role of guidance by high school counselors is highlighted in the Calgary's Career Pathway Initiative, and Macpherson (2005) acknowledged:

Having guidance counselors as integral part of the development and implementation of Career Pathways is a logical step towards creating a program that truly provides students with the abilities, skills and understanding of the process of career development to be successful. (p. 353)

The success of the Calgary's Career Pathway Initiative acknowledges the critical role high guidance counselors play in the success of program implementation. Furthermore, if students are to receive the benefits of career development, high school counselors must play a major role in advisement and counseling.

The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) recognized the integral role high school counselor play in career development. Recent changes to high school counselor roles and responsibilities have been driven by the development of the ASCA National Standards in the area of career development (2004). The career development domain specifically focused on the elements of career awareness, employment readiness, career information, and career goals. High school counselors are encouraged to use the career development standards and elements to assist students in becoming career and workforce ready.

Successful implementation of Georgia's Career Pathways requires high school counselors to recognize the importance of career pathways and to take ownership of the program. The Concerns Based Adoption Model was researched to identify connectivity to high school counselors and their adoption of the Career Pathways. Loucks-Horsley (1996) referenced The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) as "A framework that has implications for the practices of professional development. This model acknowledges that learning brings change, and supporting people in change is critical for learning to 'take hold' " (Para. 1). CBAM identifies and provides ways to assess seven stages of concern: awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration and refocusing.

Successful implementation of career pathways requires certain behaviors of high school counselors. Recognizing the practicing high school counselor's perspectives about Georgia's Career Pathway System was crucial to determine the effect on high school counselor's decisions and practices regarding the implementation of career pathways. Understanding the contextual framework from which a high school counselor works and makes decisions is central to implementing programs such as career pathways.

One key aspect of the current context of the high school counselors' work is the federal approval of Georgia's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI could add a new dimension of confusion and urgency to the current role of the high school counselor. Principals could be pressuring high school counselors to be more accountable for career development related standards found in CCRPI. The CCRPI contains standards related to career pathway success, industry credentialing of students, and career development. In addition to the accountability factor, high school counselors may lack depth of knowledge and skills critical to successful implementation of these standards. The combined pressure of

accountability and deficiency in career pathway knowledge compounded the feeling of urgency and pressure.

Statement of the Problem

The development of Georgia's Career Pathway System was a response to local, regional, state, and national emphasis of increasing Georgia's high school graduates' career and work preparedness. The initiative was an additional daunting task for local school administrators focused on improving academic achievement of all students under *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. The literature surrounding the importance of high school counselors in the implementation of school-based programs is strong (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; McDonough, 2005; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Much of the research and literature of high school counselors are overwhelmed with duties and responsibilities producing marginalized feelings in their efforts to understand their roles in the local school (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Dahir, 2004; Gewertz, 2011; Higgins, 2005; McDonough, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton 2006). The American School Counselor Association set forth competencies to assist high school counselors in understanding their roles in the local school context (ASCA, 2005).

High school counselors are directed to perform multiple duties and responsibilities, and the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathways was a task assigned to many high school counselors. Due to varied pre-service training programs and increasing demands placed on high school counselors, the self-efficacy of high school counselors could be compromised given all the job responsibilities they fulfill (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010;). Because self-efficacy is important, it stands to reason that high school counselors' perspectives regarding new programs are important to the successful implementation of school-based programs such as the Georgia's Career Pathway System.

This research was specifically designed to study high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. The National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA, 2010) has maintained that school counselors serve as gatekeepers of student potential. Trusty (2004) further clarified school counselors have access and information about which courses are necessary and appropriate for students to reach their postsecondary goals. Counselors also understand what to do with this information as they counsel students. For students to perform successfully in a career pathway, they need informed high school counselors to engage them in meaningful career guidance strategies and activities as there is a strong correlation between career readiness and post-secondary achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Additionally, the researcher was interested in how their work with career pathways impacted counseling decisions and practices. Specifically, what are the prominent themes that emerge from the high school counselors perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System? Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathways? Through this study, the researcher wanted to see what best practices emerged as high school counselors implemented Georgia's Career Pathways System. The researcher was interested in identifying barriers to successful implementation of career pathways. Finally, the researcher wanted to see if data would support tangible recommendations to assist in future implementation of career pathways under Georgia's new federally approved school accountability measures.

A qualitative research design included a sampling of practicing high school counselors who were highly involved in the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. High school counselors were selected to represent geographically diverse school populations including rural, urban, and suburban school districts. High school counselors were interviewed and observed to gain their perspectives about Georgia's Career Pathway System related to their counseling decisions and practices.

Successful implementation of a secondary career-based program is dependent on the local high school counselor's level of understanding of career pathways. Thus, identifying the high school counselor's perspective of career pathways and how their implementation affects counseling decisions and practices is critical to a broader understanding of the impact of workforce preparation programs in high schools. The researcher examined the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2002) to determine the relevance of perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System.

The Theory of Planned Behavior also provided insight into barriers and challenges that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. With its emphasis on personal beliefs and attitudes and conflicts with multi-faceted job responsibilities, this theory seemed particularly appropriate for studying the factors which effected high school counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and Williams (2002), stated, "As a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger should be the person's intention to perform the behavior in question" (p. 811).

Policy makers are focused on creating a more balanced blend of academics and Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education. Accordingly, Georgia's new accountability measure (College and Career Readiness Performance Index, 2012) requires schools to develop students who are both college and career ready. The continued efforts by the GADOE to define further career clusters and career pathways indicate the necessity to study the perspectives of high school counselors. The federal approval of Georgia's accountability model (CCRPI) created a higher degree of urgency to study high school counselors' perspectives about career pathways.

The continued implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System and the relative accountability measures (CCRPI) might be enhanced by data describing the high school counselors' perspective about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the impact on guidance decisions and practices. However, the researcher found no literature or research about high school counselors' perspectives of the implementation of the current Georgia Career Pathway initiative. Evidence about the impact of Georgia's Career Pathway System on counseling decision and practices could support, perhaps, the basis for bringing to light practices and recommendations to a broader audience who is impacted by the implementation of career pathways. Furthermore, evidence is limited regarding the perspectives of high school counselors in other states and at the national level on similar programs related to career-readiness.

While evidence is limited on the perspectives of high school counselors regarding career pathways, much research exists on high school counselor roles and responsibilities (Burnham & Jackson; 2000; Dahir, 2004; Gewertz, 2011; Higgins, 2005; McDonough, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner, et al., 2006). Additionally, the overwhelming task of counseling and the diversity of the high school counselor's job are well documented (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Falls & Nichter, 2007; Pyne, 2011; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Professional development has

been identified as a key ingredient in the successful implementation of school-based programs (Zepeda, 2012). Since high school counselors are key leaders in the implementation of career pathways, strong professional development is imperative.

Research Questions

Given the purpose of this study was to investigate high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System, the researcher sought to address three overall questions:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

Constructivist Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and to see if the implementation perspective impacted counseling decisions and practices. Consequently, this study was conducted using a qualitative research design. Creswell (2013) stated:

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices. (pp. 47-48)

The critical role high school counselors' play in the successful implementation of school is the main justification for studying this group. High schools in the state of Georgia are at differing levels of implementation of Career Pathways. A need exists to understand how counselors feel about their ability to implement career pathways. Thus, qualitative research methods will

support identifying high school counselors' perspectives to further the understanding of their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Creswell (2013) documents what he described as the evolving definition of qualitative research provided by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) in their *Handbook of Qualitative Research*:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memo's to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves as interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (2011, p. 3)

To understand more fully the perspectives of high school counselors, the researcher became immersed in the daily functions of the work of the Georgia Career Pathway System. Gathering data through individual interviews, observations, and document retrieval allowed the researcher to gather the perspectives of the counselors related to their work with the Georgia's Career Pathway System. Thus, a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study.

Qualitative inquiry grounded in constructivism provided the researcher the opportunity to seek understanding from the perspectives of high school counselors related to their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Through the principles of constructivism, the researcher was able to generate meanings from the participants of the study. Schwandt (2007) further detailed the constructivist tradition provides researchers the opportunity to focus more on interactions.

The researcher used interpretative qualitative case study methods. Merriam (2009) defined the interpretative qualitative case study as "a form of qualitative research" that provides "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" and that "the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case" (p. 40).

Overview of Methods

The methodology for this study was a qualitative research design. Four high school counselors were selected to represent diverse school populations within rural, urban, and suburban school districts. Also, the schools selected represented diverse size, ethnicity, socio-economic backgrounds, and curricular tracks (Advanced Placement/College Prep/Tech Prep). The researcher developed interview questions and accompanying interview guides which provided topics and subject areas for the researcher to explore and to probe further. The interview questions sought to discover thoughts and opinions regarding the career pathways implemented by the GADOE. Questions focused on the following: educational value of career pathways; barriers realized during implementation; students' thoughts concerning identification of a pathway, and perceived value of parents. Additional questions concentrated on gaining understanding of changes in counseling decisions and practices of the high school counselor.

Significance of Study

In general, career and technical education professionals would probably agree that high school counselors play an important role in the success of integrating a new program or curriculum in secondary education. Providing research on the high school counselor's perspectives about new curriculum and related policy could impact changes in curriculum revisions and adoption processes. Castellano, Stringfield, and Stone (2003) summarized:

Studies are needed at diverse levels and from diverse perspectives – student perceptions and outcomes, classroom processes, school and district leadership, and micro- and macro- political perspectives – all will be important in moving the field to a more scientific and more effective level. (pp. 263-264)

The significance of this study was directly connected to the perspectives valued by high school counselors as career pathways were implemented into the secondary education curriculum.

Therefore, since perception is often equated as reality, the exploration of the thoughts, beliefs,

and attitudes of high school counselors must be understood to assist in creating opportunities to further advance the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Definition of Terms

Key terms were defined to clarify meaning related to this study. The following terms and their definitions are offered to provide context and further understanding of the findings of this study.

1. Career Cluster - represents a distinct grouping of occupations and industries based on the knowledge and skills they require. The 16 Career Clusters and related Career Pathways provide an important organizing tool for schools to develop more effective programs of study (POS) and curriculum.
2. Career Pathway - A coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career/technical courses, commencing in the ninth grade and leading to an associate degree, baccalaureate degree and beyond, an industry recognized certificate, and/or licensure.
3. College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) - Georgia's comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students (GADOE Website).
4. Program of Study - A sequence of academic and career education coursework that leads students to attain a postsecondary degree or industry-recognized certificate or credential.
5. High school counselor – for the purpose of this study, counselors serving students in grades 9-12 in secondary public schools in the state of Georgia.
6. Theory of planned behavior – developed to predict an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place.

Limitations of the Study

A limited number of high school counselors serving grades 9-12 were selected to provide responses to questions designed by the researcher. Therefore, generalizability is a limitation and Merriam (2002) stated, “But since small, non-random samples are selected purposefully in qualitative research, it is not possible to generalize statistically” (p. 28). However, the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize but to provide insight and meaning of a phenomenon. Merriam (2009) reinforced, “All qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds” (p. 24).

The intent of the researcher was to make sense of the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System from the perspective of the four high school counselors who participated in this study. The researcher sought to create diversity in the sample which will hopefully provide potential for the findings of this study to inform a broader audience.

Additionally, the study may be limited by the accountability of Georgia’s Career Pathway System implementation. Georgia’s Career Pathway System began in 2005 with full implementation in 2008. Career pathways were revised in 2012 and aligned with the Federal Career Clusters System. School systems are currently held only accountable for career pathway implementation through the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006* (Perkins, 2006). However, Georgia’s College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) will begin measuring the number of career pathway completers in school year 2014-2015.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the following topics: introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, overview of the methods, significance of the study, assumptions, definition of key terms, and

limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature on current workforce and education requirements of secondary students, the role the high school counselor function in career guidance, the high school counselor's support of school wide program implementation, and self-efficacy of the high school counselor relative to career pathway implementation. Chapter 3 examines the research method and the overall data collection methods that governed the study. Chapter 4 reports the data and its analyses of individual interviews. Chapter 5 also presents a cross case analysis of the data. Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of the study including implications for future research and the potential for practice and policy.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) (2012) highlighted the creation of Georgia's new accountability system, "Georgia was one of 10 states granted a waiver from the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* in February 2012" (p. 1). The CCRPI demonstrated an intentional balanced accountability measure in both academic and career education. One of the CCRPI's core educational principles included exemplary student achievement to prepare all for success in college and careers. This policy measure enhances dialogue regarding counseling roles and responsibilities. This initiative has the potential to inform practices about high school counselors and their work with the Georgia Career Pathway System. The education professional with the potential for the most changes may be the high school counselor.

The primary purpose of the research was to examine the perspectives of four high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the impact on counseling decisions and practices. The research questions this study sought to answer were:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

According to the National Centers for Educational Statistics (2010), there are 105,079 school counselors employed in public education. Statistics from the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) have stated that there are 1,302 high school counselors in Georgia. Furthermore, the GADOE 2012 Annual Report for Career, Technical, and Agriculture reported, “Georgia Career Pathways will be implemented during the 2012-13 school year for all high school students” (p. 16). The report further claimed that career pathways existed in all 180 school systems with an enrollment of 517,744 students in grades 9-12. Each school and school system has the autonomy to implement career pathways using the resources and personnel available. The implementation of career pathways can also include partnerships with technical colleges, local businesses, and industries. High school counselors are required to be knowledgeable about career pathways and are integral to the implementation of career pathways. Arguably, this study is both relevant and timely.

A qualitative approach, employing case study methods, was selected for this research to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System and the impact on counseling decisions and practices. The following review of literature is associated with the aims of the study and stands as a comprehensive review of four main research areas which are of particular importance to this study. The areas include the following:

- 1) High School Counselors Support of School-Wide Programs
- 2) High School Counselor Workload and Stress Factors
- 3) Theory of Planned Behavior
- 4) American School Counselors Association National Standards for Students

High School Counselors Support of School-Wide Programs

High school counselors have the task of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs which promote and enhance achievement, social development, and career development of all students. The high school counselor's role in this area has been supported by the mission of two overarching counselor organizations: The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA). ASCA (2005) has claimed its mission to be "to prepare today's students to become tomorrow's adults" (p. 3). ASCA has defined student standards in the following three domains: academic, career, and personal or social.

The National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) (2011) has identified its goal as to promote the value of school counselors as leaders in school reform, student achievement, and college readiness. Lee and Bell (2011) stated in the publication *High School Counselor's Guide: NOSCA's Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling*, "High school counselors create access to college and career pathways that promote full implementation of personal goals that ensure the widest range of future life options" (p. 2). According to the document, the counselor assists students in becoming college and career ready through eight components: college aspirations; academic planning for college and career readiness; enrichment and extracurricular engagement; college and career exploration and selection processes; college and career assessments; college affordability planning; college and career admission processes; and transition from high school graduation to college enrollment (Lee & Bell, 2011).

Secondary school counselors have supported student success in a multitude of ways. Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) in the College Board's *School Counselors – Literature and Landscape Review* – claimed, “Counselors support students in both nonacademic and academic areas” (pp. 18-20). The review identified the nonacademic areas as student social support, school violence, bullying and school climate, and family and community outreach. The academic areas included career exploration and readiness, college application process, financial aid and planning, counseling subgroups, and student academic success.

The counseling literature has been inundated with articles and studies that have examined the roles which counselors play in addressing key aspects of education and in implementing programs and initiatives (Amatea & Clark, 2005; College Board, 2011; Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; House & Hayes, 2002; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). The following sections define the high school counselor roles and responsibilities which are in support of school- and system-wide programs, initiatives, and changes.

Counselors and counseling programs have been integral to student academic success. High school counselors have served a vital role in maximizing student achievement (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010). House and Hayes (2002) emphasized, “Leaving school counselors out of school reform efforts may be one of the most serious mistakes that reformers make if the goals for K-12 education are to be attained in this new century” (para. 13). Interventions led by school counselors can have positive effects on student achievement (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007; Hartline & Cobia, 2012; Luck & Webb, 2009; Web, Brigman, & Campbell, 2005). In a College Board 2011 National Survey of School Counselors, 99% of school counselors agreed that it is “important for school counselors to exercise leadership

in advocating for students' access to rigorous academic preparation, as well as for college and career-readiness counseling" (p. 5).

Counselors have been viewed as school reform leaders who effectively advocate for the success of all students. House and Hayes (2002) stated, "School counselors must be incorporated into school reform as leaders who are engaged in system-wide change to ensure student success" (para. 17). The school counselor as part of the principal's educational team in the schools has a vital role to play in supporting academic achievement by acting as a proactive leader and advocate for student success (Armstrong, MacDonald, & Stillo, 2010; Carnes-Holt, Range, & Cisler, 2012; House & Martin, 1998; Lee & Walz, 1998). In a study by Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997), researchers found that students with more fully-implemented guidance programs reported having higher grades, being better prepared for their futures, having more college and career information, and believing their school has a more positive climate.

Counselors have been strategically positioned to directly collaborate with school and community organizations to ensure that all students succeed in academia and their careers. Schools have also begun to identify ways by which they can better engage the community to meet the needs of the students. Keys (1999) stated that those counselors who can facilitate and coordinate efforts to reach out and engage community experts "can receive valuable support when planning large scale prevention efforts as well as intervention services for identified students and families" (p. 6). Keys further noted that by adopting "an indirect-services approach, school counselors assume new roles that enable them to facilitate the school-family-community linkages that are vital to broad-based, systemic change efforts" (p. 9). One third of the respondents in a study conducted to examine administrators' perceptions of the roles of a counselor revealed that administrators expected a counselor to function as a case consultant with

a wide array of stakeholders (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Given their training and knowledge, school counselors have been uniquely situated to take the lead in institutional, systemic change which supports the collaborative process required to address the numerous social and academic concerns that impact student success (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006).

However, as House and Hayes (2002) stated, “Learning how to become effective collaborators with teachers, administrators, staff, students, parents and community leaders poses a central challenge to counselors as school leaders” (para. 22). McMahon, Mason, and Paisley (2009) noted, “One way for school counselor educators to assert themselves as leaders is to utilize collaboration and teaming skills that they already possess” (p. 120). In a study conducted by Gibbons, Diambra, and Buchanan (2010), respondents indicated that they “collaborated regularly and with various stakeholders in the school at percentage levels above 77% (i.e., teachers and administrators, parents, other school counselors, students, school support staff, and community agency personnel” (p. 18).

Counselors have been instrumental in serving as an advocate for students. Counselors have been able to promote numerous strategies for students, particularly with regard to motivation, achievement, and career planning. Incorporating leadership, advocacy, and collaboration, high school counselors have promoted equity and access to opportunities and rigorous educational experiences for all students. House and Hayes (2002) argued, “As one of the primary caregivers in the school, counselors are ideally prepared and, as educational leaders, are ideally situated to serve as advocates for all students in meeting high standards” (para. 27). School counselors can positively impact students’ desire to succeed academically by helping them to understand their choices as well as the importance and the meaning of those choices (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Galassi, & Akos, 2012; Stone & Turba 1999). Keys (1999) stated,

“School counselors who act as family advocates can reach out to family members to assure that they feel welcomed and embraced as equal partners in the problem solving process” (Keys, 1999, p. 9).

Counselors have been especially successful in implementing programs which assist poor students and students of color in becoming academically successful (House & Hayes, 2002). However, educational statistics continue to demonstrate inequality between ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds of young Americans (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010). Research has indicated that the quality, consistency, accessibility, and perception of counseling services varies among subgroups, often with more favorable services provided to students of higher socioeconomic backgrounds than to less-advantaged peers (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). Bryan (2009) summarized, “students in high-poverty, large schools and schools with smaller numbers of counselors were less likely to seek school counselors for college information” (p. 280). Gewertz (2011) reported that a strong disconnect has occurred in public and low-income schools: “Only 19 percent in high-poverty schools said college and career readiness was a part of their schools’ day-to-day mission compared with 30 percent of the counselors overall” (p. 2).

However, King (1996) countered this claim by stating that, “low-income students were more likely than average to attend a four-year college if they frequently saw a school counselor who recommended they attend a four-year college” (p. 6). Kemple and Scott-Clayton (2004) identified, “positive labor market impacts were concentrated among Academy group members who were at high or medium risk of dropping out of high school when they entered the programs” (p. iii). Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) in a report entitled, *School Counseling in New York: A College Board 2011 National Survey of Counselors*, reported:

School counselors are a vital, but often overlooked part of the education system, playing key roles in supporting students in holistic ways. Counselors, nearly half of whom (49

percent) are former teachers themselves, are uniquely positioned to support student achievement not only because of their specialized education, but also because they have a more complete picture of every student they counsel, understanding their hopes and life circumstances, while working with them from year to year to help them meet both academic and nonacademic needs. (p. 6)

The focus of the counselor on subgroups might prove beneficial and make the difference in student achievement, student engagement, and eventual career success. Zigelbaum, Kruczek, Alexander, and Crethar (2014), referring to the Education Trust New Vision for Counseling, stated, “the ultimate goal was to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people to lives on the margins of the American mainstream, especially students of color and students from low-income families” (p. 4). Counselors have been integral in detecting issues concerning students’ lives.

High school counselors have been influential in preparing students for college success through a college advisement program (Gewertz, 2011). Results from a national survey of high school seniors reported, “59% say they were strongly encouraged to go to college” (College Board, 2011, p. 4). The vast majority of America’s high school students (86%) expected to attend college, but many have lacked the support and guidance that they need to prepare for enrollment and success in college (U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2010-170). Strategies such as engaging the whole school in college and career readiness, and forming strategic community-based partnerships, have supported the efforts of counselors to prepare students for college (Knight-Diop, 2010). McDonough (2005) stated:

Within schools, no professional is more important to improving college enrollments than counselors. Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge. (p. 2)

Gewertz (2011) summarized results from an on-line survey of more than 5,300 counselors: “nine in 10 counselors said that two objectives which should top their schools priority list are: ensuring that all students have access to high quality education and that they graduate well-equipped for college and careers” (p. 2).

Career development and guidance has been important for the youth of this generation to connect to the academic and career requirements of today’s workforce (Gewertz, 2011). The *College Board’s “School Counselors – Literature and Landscape Review* (2011), reported that “Career counseling provides benefits to students by enabling them to plan appropriately for the academic and licensing requirements of their desired professions” (p. 21). Earlier, the Association for Career and Technical Education (2008) reported, “Structured career guidance activities are essential in preparing students for successful education and career transitions, which are important to realizing both personal goals and national economic and workforce objectives” (p.7). Students have benefited from high school counselors who have been involved in developing individual education plans and career pathway plans to assist students in transitioning to careers. Students who have taken advantage of an established, defined, developed, and articulate program or career pathway, while guided by a counselor, have benefited from such programs (Hull, 2005).

However, research has indicated that the lack of a good career counseling program has prevented students from understanding their education requirements for success in an elected career field (House & Hayes, 2002). In a report from the Education Trust, *Poised to Lead: How School Counselors Can Drive College and Career Readiness*, Hines, Lemons, and Crews (2011) noted that school counselors have been “uniquely positioned not just to spot the problem, but to lead a college-and career-ready agenda” (p. i). Hines et al., further reported that, “counselors

play a crucial role in students' course selection process, have access to data on all students for timely interventions, and most importantly, are 'champions of equity' because they can identify which students need more support" (Hines et al., 2011, p. 3). Schneider and Stevenson (1999) found that high schools that did not support students in planning for their futures were more likely to have students who underestimated the amount of education they would need to realize their occupational aspirations.

Creating opportunities for students to know and to understand their career paths has been crucial in helping students become successful in a career. A study regarding the implementation of South Carolina's Career Pathway System reported an increased counselor role in education and career planning (Withington, et al., 2012). The study reported that South Carolina's policy, "has already increased the amount of career-planning activities and guidance that students are receiving" (p. 154). Furthermore, school guidance personnel were found to be key players in career pathway policy implementation. Hughes and Karp (2004) stated, "Career guidance and academic counseling can provide students with the necessary tools to set career goals and give them an understanding of education and skills they need to meet their goals (p. 2).

Lapan, Aoyagi, and Kayson (2007) found that students who received career development services reported greater career awareness and higher levels of career exploration and planning than those who did not receive such services. Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) suggested that counselors can play a central role in facilitating student understanding of and engagement in the school-to-career path and its related planning. The New Vision for Career and Technical Education (2003) called for "career guidance and counseling by school officials which is perhaps supplemented by employer and community partnerships throughout high school to ensure early college and career preparation" (p.15). Macpherson (2005) stated, "Guidance counsellors are

excellent advocates who can help the Career Pathways take a form that encompasses all the needs of the students in career development and exploration” (Macpherson, 2005, p. 356). Feller (2003) emphasized “School counselors cognizant of how the workplace is changing can better assist students in responding to the impact of globalization on their choices in the workplace and community” (p. 10).

Research has argued that providing strategies to facilitate a students’ academic, career and personal/social development should be the goal of high school counselors. The focus on this goal may empower students to consider alternatives for change and to make plans for a successful career. Professional activities in the ASCA three domains may create a synergistic effect on creating a comprehensive approach to school counseling and may facilitate students’ development and learning. Engaging students in planning for success, exploring career interests, and building awareness of postsecondary options have been critical aspects of the new vision for career pathway implementation and college and career readiness. The GADOE Counseling Department (2014) stated:

They (counselors) help all students in the areas of academic achievement; personal/social development and career development, ensuring today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow. Gone are the days of guidance counselors sitting in their offices and only handing out college applications or dealing with the “problem kids.” (para. 6)

However, a review of literature in the next section will reveal high school counselors’ concern with the impact of additional duties and responsibilities. Counselors have confronted concerns such as role confusion, self-efficacy, and counselor training.

High School Counselor Workload and Stress Factors

An addition or a change of workload in any profession may often lead to various challenges that may cause increased stress for the worker. Counselors are no exception. This

section will illustrate how the changing roles of counselors have created role confusion. Also, the continual changes in education accountability measures have required principals to add responsibilities to many educational positions, including the high school counselor. The review also describes the current caseload of counselors and thus the corresponding effects on the complex job description of high school counselors.

Counseling programs have seen multiple shifts in direction based on the current issues and trends facing the United States (Galassi & Akos, 2012). The counselor's historical roles were as varied as the current ones. The counseling profession has had numerous role definitions from vocational guidance to supporting personal and social development to supporting students requiring special services – and even today, its role remains ambiguous and undefined (Lee & Mishook 2012). Herr (2002) reported that “school counseling arose in the late 1800s and early 1900s in response to social, political and economic events outside of the school” (pp. 9-10). The National Defense Act had impact on the future of counseling, including the following: 1) the number of school counselors, 2) the availability of counselor education programs, 3) development of a professional literature in school counseling, 4) organization of K-12 programs of school guidance, 5) certification requirements for school counselors (Herr, 2002). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 and later amendments continued to identify the need for vocational guidance.

More recent years have seen an increased focus on creating standards for students, counselors, and career guidance programs (Galassi & Akos, 2012; Moyer & Yu, 2012; Savitz-Romer, 2012). The American School Counselor Association created the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Leuwerke, Bruinekool, & Lane, 2008). The standards focused on academic development, career development, and personal-social

development. These standards were created to provide focus for counselors in their overall aim of student development.

The lack of definition and clarity of high school counselor's roles in education has continued to plague the profession of school counseling. Historical roles and administrative decisions also have led to confusion. One of the most significant challenges for high school counselors has been to better understand their roles in the educational achievement of all students (Leuwerke, Bruinekool, & Lane, 2008; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). High school counselors have been asked to perform a multitude of duties and responsibilities, including the following: testing, post-secondary advisement, scheduling, recruitment, individual and group counseling, and collaboration with community partners (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Schimmel 2008). Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) stated, "research suggests that counselors in schools across the country are eager to help students navigate the educational system, but that these professionals lack a well-defined role, preventing them from consistently supporting student's academic success." They also claimed that "measures of accountability are not in place and counselors are often missing from the efforts at the local, state and national levels to reform and strengthen education" (p. 6).

Principals have had a critical role in directing the day-to-day activities of the high school counselors. Multiple studies have attempted to identify the relationship between the principal and the high school counselor (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Armstrong, MacDonald, & Stillo, 2010; Carnes-Holt, Range, & Cisler, 2012; Leuwerke, Walker & Qi Shi, 2009). The professional school counselor's relationship with the principal has been critical because of the principal's role as leader within the building (Beesley & Frey, 2006; Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). Studies have discussed the confusion in what is expected from the high school counselor

as compared to what principals perceive (Bardoshi & Duncan, 2009; Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Amatea and Clark (2009) reported that “school administrators had four distinctively different preferences for the school counselor role” (Amatea and Clark, 2009, p. 10). The article claimed that these roles parallel the roles which have been advocated throughout the history of school counseling.

However, counselor leadership and communication might be able to create a positive impact of the expansion of programs and services provided by the high school counselor. Dollarhide, Smith and Lemberger (2007) stated, “by demonstrating effective leadership and systematic interactions, school counselors can foster relationships with principals that can help them expand their roles and their programs” (p. 360). Graham, Desmond, and Zinsser (2011) reported, “For school counselors, the support of their administrative team is imperative for facilitating their roles within the school environment” (p. 95).

High school counselors who have well-defined and clear goals and objectives are more effective in delivering effective school counseling programs. Bridgeland and Bruce (2011) argued, “Counselors, like any school professional, often have limited time and resources; thus, clear and well-coordinated roles within the school may contribute to greater effectiveness and ultimately higher rates of student success” (p. 30).

High school counselors have been overloaded by multiple duties. Many of these duties often have not been aligned with the purpose of education achievement of all students. Counselors have been required to address such issues as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and school violence (Burrow-Sanchez, Lopez, & Slagle, 2008; Chambers, Zyromski, Asner-Self, & Kimemia, 2010; Fuller, 2012; Goodyear, 2002; Higgins, 2005). Withington et al. (2012) noted

that “school counselors generally reported little change in their involvement in ‘inappropriate duties’” (Withington et al., 2012, p. 152).

Counselors have not been trained for these duties, a fact which might contribute to work-related stress. A major theme that has repeated throughout the literature related to the professionalization of school counseling has referenced the dissonance or conflict between school counselor preparation and the realities of the work environment (Brott & Myers, 1999). The literature has demonstrated that demands of new programs and initiatives have increased pressure on high school counselors (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005).

The ratio of students to high school counselors has complicated the responsibilities of high school counselors. The American School Counselors Association (2005) has recommended a student to counselor ratio of 250:1. The 2010-2011 student to counselor ratio was reported to be 471:1(USDOE, 2010), while Georgia’s average was estimated at the same level of 471:1(USDOE, 2010). However, the limited resources for education have prevented most school systems from meeting the recommended ratio. Withington et al. (2012) reported that the South Carolina Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) had “altered the role of counselors and led to an increase in the amount of time that counselors spend with students engaging in one-on-one career based counseling” (p. 154).

Theory of Planned Behavior

The adoption of new programs such as career pathways has required counselor professionals to change their perspectives, skills, and behaviors. The following section has highlighted theories which have been used in research to measure success and challenges when

educators and schools have implemented new programs. Although each theory has been used in other disciplines, the researcher attempted to maintain the focus within an educational context.

Brott and Myers (1999), explained self-conceptualization as “one’s professional identity, to serve as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, to make significant decisions, and to develop professionally (p.1). Brott and Myers (1999) further defined professional school counselor identity as “a frame of reference for carrying out work roles, making significant decisions, and developing as a professional (p. 2).

In summary, the professional growth and development of a high school counselor has been a continuous process. Brott and Myers (1999) focused on research professional socialization and stated that “professional growth and development begins during one’s training for the profession, evolves during entry into the profession, and continues to develop as the practitioner identifies within the profession” (Brott and Myers, 1999, p. 10).

The implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System added a new dimension to the professional identity of high school counselors. The review of literature already identified an exhaustive list of duties and responsibilities of high school counselors. Furthermore, the leadership decisions by school principals have enhanced the overwhelming pressure on counselors.

The Theory of Planned Behavior was initially developed as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 to predict an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place. The Theory of Planned Behavior on the determinants of behavior is a person’s intention to perform that behavior and their perceived behavioral control (PBC), i.e., a person’s belief that performance of the behavior is within one’s control (Ajzen, 2002). According to the theory of planned behavior, performance of a behavior is a joint function of intentions and perceived

behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioral intention is predicted, in turn, by three main determinants: attitude toward the behavior (AB), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991). The extent to which individuals view a particular behavior positively (attitude), think that significant others want them to engage in the behavior (subjective norm), and believe that they are able to perform the behavior (perceived behavioral control), serve as direct determinants of the strength of their intention to carry out the behavior. Each of these three direct determinants of behavioral intention is influenced, in turn, by an indirect determinant. Indirect determinants are based on a set of salient beliefs and evaluations of these beliefs.

Numerous studies have applied the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to understand a range of behaviors related to behaviors of young adults, behaviors related to the medical field and areas of social concern. Moreno-Murcia, Cervello, Hernández, Belando Pedreño, and Rodríguez, (2013) studied young adults by using TPB to create motivational profiles. Rhoades, Al-Oballi Kridli, and Penprase (2011) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to understand the beliefs of overweight adolescents. Hanbury, Wallace, and Clark (2011) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to determine health professionals' adoption of a national suicide prevention guideline. The results of these studies have provided specific information used to design and implement effective programs.

The Theory Planned Behavior has also been used moderately in the field of education. For example, Brack and Corts (2012) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to provide a theoretical framework to evaluate the impact of attitudes, norms, and controls on parental involvement in a local school district. Lepre (2007) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to evaluate a persuasive message aimed at getting undecided students to take advantage of career

counseling. More specifically, the TPB has been used to determine teachers' usage of technology (Salleh & Albion 2004; Sugar, Crawley, & Fine, 2004). The results of such studies might be able to identify any issue concerning the implementation of programs and innovations.

The literature review highlighted more articles in the area of health and social sciences. A few articles focused on education. Only one article was found which was tied closely to the aim of this study (Lepre, 2007). However, the Theory of Planned Behavior might be able to guide the development and implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System from the perspective of the high school counselor. As stated above, TPB is grounded in person's intention to perform a behavior and their perceived behavioral control (PBC), i.e., a person's belief that performance of the behavior is within one's own control (Ajzen, 2002). The intention of the high school counselor to implement a program such as Georgia's Career Pathway System is determined by two main variables: attitude and subjective norms (i.e., perceptions of social pressure). Therefore, understanding a high school counselor's perspective through the lens of TPB might improve the implementation and professional skills development needed for success by high school counselors.

American School Counselors Association National Standards for Students

The history described earlier in this chapter has provided much of the context for the role confusion of high school counselor. The history of the changing roles of high school counselors also has served as the preface to the development of standards for high school counselors and counseling programs. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative (Education Trust, 1996) was the starting point from which one might define the role of a school based counseling program. McMahon, Mason, and Paisley (2009) described the core of Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) as "grounded in the belief that all children can learn and be

successful in schools” and “called for school counselors to play a more essential role in schools by identifying and addressing systematic barriers to student learning” (McMahon, et al., 2009, p. 117).

The “new vision” of school counseling has depicted school counselors assuming leadership roles within schools and working systematically to help all students succeed (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006). The new vision was defined further through the development of the American School Counselors Association’s National Model (ASCA, 2005). ASCA (2005) described the “new skills” of leadership by including collaboration, systemic change, advocacy, and the use of data as the foundation of a comprehensive, development program.

Well-established and defined models for school counseling exist. Among those models are the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Standards for Students. ASCA National Standards were created in 2004 (ASCA, 2005), with a focus on helping school counselors to assist students. ASCA National Standards identified and prioritized the specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program. ASCA clearly established standards in three crucial domains: academic development, career development, and both personal and social development. Wilkerson (2010) stated:

The purpose of a counseling program in a school setting is to promote and enhance the learning process. The goal of the program is to enable all students to achieve success in school and develop into contributing members of our society. A school counseling program based on national standards provides all the necessary elements for students to achieve success in school. This programmatic approach helps school counselors to continuously assess their students’ needs, identify the barriers and obstacles that may be hindering success, and advocate programmatic efforts to eliminate these barriers. (p. 421)

The ASCA National Standards have been designed to bring clarity to the role of counselors and counseling programs. The standards also have sought to create an accountability system for students.

The review of the research articles revealed multiple studies highlighting the ASCA National Standards within the literature review. Herr (2002) provided a historical review of changes in the role of the high school counselor which led up to the development of the ASCA National Standards.

Many of the articles sought to identify the principal's level of awareness of the standards. Principals are unfamiliar with the ASCA model. Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, and Skelton (2006) reported that administrators do not recognize the incongruence between what their school counselors should be doing and what services are being provided. Leuwerke, Walker, and Qi (2009) reported, "Principals' exposure to the ASCA National Model was limited, with over 70% reporting little or no exposure to the model" (p. 10). However, the study did conclude that principals who were exposed briefly to the ASCA National Model did alter their perceptions of school counseling (Leuwerke, et al., 2009). Wilkerson (2010) conducted a content analysis of the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP) *The Bulletin* to identify how the publication could inform high school counselors of areas of critical concern for principals.

The review of the literature also pointed out the role of administrators in supporting the implementation of the ASCA National Standards. Graham, Desmond, and Zinsser (2011) concluded that "the roles of administrators, primarily the principal(s), are central in determining the function and tasks the school counselor will undertake within the school system" (p. 95). Poynton, Schumacher, and Wilczenski (2008) also noted:

As school districts across the nation implement the ASCA National Model or a state school counseling model, consideration of what facilitates, hinders, and blocks change is significant for school counseling leaders at the state and district levels, and for professional associations guiding model implementation. (Poynton et.al., 2008, p. 420)

In summary, principals and administrators have played key roles in the implementation of the ASCA National Standards. The counseling profession has been charged with providing administrators with research that highlights the positive student achievement outcomes of a counseling program which implements the ASCA National Standards.

Significant research was identified which described the positive effects on student development as a result of the development and implementation of the ASCA National Standards. Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) reported that findings are clearly consistent with the contention that the implementation of a comprehensive developmental guidance program results in educational benefits including increased student achievement. In a study conducted in Utah, Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Stevenson (2012) found that a school counseling program (measured by the program orientation subscale) identified in the ASCA National Model was associated with significantly higher average ACT scores, an increased percentage of students taking the ACT, an increased percentage of students scoring as math proficient on the state test, and an increased percentage of students scoring as proficient in reading on the state test. Results were replicated in a similar study in Nebraska (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012). However, this study suggested that the biggest impact was realized as a result of a differentiated delivery system.

Research illustrated that the development of ASCA standards improved focus on career development. The Nebraska and Utah study also identified positive career development outcomes as a result of a comprehensive career guidance program as recommended by ASCA. In the Nebraska study Carey, Harrington, Martin, and Hoffman (2012) suggested that “focusing

on the full implementation of career and technical education programs (Perkins programs) within the context of comprehensive developmental guidance is associated with positive outcomes for students” (p. 106). The Utah study represented an identical finding (Carey, et al., 2012).

Additional research was identified which uses the ASCA National Model as a means for supervision expectations. Graham, et al. (2011) recommended that faculty in school counselor training programs educate emerging school counselors in ways that help them view themselves holistically. The Education Trust’s Transforming School Counselors Initiative (TSCI) sought to change the way school counselors were trained. TSCI required that school counselors adopt the “new vision” and shift their focus from mental health to an academic/student achievement focus; from individual student concerns to whole school and system concerns; from record keepers to users of data to effect change; and from guardians of the status quo to agents for change, especially with regard to educational equity for all students (House & Martin, 1998). In a study conducted by Perkins, Oescher, and Ballard (2010), they found “a dissonance between what is valued by counselor educators and what is valued by principals and teachers...there may be significant differences between those who teach theory (counselor educators) and those who deal with practitioners” (p.18).

Chapter Summary

College Board’s “*School Counselors – Literature and Landscape Review* (2011) stated, “counseling is a less well-researched area in comparison to other topics in education, which seems misaligned with the potential impact that school counselors could have on student’s educational success” (p. 4). Evidence exists from the review of literature that high school counselors have a positive impact on the implementation of school programs. The impact of high school counselors spans across many areas. For instance, evidence highlights the positive

impact high school counselors have on the academic achievement of students. Particularly, high school counselors are successful in advocating for all students and research indicates that high school counselors have a great impact in providing educational equity for low income students and students of color. High school counselors are also well-positioned to assist in leading educational reform efforts. Collaboration is a key element of the potential for the success of all students. High school counselors are viewed as being a key team member assisting with collaboration efforts of teachers, students, parents, and community members. Current educational public policy is focused on a college and career success agenda. Evidence validates the impact the high school counselor has in both the college success and career readiness agendas.

The complexity of the high school counselor's job was well documented in research and highlighted throughout the literature review. The stress and workload has been complicated by the additional duties and responsibilities placed on schools. These challenges add to the compounding problem of the lack of defined roles for high school counselors. Understandably, counselors have cause for concern in regards to role confusion. Added to this challenge is the ongoing rise in student to counselor ratios. These issues raise concern for the stress and workload of high school counselors. Research indicates higher student success when high school counselors can focus their attention on students. Fortunately, the American School Counselors Association has attempted to narrow the focus to three domains. However, discussion continues on the role relative to these three domains. Should the high school counselor maintain the position of a school's mental health provider?

Change is imperative to the life of any organization or group of professionals. Counselors are not immune from this conversation. However, methods used to change

counselors add to the debate regarding their newly-defined roles. Research highlighted the theory of planned behavior is primarily used in areas in the social/health context, and there are few references to its use in education, especially related to high school counselors.

Finally, the influence of the American School Counselors Association National Standards (2005) is substantial. Most articles consulted during the literature review referenced the ASCA standards. ASCA standards were derived from many years of study and implementation. ASCA standards have attempted to clarify role confusion and to create a specific role identity for counselors. The ASCA standard for career development may influence perspectives of high school counselors relative to the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Many might agree that educational accountability has been the focus of political and economic discussions in recent years (Donner & Shockley, 2010; Krieg, 2011; Mathis, 2004; Terry, 2010; Thomas & Brady, 2005). Multiple changes to education policy have forced local schools to incorporate new programs to improve both academic and career preparation (Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Fletcher, 2006; Nesselrodt, 2007; Overbaugh & Lu, 2008; Zimmer, Hamilton, & Christina, 2010). The high school counselor has played a key role in implementing many of these changes. Georgia's Career Pathway System has been a key initiative which has altered the work of the high school counselor. The primary purpose of the research was to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the impact on counseling decisions and practices. The researcher's interest in conducting this study was to better understand the perspectives of high school counselors and their approaches to further implement the Georgia's Career Pathway System. An understanding of the high school counselor's perspective is needed because career pathways are now included in the accountability system for Georgia. The Georgia College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) assigns a score for career pathway completion.

The research design and methodology provided in this chapter includes the: (a) research questions, (b) constructivist research design, (c) case study approach, (d) context of the study, (e) sampling, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, and (h) trustworthiness.

Research Questions

Four high school counselors were selected to participate in this study. Each participant was interviewed two times. The first interview was conducted to gain the high school counselor's perspective about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the potential impact on counseling decisions and practices. The first interview also gained an initial perspective of perceived barriers which occurred during the implementation of career pathways. The second interview was conducted to further clarify counseling decisions and practices which changed as a result of the counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. In addition, the second interview served as a means to collect documents which were created to assist with the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. The researcher also observed the school, career centers, and CTAE classrooms with the counselor to gain an additional level of understanding about the messaging of career pathways counselors post as a result of implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System.

The research questions this study sought to answer were:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

Constructivist Research Design

The research study was conducted using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to explore the perspectives of the counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Creswell (2013) stated:

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. An exploration is needed, in turn, because of the need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices. (pp. 47-48)

Although counselors played a key role in the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System, the literature review did not identify research directly focused on Georgia high school counselors and their perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. However, areas such as high school counselor's support of school-wide programs, high school counselors' workload and stress factors, American School Counselors Association National Standards for students, and the theory of planned behavior were identified in the related literature surrounding the work of high school counselors.

Creswell's (2013) description of the evolving definition of qualitative research aligns with the purpose of the present study and served as a way to think about the methods appropriate to conduct the present study. Creswell explained:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 43)

Thus, the researcher sought understanding of the perspectives of high school counselors through interviews, shadowing experiences, field notes, and the examination of documents pertaining to

their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The perspectives of high school counselors gave meaning to the challenges and opportunities to implementation of career pathways as a result of their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

Schwandt (2007) clarified that qualitative inquiry “begins from the point of view that inquiry is a matter of the perception of qualities of some object or event and an appraisal of their value” (pp. 248-249). The researcher was specifically interested in the high school counselor’s perspective about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. While framing this study, the researcher started theorizing that perhaps the high school counselor’s work with career pathways contributed to the success of the school on the new College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). However, there was no study that directly connected the work of counselors with career pathways or the high school counselor’s work with the CCRPI.

Qualitative inquiry grounded in constructivism provided the researcher the opportunity to seek understanding from the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The constructivism theoretical perspective generated meaning from both the subject of the research study and the object of the study. Figure 3.1 portrays the relationship between the subject and the object of this research design.

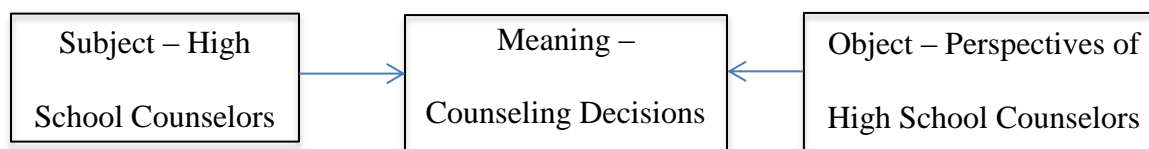


Figure 3.1. Constructivism Philosophy of High School Counselors Perspectives on how the Implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System Impacted Counseling Decisions and Practices

The subject of this research study was high school counselors. The object of the study

was the perspectives high school counselors held regarding their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Schwandt (2007) explained that the mind is active and does something with impressions. He further clarifies, "In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge as so much as construct or make it" (p. 38). Schwandt (2007) explained that the constructivist tradition provides the researcher with the opportunity to focus more on social process and interaction through social constructionism.

Prasad (2005) indicated, "Interpretative traditions emerge from a scholarly position that takes human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world" (p. 13). Employing an interpretative tradition, the researcher was able to use the interpretations of high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathways System to develop knowledge about the impact the system had on counseling decisions and practices. Prasad (2005) explained, "...what is of paramount importance is how we order, classify, structure, and interpret our world, and then act upon these interpretations" (p. 13). Schwandt (2007) further defined:

The term interpretivism denotes those approaches to studying social life that accord a central place to *Verstehen* as a method of the human sciences, that assume that the meaning of human action, and that the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning. (p. 160)

Learning how counselors perceived their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System allowed the researcher to understand how counseling decisions and practices were impacted. The goal of the researcher was to create and understand meaning from interpretations which were beyond simple explanations.

The researcher's goal was to understand the meaning of the perspectives of the high school counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Also, the time and place of implementation was of interest because the development of Georgia's Career Pathway System

began in 2008, and the first eight pathways were implemented in secondary schools in the fall of 2009. The remaining 42 pathways were implemented in Georgia secondary schools over the next 3 years. The urgency to this study is associated with the alignment of Georgia's Career Pathway with Georgia's recently approved school accountability system known as College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).

Case Study Approach

The researcher used the case study analysis approach to understand the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the impact on counseling decisions and practices. Yin (2009) defined a case study in this way, "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined a case study as, "A detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (p. 59). Creswell (2013) further clarified case study as, "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97).

Given Georgia's career pathway implementation which began in 2005 with the Re-engineering of Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE), along with Georgia's recently added accountability system, known as the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), high school counselors played an instrumental role in implementing the career pathways. The addition of career pathways into the accountability requirements of the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) provided an additional level of importance in

studying this phenomenon. In some districts, this additional requirement might be seen as a problem or issue. Therefore, gaining understanding from high school counselors frames the research study as a way to understand the problem. The researcher examined the perspectives of the high school counselors relative to these two events. Therefore, the events and the real-life context provided parameters which make the research study appropriate for case study.

Situations can be studied because they are useful in providing a better understanding of the event being studied (Stake, 1995). The understanding of the high school counselor perspectives could help advance the efforts to improve the impact of career pathways. Creswell (2013) noted, “the intent of the case study may be to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern and a case or cases selected to best understand the problem” (p. 98).

Another characteristic of a case study approach is an in-depth understanding of the case studied (Creswell, 2013). The researcher was intentional in a thorough examination into the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. As a result, multiple forms of data collection were incorporated into the research methodology. Interviews, field notes, document collection, and shadowing experiences are all recommended evidence collection strategies for case study research. The intent of the researcher was to identify counseling decisions and practices which changed and could serve as strategies to further the work of career pathways. The researcher’s intent was to provide findings to inform practical applications.

The researcher was able to identify specific boundaries of the event of career pathway implementation. The boundaries were clear in both the event and time of the event. The data collection strategies (interview, field notes, document collection, and shadowing experiences) incorporated in the design of this research study was conducive to a case study approach. Using

a case study approach, the researcher was able to create meaningful examination of the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Context of the Study

The research study was conducted with high school counselors who were directly involved with the work of Georgia's Career Pathway System. Schwandt (2007) stated, "Interpretations are context bound in the sense that a specific situation determines the form and direction of an interpretation" (p. 43). Therefore, the researcher was interested in high school counselors' perspectives who worked directly with career pathways in local high schools. Schwandt further clarified, "context is produced in the social practice of asking questions about meaning, identity, speech, and so on" (p. 43). The research study identified multiple criteria for the selection of the sites which were studied.

Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to identify the best opportunity to gain meaningful data. The research questions specifically depended on a sample that could add meaning to overall perspectives of career pathways, changes in guidance decisions and practices, best practices, and response to barriers to implementation. Schwandt (2007), in regard to research samples, wrote, "units are chosen not for their representativeness, but for their relevance to the research question, analytic framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research (p. 269). Merriam (2002) provided further explanation for the use of purposeful sampling: "...since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 2).

The first criterion used for site selection was to identify secondary schools within a specified Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) as defined by the Georgia Department of Education. The Piedmont (Pseudonym) RESA was identified as containing 26 secondary schools. The secondary schools were chosen because they represented schools of diverse population classifications including rural and urban. Table 3.1 outlines the secondary school size and the high school population range. All schools were identified with a pseudonym.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Secondary Schools Study Sites (Indicates the presence of a career academy)*

School System	Secondary Schools	Student Population/Range
System 1	1	962
System 2	5	1,188-1,661
System 3	11*	319-2,026
System 4	1*	702
System 5	4*	1,289-2,059
System 6	1	1,081
System 7	2	1,194-1,297
System 8	1	1230

The second criterion for site selection involved the counselor's years of experience in the eligible secondary schools. The participating secondary schools had to employ a high school counselor who possessed a minimum of five years of experience and who self-identified as knowledgeable and engaged in the work of Georgia's Career Pathway System. Based on a pilot

study, findings indicated that counselors with less than five years of experience had little to share, and their perspectives were sketchy attributed to lack of on the job experience.

The researcher made a personal contact with district superintendents in the Piedmont RESA (a pseudonym) area to identify high school counselors who were directly engaged in the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. The district superintendent recommended counselors who they felt were highly involved in the work of implementing career pathways. The researcher contacted each of the counselors through email to determine if the high school counselor met the criteria. A diversity of gender, ethnicity and years' experience was identified. The research identified four high school counselors who met the criterion defined in this research study.

The research site for interviewing counselors was the high school location. Conducting interviews at the selected school site provided participants the opportunity to share documents relative to their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. For example, counselors were able to share master schedules, promotional brochures, and samples of student programs of study. The researcher was also able to schedule a shadowing experience and tour of the school with the high school counselor observing the school, career center, and CTAE classrooms. Providing convenience to the participant was a secondary consideration for the selected site. The researcher secured approval to interview the counselor through the district Superintendent. The researcher also followed the policy of each local board of education relative to conducting research within their respective system.

Sampling

The research study selected both purposeful and criterion sampling as the basis to select participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described the method by noting that one chooses

“particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73). Creswell (2013) further explained purposeful sampling as, “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). High school counselors were identified as the key informants about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

Additionally, criterion sampling was used to select counselors who had worked with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Creswell (2013) emphasized the importance of criterion sampling by stating, “Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 155). Roulston (2010) further explained, “Criterion-based selection researchers specify characteristics and attributes of the population to be studied” (p. 81). The researcher selected criterion sampling for two reasons. The first criterion was high school counselors who experienced the phenomenon of working with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The researcher determined that high school counselors who experienced career pathway implementation as a function of their job could provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon. The second criterion included high school counselors who had at least five years of employment as a high school counselor. The researcher predicted that these counselors would influence the study from a historical context.

The criteria defined for participant selection included the following: 1) the counselor was employed by the selected secondary school and had worked with Georgia’s Career Pathway System, 2) the counselor was employed a minimum of five years at the selected secondary school, and 3) the counselor indicated a strong familiarity with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Four high school counselors were selected for potential interviewing representing four

secondary schools. Table 3.2 identifies the characteristics of the high school counselors interviewed.

Table 3.2

Characteristics of high school counselors meeting criteria for research study

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years' Experience
Anne Smith	Female	White	5 years
Jamie Paul	Female	Black	15 years
Pam Bennett	Female	Black	6 years
Sarah Ellis	Female	White	26 years

The amount of data collection was measured by the concept of data saturation. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described data saturation as, “the point of data collection where the information you get becomes redundant” (p. 69). Saturation is the point at which one begins to obtain the same data repeatedly and no further useable information emerges (Merriam, 2002). Eligible high school counselors were interviewed until recurring themes became apparent to the researcher.

Prior to contacting the counselor participants, the researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the University of Georgia. Counselor participants were contacted by email after the researcher completed appropriate applications and received written approval to conduct research from selected school systems. The researcher also received approval from the district superintendent to contact the identified high school counselor participant. The researcher provided a general overview of participant expectations to the district superintendent and participants prior to interviewing the high school counselor. Participants

were asked to sign a consent form acknowledging the purpose of the study and the research methods being used.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) stated, “I visualize data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p. 46). The data collection methods used by the researcher included a combination of interviews and collection of artifacts and documents relevant to the research question. Also, the researcher shadowed each high school counselor engaged in a career pathway job responsibility. The data collection aligned closely to the activities found in the Data Collection Circle described by Creswell (2013, p. 146). These activities included locating the individual, gaining access, and establishing rapport, using purposeful sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data. Yin (2009) identified the following sources of evidence as those commonly used in conducting case study research, “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 101). The researcher used these three strategies identified by Yin (2009) in the research study: documentation, interviews, and direct observation.

The following activities ensured that the researcher completed data collection with meaningful and usable data reflective of the purpose of the study. The researcher incorporated numerous qualitative methods to collect data including:

1. Individual interviews (90 min max.) with four high school counselors engaged in the work of career pathways;
2. Follow-up interviews (60 min max.) with each of the four high school counselors;

3. Shadowing experience and counselor led tour of the school, career center, and CTAE classrooms with each of the four high school counselors;
4. Document analysis of artifacts related to career pathways, career development, career guidance;
5. Field notes collected during the interviews, document analysis, shadowing experience, and reading of transcripts;
6. Interview reflection written after each of the initial interviews.

The researcher used interviews, document collection, field notes, and shadowing to derive data. Creswell (2013) wrote, “Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source” (p. 45). The primary source of data collection was through the use of interviews with high school counselors. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, “The interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject’s own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 103).

Interviews

For the purpose of the study, the researcher wanted to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Bogdan and Biklen further explained that in qualitative research, interviews could be used two ways (2007): “They may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques” (p. 103). Additionally, the collection of documents appropriate to the purpose of the study was collected and examined. The documents gathered included career pathway brochures, individual student graduation plans,

advisement plans, presentations, and master schedules generated by the high school counselor who was interviewed.

The most common forms of interview structures include highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam 2002; Roulston, 2010; Schwandt, 2007). The researcher employed the use of semi-structured interviews to further examine the perspectives of counselors for this research study. Roulston (2010) noted that in semi-structured interviews:

...interviewers refer to a prepared interview guide that includes a number of questions. These questions are usually open-ended, and after posing each question to the research participant, the interviewer follows up with probes seeing further detail and description about what has been said. (p. 15)

The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to inquire about additional open-ended questions from each counselor participant to describe their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System in a personal, unique way. The researcher was able to glean further information from questions which were perceived as unclear or uncertain. A pilot interview was conducted with a counselor in the researcher's college and career academy to determine the appropriateness of the questions. The initial interview guide was adjusted to reflect the suggested changes made by the pilot high school counselor. Interviews were conducted with four high school counselors.

Prasad (2005) stated, "Interviews are typically in-depth and meaning centered. In other words, they ask fewer questions about 'what' is or was taking place and more questions about 'how' interviewees make sense of specific situations" (p. 25).

Each high school counselor participant was interviewed twice. The researcher received approval from the high school counselor for a follow-up interview if the researcher deemed one necessary. The use of an interview guide provided direction for the researcher and contained the following general sections: 1) Introduction and subjectivity explanation; 2) Demographics and experiences; 3) Interview Questions. Creswell (2013) defined the interview guide as "a form

about four to five pages in length with approximately five to seven open end questions and ample space between the questions to write responses to the interviewee's comments" (Creswell, 2013, p. 164). Roulston (2010) expounded:

Although the interview guide provides the same starting point for each semi-structured interview given that it assumes a common set of discussable topics – each interview will vary according to what was said by individual interviewers, and how each interviewer used follow up questions to elicit further description. (p. 15)

Interview questions focused on the following areas of Georgia Career Pathway System:

awareness and appreciation, knowledge about career pathways, implementation communication, professional development opportunities, school leader expectations, career pathway self-efficacy, counseling decisions and practices, barriers or best practices to implementation, and connections to the College and Career Readiness Performance Index.

Questions were altered throughout the interview process to increase the clarity and relevance of the questions. The interview guides for both interviews are located in Appendix A. Prior to the interview, the researcher provided an overview of the relationship that the researcher had to this study. The overview included the researcher's experience as the state CTAE Director; this experience provided direction for the development of Georgia's Career Pathway System and his former role as a local CTAE director and career academy leader in implementing career pathways. The overview strategies assisted in creating rapport and an open dialogue with the participants and provided a general understanding as to why the researcher was interested in high school counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System.

The researcher digitally recorded all interviews, and each file was coded specifically to the participant. A back-up copy was created to ensure the security of the data. Each participant was asked to give permission for the interview using a consent form provided by the researcher.

An explanation of the consent form was provided by the researcher prior to the beginning of the interview.

The researcher contracted with a professional transcriptionist who transcribed each of the digitally recorded interviews. The researcher verified the written transcription to the digital recorded interview. During each review, the researcher identified key terminology and phrases for further analysis. The transcription also served as a data source. Participating high school counselors validated the transcription and provided additional clarification as a means to member check.

Documents

The researcher used the collection of documents as a second strategy for data collection. Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as, “Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (p. 28). The purpose for the collection of documents in this study was to further corroborate the interviews with the high school counselor about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Bowen (2009) further stated, “By examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact against potential biases than can exist in a single study” (p. 28). Yin (2009) explained, “The most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.

A secondary purpose for the use of documents in qualitative research is to make inferences from documents (Yin, 2009). Inferences provide a means for further investigation by the researcher. Clues about implementation, communication, and general excitement for career pathways were identified through the review of documents. The researcher asked follow-up

interview questions to clarify and confirm inferences about the work of high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway system.

The research study was aimed at examining the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Thus, the researcher determined the collection of career pathway related documents assisted in connecting meaning to the perspectives held by counselors. Additionally, the researcher chose to collect documents as a method of identifying best practices used by high school counselors as they work with career pathways.

Prior to the initial visit, the researcher conducted a thorough internet search of the high school counseling department. The documents collected included promotion brochures, informational text, and career guidance information. Secondly, as interviews were being conducted the researcher identified related career pathway documents. As a follow-up to the interview, the researcher asked for documents identified throughout the interview. The documents collected included student schedules, promotion brochures, informational flyers, activity agendas, student agendas/handbooks, presentations, and career development plans. Documents were also collected through the shadowing experience. Documents collected through the shadowing experiences and the school tour included items such as career pathway fact sheets, parent informational flyers, and presentations.

Shadowing

Data was also collected through shadowing to gain additional perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Quinlan (2008) provided a clear definition for shadowing:

Shadowing entails a researcher closely following a subject over a period of time to investigate what people actually do in the course of their everyday lives, not what their

roles dictate of them. Behaviours, opinions, actions and explanations for those actions are reflected in the resulting thick, descriptive data. (p. 1480)

McDonald (2005) further defined shadowing as, “a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time” (p. 456). Shadowing provides additional insight into the perspectives high school counselors held. McDonald further explains, “By following one person through the organization, the shadower obtains insight into a focused and specific experience which is relevant to a particular expert role” (p. 457). Yin (2009) further supported direct observation by noting, “Because a case study should take place in the natural setting of the ‘case,’ you are creating the opportunity for direct observations” (p. 109).

Yin identified that direct observations ranged from formal to casual data collection (Yin, 2009). The researcher arranged for a casual data collection activity by the use of a shadowing experience as a follow-up to the interview with the high school counselor. Shadowing experiences included a tour of the school, career center, and CTAE classrooms conducted by the high school counselor related to their work with career pathways. When shadowing the high school counselor, the researcher identified key terminology, phrases, and documents used to assist in the high school counselors’ work with career pathways. The tour also provided the researcher with an overview of the level of messaging about career pathways in the school. Field notes of shadowing experiences were taken to record the highlights of the activities conducted by the high school counselor. The high school counselor also allowed the researcher to take pictures of bulletin boards, career pathway related posters, and classroom posted career pathway related information.

Field Notes

Field notes served as an additional data source. Schwandt (2007) recognized field notes as “a kind of evidence on which inquirers base claim about meaning and understanding” (p. 115). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) referenced field notes as a second distinctive activity of ethnographic field research, “the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others” (p. 1). The researcher determined that rich meaning of the high school counselors’ perspectives were derived from field notes as a data collection method.

The field notes were taken by the researcher during the interview to focus on reactions and comments made by the high school counselor. The captured field notes recorded key terms, concepts, and ideas generated by the high school counselor. Field notes were written during the interview on the interview guide. The researcher also provided an expanded reflection after each interview. The reflection provided a summary of key ideas and concepts captured through the field notes. The shadowing opportunity provided the opportunity to collect the essence of the experience of high school counselors engaged in the work of career pathways. Field notes were also collected through the reading of the transcript as the researcher interpreted the meanings generated from the interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was focused on developing general themes regarding high school counselors’ perspectives about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Creswell (2013) provided an overarching definition of data analysis, “It involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p. 179). He further explained that

these steps are “interconnected” and “form a spiral of activities.” Bogdan and Biklen (2007) reaffirmed this definition, “Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them and searching for patterns” (p. 159).

Because the research study was grounded in the tradition of symbolic interactionism, the researcher assumed what Prasad described as an “open-ended stance” (p. 25). Prasad further explained data analysis in the tradition of symbolic interactionism:

are invariably inductive, posing broad research questions and refraining from introducing too many theoretical propositions at the start of the study. Symbolic interactionism is far more comfortable with generating theory out of research findings than going in with a set of clear conceptual relationships that need to be confirmed. (pp. 25-26)

The case study representation was used in the data analysis because no theory was pre-determined by the researcher. The researcher was interested in creating naturalistic generalizations of what was learned from the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used to provide analysis of the semi-structured interviews, interview transcripts, field notes, and interview process documents. According to Bogdan and Biklen, “The constant comparative method is a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of the data collection” (p. 73). Data were analyzed throughout the study. A preliminary analysis was done after each interview. The preliminary analysis included an overall summary, strengths, limitations, recommendations, and final summary.

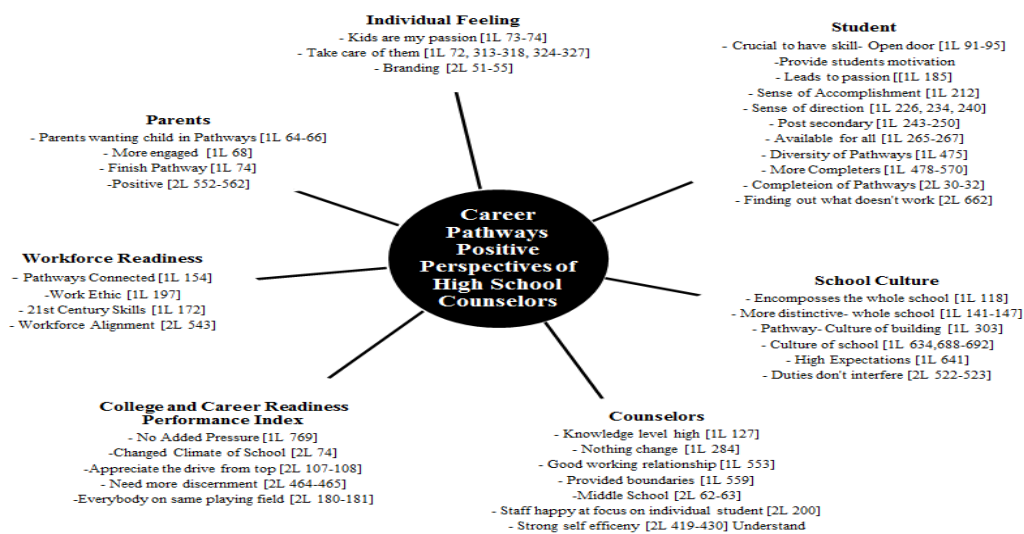
The researcher interpreted and analyzed the data through an inductive process involving coding, memoing, forming categories, bracketing and identifying emerging themes found in the data. Open, axial, and selective coding helped determine the main perspectives. Each transcript

was coded by line and assigned a key word or phrase. Examples of codes and key word or phrase includes: PP – Promising Practices, CH – Changes in Practice, POS – Positive Perceptions, and NEG – Negative Perceptions. The perspectives of participating high school counselors were organized by patterns or regularities found within the interview data and the artifacts collected from each participant. The product of the research study was the “essence of the experience,” which is defined as a passage that focuses on common experiences with an underlying structure (Creswell, 2013). The product of the research was a document of the learned experiences of the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The researcher was hopeful that these experiences could further inform the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

The researcher used the transcription of each counselor interview to identify key terminology and phrases relative to the research questions. An advanced organizer was developed for each interview detailing the main ideas and the corresponding interview and line number. The data served as the foundation of the preliminary interpretation of the participants perspectives. The interpretative analysis provided a “first look” into the perspectives of the high school counselors about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Figure 3.2 shows an example of how each transcription was analyzed for the participant’s perspectives about their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

Figure 3.2

Sample of Advanced Organizer of Transcription Analysis



Categories were created throughout the analysis of the data emerging from the first interview. The high school counselor's perspectives revealed evidence of interpretations in several broad areas such as impact of career pathways on the school. The impact of career pathways on the school included the high school counselor's perspective regarding their belief that the implementation of career pathways affected the culture of the school. Further analysis of the data within each of these broad areas allowed the researcher to create a more accurate explanation of categories.

Gaps in data were identified from interview one and formed the basis of the follow-up for interview two. The second interview transcript, field notes, document analysis, and observation notes continued to add to the analysis of data until categories were well defined and complete. The second interview added depth to the existing data and provided a more meaningful interpretation and analysis of the data. The participants were very positive about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. As a result, interview two attempted to identify the negative perspectives and follow-up on changes in practice. Figure 3.3 provides an example of a completely organized category focused on changes which occurred as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway.

Figure 3.3

Example of Completed Category

Changes in Counselor Decisions and Practices		
<i><u>Before</u></i>		<i><u>Current</u></i>
College or Tech Prep	↔	Pathways for all students CTAE/ Fine Arts/ Foreign Language
No Platform Statewide for Guidance	↔	GA College 411
No Requirement for Guidance	↔	Requirement for Guidance- BRIDGE

The categories were further strengthened by an analysis and comparison of field notes, documents, and observation data. Each case was individually analyzed and then cross analyzed. The findings from the cross analysis contributed to the development of three overarching themes

be discussed in Chapter 5. The themes represented a complexity of key findings gained from the high school counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is evaluated differently from quantitative research in terms of reliability and validity. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that in qualitative studies, "researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data" (p. 40). The goal of qualitative research is to provide sufficient detail to convince the reader that the author's conclusion is valid. Trustworthiness is a commonly referred to term in qualitative research. Schwandt (2007) explained trustworthiness is referred to as the "quality of an investigation (and its finding) that made it noteworthy to audiences" (p. 299). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the term trustworthiness as how an inquirer can "persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of the inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of." They noted, "the criteria that evolved in response to these questions are termed 'internal validity,' 'external validity,' 'reliability,' and 'objectivity'" (p. 290). In this study, the goal was to establish protocols and procedures within the criteria set for qualitative research to ensure that the research study was trustworthy.

The researcher ensured validity by incorporating multiple strategies throughout the design of research study. These strategies included involving the participants in the study through such activities as member checking and asking the participants if they had any follow-up thoughts they wanted to share before beginning the second interview. The researcher employed several methods to increase objectivity and to reduce subjectivity by framing a series of self-reported statements (see Reflexivity Statement). A transcriptionist was hired to transcribe all interviews; however, the researcher listened to the audio-recording and followed the transcript

line-by-line. Moreover, at the end of each interview and tour, the researcher summarized what was heard or saw and then asked the participants to add to his understanding of what was heard or observed in the tours and the interviews. The researcher also kept running field notes to support data analysis. Finally, the researcher catalogued artifacts and photos taken of display boards or any other item that illustrated pathway activities or efforts. Through these efforts triangulation was established.

Merriam (2002) proposed that internal validity asks the question, “How congruent are one’s finding with reality” (p. 25) and external validity as, “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to their situations” (p. 28). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined reliability as a match “between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under the study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (p. 40).

Merriam (2002) also stated, “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 25). Arguably, the reality of the perspectives of high school counselors will provide advancement of career pathway implementation. Creswell (2013) summarized his view of validation as, “I consider ‘validation’ in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250).

The researcher incorporated multiple strategies to safeguard validity so that the results of this study would represent the reality of the phenomenon high school counselors experienced during the implementation phase of Georgia Career Pathway System.

Data Triangulation

The first strategy of validation used by this research study was triangulation. Triangulation is a common method of meeting criteria for validity (Roulston, 2010). Schwandt (2007) defined triangulation as “a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” (Schwandt, 2010, p. 298). He further explained that the “central point of the procedure is to examine a conclusion (assertion, claim, etc.) from more than one vantage point” (p. 298). The research study combined the practices of multiple interviewees and document collection to meet the requirement for data triangulation. The researcher interviewed four high school counselor participants so that a diversity of perspectives was gained. The researcher also paid to have the interviews transcribed, provided the participants with a written transcription, and included the researcher’s analysis to ensure the participants’ perspectives were captured accurately. Participants were given the option of providing further explanation if deemed necessary to provide the most accurate portrayal of their perspectives.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

The second method of guaranteeing validity was the clarification of researcher bias. Creswell (2013) noted, “The researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (p. 251). In 2005, the researcher was named the Director of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education. The primary task provided by the Georgia Department of Education state superintendent was to create and to implement a system of career pathways for Georgia. The researcher provided both direction, oversight for the creation, and implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Additionally, the researcher served as the district Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education director and principal/CEO of a college and career academy. The district engaged in the full

implementation of career pathways through three high schools and the college and career academy. The researcher included these points in the conversation with the participants. The researcher has provided an extensive subjectivity statement later in this chapter to further evidence the researcher's connection to this study.

Reflexivity

According to Creswell (2013), "Researchers 'position' themselves in a qualitative research study. This means that researchers convey their background, how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study" (p. 47). The researcher has an extensive professional career in Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (formerly referred to as Vocational Education). The researcher spent nine years in the classroom as an agriculture teacher. During that time, he completed his masters and specialist degrees in education. His research interest at that time was focused on program enrollment in which he conducted a thesis titled, "Perceptions and Practices of Georgia Guidance Counselors Regarding Agricultural Education Programs." Several refereed journal articles and national conference presentations were generated from this thesis.

The researcher passionately believes counselors are the "gate keepers" for all elective programs. Furthermore, he believes that elective teachers must seek the support of all involved in the decision-making process to emphasize the value of elective programs. The following statement represents a student's view of the difference a career pathway can have on a student's life. The researcher includes this statement to demonstrate his level of passion in assisting with further implementation of career pathways in Georgia.

Attending the Pine College and Career Academy (PCCA) was an eye-opening experience for me...from the degree of personality in the faculty to the level of hands-on experience I have gained. Prior to attending PCCA, I had a very dim outlook on the world of academia. School seemed pointless to me. I had neither drive nor any goals in the

typical high school setting. Having been given the opportunity to work with my hands and truly exploit my talents, I found my passion. My passion has become my drive. I found something I truly love to do; had I not had a real industry chef as my instructor things could have easily turned out differently. I am utterly excited for the future now that I discovered my passion. My possibilities are endless; none of these previous statements could be true if not for PCCA. The teachers all care and want to help you towards your future. I don't see myself as someone who "walks the beaten path," believing I couldn't find hope for the future. For all the teenagers with similar feelings, please don't give up, give career pathways a shot. It could honestly change your life. (Email from student at PCCA, 2013)

The researcher had the opportunity and professional pleasure to observe Jake (a student at PCCA) evolve from a "wall hugger" to a successfully-employed chef at a local restaurant. The researcher first greeted Jake as he walked alone down the long hall at PCCA. Jake hung to the wall and was reluctant to shake the researcher's hand. Over the next two years, Jake connected with Chef (all the students call her Chef) and began to engage in Culinary Arts. During his second year, the researcher walked into the culinary lab and watched as Jake prepared for a statewide culinary competition, and the researcher again realized the power of career pathways. The researcher wanted to share this experience with every high school counselor. The researcher always believed in the power of connecting young people to career pathways, and Jake's story is one of many that he comes into contact with every day.

The researcher believes in young people and wants to connect them to a relevant career. However, he also had an awareness of the education barriers and perceptions of agriculture which prevented students from pursuing a relevant education in agriculture. One of these barriers was within the counseling profession. Therefore, his research interest was guided by his interaction with counselors and their attitudes and perspectives of agricultural education. His thesis was specifically designed to better explain how these attitudes and perspectives affected student enrollment in agricultural education programs. He believed that counselors have been the "gate keepers" for all elective programs and student success.

In 2005, the researcher was selected as Georgia's Director for Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education. As the new director, the task of creating Georgia's Career Pathway System was provided to him by the State Superintendent of Schools. His team provided both direction for and oversight of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. The task of creating Georgia's Career Pathway System gave him the opportunity to once again identify potential barriers to implementation, specifically the actions of high school counselors. Throughout the process of implementation, his team provided targeted professional development for high school counselors. The interaction with high school counselors provided a glimpse into the many jobs and responsibilities of high school counselors. The researcher observed their limited understanding of career pathways and economic development. Counselors' frustrations with their many responsibilities, tasks, and roles were also noted. Thus, this research seemed necessary. The researcher valued connecting students to a relevant pathway, since he agreed with the statement from the *Pathways to Prosperity Report* (2011), "One of the most fundamental obligations of any society is to prepare its adolescents and young adults to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults" (p. 1).

Formerly, the researcher served as the district Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education director and principal/CEO of a college and career academy. The college and career academy and local high schools engaged in the full implementation of career pathways. Thus, the researcher had the opportunity on a daily basis to interact with students, parents, administrators, counselors, and many other stakeholders concerning the importance of career pathways. Jake's e-mail validates the importance of the researcher's work. However, career pathways will never reach the potential for all students without the full understanding and awareness of the power of career pathways. Georgia's State School Superintendent Dr. John

Barge created the slogan, “Making Education Work for all Georgians,” which emphasized the need to prepare students better for college and careers. Students’ access to a diversity of career pathway choices in their pursuit of educational excellence served as the slogan’s underlying foundation. The report released by the Georgia Department of Education stated:

Georgia has good reason to embrace its bold vision for 21st century education: career exploration and real-world experience in current and future pathways to ensure that ALL students have the opportunity to be successful in our rapidly changing and evolving digital world and global economy. (p. 1)

As the district director of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education, the researcher understood the power of the research he has conducted. During the research process, an elective teacher came to the researcher with her frustrations concerning the high school counselors at her school. The teacher stated, with tears streaming down her cheeks, “They just don’t understand.” The researcher’s objective in conducting this study was to provide insight into the perspectives of high school counselors regarding the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System. In addition, and more importantly, high school counselors will have a set of strategies with which to improve their practice.

The researcher chose to share real stories and provide an overview into his experiences as a teacher, administrator, and researcher. The researcher feels this study is important to the broader context of preparing students for the future workforce. The future implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System depends on this research to increase the fidelity of implementation. Having taught the agriculture career pathway, leading the development of Georgia’s Career Pathway System, and providing direction for the implementation of career pathways, the researcher wanted to hear the silent voices of high school counselors. The researcher values the perspectives of high school counselors as they guide the career development process for students. To summarize, the researcher placed himself in this study and

understood that his experiences helped interpret the meaning and provide critical understanding and conclusions.

Member Checking

Member check is the third method which the researcher engaged in securing validity for this research study. Roulston (2010) emphasized the importance of member checks:

“Researchers often use the process of member checking of transcriptions and interpretations with research participants to demonstrate that they have developed an adequate understanding of the phenomenon investigated” (p. 87). The high school counselors were provided with the researcher’s interpretations of the transcripts.

Each high school counselor was asked to review the data and to verify that the researcher’s interpretations of the data were accurate. Merriam (2002) described the process of member checking as taking “your tentative findings back to some of your participants (from which you derived your raw data through interviews or observations) and ask whether your interpretation “rings true”” (p. 26). Creswell (2013) further explained, “ This approach, *writ large* in most qualitative studies, involves taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (p. 252, emphasis in the original).

Chapter Summary

The research study was conducted within the constructivist philosophy of epistemology. The interpretivism perspective provided further framework for this study. The interpretative tradition provided the researcher the opportunity to develop knowledge of Georgia’s Career Pathway System implementation based on counseling decisions and practices. The selected methodology was an interpretative case study to understand the perspectives of high school

counselors. Data generation methods included individual interviewing, shadowing experience, field notes, and document collection. Data analysis involved developing themes using the constant comparative analysis approach. The researcher insured trustworthiness through data triangulation, clarifying research bias, and member checks. The researcher provided an extensive subjectivity statement which was intended to demonstrate the value he placed on this research study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the present study.

CHAPTER IV

INDIVIDUAL CASE FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Additionally, the researcher was interested in how their work with career pathways impacted counseling decisions and practices and used this fundamental question: "Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathways?" Through this study, the researcher wanted to determine the practices that emerged as high school counselors implemented the Georgia's Career Pathways System. Also, the researcher was interested in identifying barriers to successful implementation of career pathways. Finally, the researcher wanted to see if data would support tangible recommendations for future implementation of career pathways under Georgia's new federally approved school accountability measure.

Given that the purpose of this study was to investigate high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System, the researcher sought to address three overall research questions:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

A qualitative research design included a sampling of four practicing high school counselors who were highly involved in the work of implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System. High school counselors were selected to represent geographically diverse school populations including rural, urban, and suburban school districts. High school counselors were interviewed and observed to gain their perspectives about Georgia's Career Pathway System related to their counseling decisions and practices.

Participants were interviewed two times between December, 2014 and February, 2015. Interview 1 was approximately 90 minutes. Interview 2 was approximately 60 minutes. Additionally, participants provided the researcher a tour of career centers, commons areas of the school and the career, technical, and agriculture education classrooms. The purpose of the tour was to gain a perspective of the messaging of career pathways within the student environment. Participants were provided a copy of their interview transcripts with the opportunity to correct any statements that would better describe their perspectives. Participants also were provided the opportunity to gather related documents and submit them to the researcher.

Most interviews were conducted in each participant's office, with only one being conducted in a conference room, to ensure privacy and convenience for access to documents in relation to gathering data. The researcher sought to provide comfort, convenience, and privacy during the interviews. The researcher used Voice Pro Application to record digitally the interviews. The researcher used a second recording device to serve as a backup data file. The digital files were immediately forwarded to the paid transcriptionist. The transcriptionist provided a quick turnaround of the transcripts which were reconciled with the digital recordings by the researcher.

The researcher was provided a tour of selected areas within the school by the participant with one variation when a scheduled conflict necessitated a Career, Technical, and Agriculture (CTAE) Department Chair providing the tour. The areas toured included each counselor's office, career center, counseling center, school's commons area, bulletin board display location, and the CTAE classrooms. The researcher was observing all locations to identify the persistency of career pathway information for students.

The researcher asked participants to provide documents supporting implementation of career pathways. These documents served as way to triangulate and validate the information provided to students supporting each counselor's work with career pathways. The documents collected at each research site included flyers, brochures, advisement sheets, PowerPoints, class schedules, and dual enrollment information.

Field notes were recorded by the researcher during the interview to capture thematic perspectives, counseling decisions, practices and barriers. The researcher created a reflection of each interview which included a brief overview, strengths and weaknesses of the interview, and a summary of key ideas to think about later during the analysis of data.

Participants were selected through purposeful and criterion sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to gain the most meaningful data. The researcher used criteria sampling to identify characteristics of high school counselors which would provide meaningful data. The criterion included years of experience working as a high school counselor and with career pathways.

Participants of this study represented four high schools in the Piedmont Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). Piedmont RESA represents schools which are located in the Metropolitan Atlanta areas as well as schools which are located in rural central Georgia.

Each of the participants was certified in counseling with a minimum of five years' experience.

Table 4.1 demonstrates the profile of the participants.

Table 4.1

Profile of Participants for School Year 2014-15

Participant	Anne Smith	Jamie Paul	Pam Bennett	Sarah Ellis
High School	Aqua	Partner	Pine Street	Oak
Years in Education	8	15	13	40
Years of Teaching Experience	0	0	6	14
Teaching Experience Subject Area	Graduation Coach	NA	Social Studies	English
Years of Counseling Experience	5	14	7	26
Advanced Education Degree Earned	Masters	Specialist	Masters	Masters

The researcher made a personal contact with the superintendent of each school district to identify the counselor which met the criteria for the study. The researcher then provided a follow-up email and overview of the study to determine the participant's willingness to participate in the research study. The follow-up email also served as a means of validating that the participant met the qualifications of the study.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. The data analysis was focused on the development of general themes regarding the high school counselor's perspective about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System and the impact on counseling decisions and practices. The data analysis was grounded in the tradition of symbolic interactionism. The researcher used an "open-ended stance" (Prasad, 2005) to interpret the data.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The chapter begins with an overview of the contextual setting of Georgia's Career Pathway System. The next section provides an overview of the Piedmont Regional Education Service Agency area. The third section provides a contextual profile of the school study sites. The fourth section provides a profile of each research participant. The fifth section includes findings from the interviews with counselors, documents examined and tour of the selected sections of the identified high school. The next section provides a case study data cross analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Contextual Setting of Georgia's Career Pathway System

The implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System began in 2005 as an initiative of the Georgia Department of Education. The focus of creating career pathways was spurred by efforts to create a secondary education system which supported the efforts of workforce development. Prior to this, high school students were able to take a variety of courses under the umbrella of Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education. The successful completion of three courses provided a student a Career and Technical Education diploma. However, this diploma did not provide a focus of skill development in any specific industry.

Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) created the system of career pathways as a strategy of the new focus for the Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education Division. The strategy involved creating career pathways as prescribed by industry and teacher advisory committees. The rollout of the implementation of career pathways impacted all school districts in Georgia and affected the role of other school personnel such as high school counselors' decisions and practices as well as school schedules and program offerings.

Career, Technical, and Agriculture teachers were challenged with teaching new standards as well as teaching advanced levels of the same subject matter. The course sequence was aimed at providing employers with specific skill sets. Additionally, the career pathways promoted connecting relevance to education for students. And finally, career pathways were aimed at helping transition students to career and postsecondary education opportunities by expanding the career options for students.

This endeavor was begun prior to the shift of Georgia's educational policy to integrate career and college readiness skills in K-12 (Georgia College and Career Readiness Performance Index, 2012). Georgia's new accountability system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index, (CCRPI) supports "exemplary student achievement that prepares each student for success in college and career" (GADOE, 2012, p. 1). The new accountability system incorporated performance indicators related to career pathway completion. The accountability has increased the responsiveness of local school leaders to implement career pathways in middle and high schools.

The change to Georgia's new accountability system added a new level of importance to the implementation of Georgia Career Pathway System. The inclusion of career pathway completion as a performance indicator raised the conversation at the district and school level.

School leaders, teachers, and personnel began to create strategies for better incorporating career pathways at the school level. The role of high school counselors in career development was highlighted as instrumental in enhancing the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Contextual Setting of Piedmont RESA

The Piedmont (a pseudonym) Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) is 1 of 16 educational service delivery areas in Georgia. The Piedmont RESA serves eight local school districts. The RESA area is located in close proximity to the metropolitan area and a large city with school systems served by the RESA consisting of both large suburban schools and rural schools. School systems range in FTE enrollment from 2,668 to 41,277 and represent diverse population classifications including rural and urban.

The Piedmont RESA serves 105,362 students and includes 21 high schools and 26 secondary schools. Also, the Piedmont RESA area is the host of two college and career academies with a main mission to promote students in career pathways.

Four high schools were chosen for the study and the schools were from districts where the superintendent's perception was of a quality counseling department heavily engaged in the work of implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System. The schools in which participants were selected also had a counselor who met the minimum criterion of having a minimum of five years of experience working with career pathways. All four high schools were similar in size. The schools ranged in size from: Aqua High School (1,115 students), Oak High School (1,226 students), Pine Street High School (1,419 students), and Partner High School (1,444 students) (all pseudonyms). Oak High School and Partner High School are located in a suburban setting while Aqua High School and Pine High School are located in a rural setting. All high schools

had a strong focus on implementing career pathways with adequate resources for the implementation of career pathways as evidenced by teacher and facility allocations.

Contextual Setting of the Four Schools

Aqua High School

Aqua High School is located in rural Central Georgia. The Georgia Department of Education Enrollment Report (2014) indicates that the fall 2014 FTE Enrollment was 1,115. The diversity of the school is described as follows: .72% Hispanic, .09% American Indian, .36% Asian, 6.91% Black, 89.24% White, and 2.69% two or more races. The gender of the school is 53.27% male and 46.73% female.

Career Pathway offerings include: Business and Technology, Entrepreneurship, Therapeutic Services/Allied Health and Medicine, Teaching as a Profession, Plant and Landscape Systems, Animal/Mechanical Systems, Animal and Horticulture Systems, Food Animal Systems, Horticulture/Mechanical Systems, and Agriculture Mechanics System. The diversity of agriculture offerings represented a strong agricultural presence in the community. On several occasions throughout the interview, Anne highlighted the accomplishments of the agriculture program. She also added that the agriculture program recently received a new facility and was part of the STEM programming. Dual enrollment opportunities are provided through the local technical program in the areas of culinary arts and healthcare.

The major industries include: agriculture, healthcare, manufacturing, retail sales, and banking. Aqua County is a bedroom community with approximately 74% of the working population working outside of the county. Aqua County has a labor force of 8,154 with an unemployment rate of 8.4%, (Georgia Department of Labor, 2013).

Partner High School

Partner High School is located in a suburban metro area. The Georgia Department of Education Enrollment Report (2014) indicates that the fall 2014 FTE Enrollment was 1444. The diversity of the school is described as follows: 4.36% Hispanic, .48% American Indian, 2.70% Asian, 18.42% Black, 69.32 % White, and 4.71% two or more. The gender of the school is 51.39% male and 48.61% female. Career Pathway offerings include: automobile and light maintenance, audio/video technology and film, business and technology, engineering and technology, food and nutrition, law and public safety, marketing, teaching as a profession, healthcare, and web/digital design.

The major industries include: healthcare, manufacturing, retail sales, and banking. Partner County has a labor force of 52,424 with an unemployment rate is 7.2%. (Georgia Department of Labor, 2013)

Pine Street High School

Pine Street High School is located in rural Central Georgia. The Georgia Department of Education Enrollment Report (2014) indicates that the fall 2014 FTE Enrollment was 1419. The diversity of the school is described as follows: 6.69% Hispanic, .07% American Indian, 1.19% Asian, 56.30% Black, 32.76% White, and 2.95% two or more races. The gender of the school is 48.49% male and 51.51% female. Career Pathway offerings include: audio/video technology and film, business and technology, engineering and technology, culinary arts, healthcare, JROTC, and construction.

The major industries include: agriculture, construction, healthcare, manufacturing, retail sales, and banking. Allen (pseudonym) County has a labor force of 28,326 with an unemployment rate is 10.7%. (Georgia Department of Labor, 2013)

Oak High School

Oak High School is located in a suburban metro area. The Georgia Department of Education Enrollment Report (2014) indicates that the fall 2014 FTE Enrollment was 1226. The diversity of the school is described as follows: 10.85% Hispanic, .16% American Indian, .05% Asian, 56.31% Black, .08% Pacific Island, 32.77% White, 4.49% two or more. The gender of the school is 50.82% male and 49.18% female. Career Pathway offerings include: web design, business accounting, small business development, medical services, early childhood, agri-science, architectural drawing and design, NJROTC, Audio-Video Technology, law enforcement, and engineering technology.

The major industries include: agriculture, construction, healthcare, manufacturing, retail sales, logistics, food services, retail trade, and banking. Oak County has a labor force of 105,695 with an unemployment rate is 8.1% (Georgia Department of Labor, 2013).

Characteristics of the Research Participants

Participants in the study were selected through purposeful and criterion sampling. Deliberate sampling was important since being engaged in the work of implementing of Georgia's Career Pathway System is critical to understanding the meaning of perspectives high school counselors hold about their work with career pathways. Key informants (the superintendents) of each of the school districts referred the researcher to specific schools and high school counselors. Superintendents were identified as key informants as a result of their understanding of which school was highly engaged in the implementation of career pathways. Superintendents were then asked to identify high school counselors who were highly engaged in the work of Georgia's Career Pathway System. The high school counselors were emailed letters of introduction, requests to participate in the study, and the required criteria. The emails also

included the criteria involved required to participate in the study. Out of six teachers identified and emailed to participate, five responded and agreed to become a part of the study. However, one participant dropped out of the study due to scheduling conflicts. In the end, the study included four high school counselors.

The following criteria was used to select high school counselors to participate in the study: a high school counselor with a minimum of five years of experience and who self-identified as knowledgeable and engaged in the work of Georgia's Career Pathway System. High school counselors selected for the study represented a wide-range of teaching experiences, counseling experiences, and variations in age and race as profiled in the following descriptions:

Anne Smith – Aqua High School

Anne, currently with eight years of experience in education, is serving in her fifth year as a counselor at Aqua High School. Prior to this role, Anne served as a middle school graduation coach. Anne had no previous teaching experience prior to becoming a graduation coach. Anne's undergraduate degree is in Psychology, and she currently holds a Master's Degree in Counseling. Anne also serves as the counseling unit department chair. The counselor to student ratio at Aqua High School is 1:372 and was recently reduced due to the addition of a counselor.

Anne loves being a counselor, especially at the high school level. Though she barely met the criteria for the research study, she is well versed in the implementation of career pathways. Her passion lies in the development of dual enrollment programs through the local technical college, and she provided evidence of the school's dual enrollment growth under her leadership.

Jamie Paul – Partner High School

Jamie is currently in her 15th year in education, where she was recently promoted to the district position of work-based learning coordinator. She served as the high school counselor at

Partner High School for six years. Prior to Partner High School, Jamie was a high school counselor in two Georgia schools and one neighboring state's high school. She has a total of 14 years as a high school counselor with no previous teaching experience prior to becoming a high school counselor. Jamie's undergraduate degree is in Sociology with a concentration in Social Studies. She currently holds a Master's Degree in Counseling and recently finished her Specialist Degree in Leadership. Jamie also served as the counseling unit department chair while at Partner High School where the counselor to student ratio is 1:361.

When asked to speak about her experiences as a counselor, Jamie stated, "Well, I love working." She went on to explain that she has always had good administrators who did not burden counseling staff with administrative duties such as testing. Jamie was positive about the role career, technical, and agriculture (CTAE) education has played in the schools where she served as a counselor. She was passionate about the relevance CTAE provides students in their educational preparation, and she was very excited about the role career pathways offer students. Jamie's passion was directly linked to her previous position as a counselor in a career center.

Pam Bennett – Pine Street High School

Pam is currently in her 13th year in education where she is currently serving in her 5th year as the high school counselor at Pine Street High School. Prior to Pine Street High School, Pam was a high school counselor in another state for two years and a social studies teacher for six years. She has served a total of seven years as a high school counselor. Pam's undergraduate degree is in Social Studies. She currently holds a Master's degree in Counseling Education and is currently pursuing her Doctorate of Education in Workforce Education. Pam is currently serving as the ninth grade counselor for Pine Street High School where the counselor to student ratio is 1:355.

Pam really enjoys her job as a high school counselor. She articulated her likes and dislikes about her job. Pam gets more excited when she has the opportunity to provide career counseling to students versus academic counseling. She indicated that when she does academic counseling the student is typically off track for graduation. The part of the counseling job Pam likes least is the social/emotional counseling. Unfortunately, Pam indicated that she has had to do more social/emotional counseling this year. She generally appreciated her work with career pathways, believing career pathways' counseling allows her to help students create a game plan.

Mary Ellis – Oak High School

Mary is currently in her 40th year of education. She has served as the high school counselor at Oak High School for 25 years. Prior to Oak High School, Mary was a middle and elementary school teacher. She has a total of 26 years as a high school counselor. Mary's undergraduate degree is in English and Social Studies. She currently holds a Master's Degree in English, and she completed an add-on certificate in counseling, and she also holds a Specialist Degree in counseling. Mary also served as the counseling unit department chair while at Oak High School. The counselor to student ratio at Oak High School is 1:409. A summary of the student: counselor ratios are found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Summary of student population, number of counselors and student: counselor ratio

High School	Aqua	Partner	Pine Street	Oak
Number of Students	1,115	1,444	1,419	1,226
Number of Counselors	3	4	4	3
Student: Counselor Ratio	372:1	361:1	355:1	409:1

Mary has been a counselor for a long time and has served the current high school for a long time as well. She is very passionate about her work with career pathways. She indicated multiple times throughout the interview that her school had been working with career pathways a long time. Her passion and excitement for education were very genuine and sincere. Mary became teary eyed on several occasions as she discussed the potential impact career pathways had on students.

Overview of the Findings

Case Summary I

Anne Smith – Aqua High School

Anne was the first participant interviewed. Anne was a very soft spoken counselor and the least experienced one interviewed for this research project, and it was apparent that that Aqua High School focuses on career pathways, and Anne was able to articulate their purpose and understood the sequencing of courses required for career pathway completion. The career development goal for her school included career pathways. When asked about her school's

career development goals, Anne stated, “Well, we want to get our students plugged in. You know our goal is for 100 percent of our students to be pathway completers.”

The general theme of Anne’s interview was that students and parents were very excited about the implementation of career pathways. She stressed the following, “And, it’s very exciting to us counselors any time students are excited about pathways and about coming her to finish something, and accomplish a goal.” The word “excited” was used pervasively throughout the data collection process. Anne was also deeply engaged with career pathway offerings through dual enrollment at the local technical college which served to diversify Aqua High School’s career pathways. Document analysis and observation validated the use of dual enrollment at Aqua High School.

However, Anne acknowledged that she did not have a written counseling plan for Aqua High School. She indicated that their work with helping students identify and complete career pathways was the basis for the school’s counseling plan. She did assert that an upcoming school year goal for their counseling unit was to create a school counseling plan that focused more on career pathways.

Perspectives of Georgia’s Career Pathway System

Anne was very positive about career pathways. As head counselor for Aqua High School, Anne had implemented multiple strategies to improve the fidelity of career pathway implementation. She was genuinely focused on improving the career pathway guidance at her school and was very positive about the difference the career pathways were making with student empowerment and parent engagement.

She felt like the removal of the high school graduation test would allow her more time to focus on career pathways. Anne clarified that testing was a responsibility which prevented the

counseling unit from providing a more direct focus on career pathways. She stated, “And the only other thing would be testing, making APs in charge of testing as opposed to counselors.” However she confirmed that her administrators did not overload counselors with many duties outside of testing. She stressed, “But aside from testing our administration does a really good job of not piling other duties on us.” She also felt like the reduction of the student to counselor ratio would be positive. With the exception of not having an overarching counseling plan, appropriate strategies were in place to enhance career pathway implementation. Additionally, Anne was interested in improving her school’s performance in this area.

Anne described the positive perspectives of her work with career pathways. She acknowledged the positive aspects of career pathways on students and the school’s culture, on parental engagement, and on workforce readiness. Negative perspectives about career pathways were mainly focused on changes in course titles and names and the lack of timeliness in the dissemination of such changes by the Georgia Department of Education.

Anne described multiple positive perspectives about her work with career pathways based on their positive impact on students. She noted the positive impact of career pathways on graduation by describing the connection to graduation that career pathways make for students.

Anne asserted:

I started off as a graduation coach and so I am really passionate about helping those kids that aren’t connected to school and the kids who are off track. The great thing about CTAE and pathways is that they are son hands-on. Those students don’t do well in academic classes where they have to sit for fifty minutes. But they really enjoy the hands-on classes. It’s really important to me to connect the some pathway they are interested in because it can be key to keeping them in school.

Anne continued to emphasize the importance of career pathways in keeping students engaged by offering courses/pathways which connect to their interest. She indicated that career pathways now offered through dual enrollment keep students in school. Speaking of Culinary Arts which

was not traditionally offered, she stated, “we don’t have that here, but we can get students plugged into the school (postsecondary) which can help them with staying in school.”

With regard to her work, Anne emphasized the student interest in and engagement with career pathways. The student interest is evidenced by students asking questions. Anne recounted, “They asked a lot of questions and they were very engaged during the process.” Parent calls regarding pathways was another piece of evidence showcasing student engagement. Anne clarified, “And we have had parent phone calls since we did the individual graduation plan. So you know they are going home discussing with parents.” She further stated, “We watch them complete their individual graduation plan, and so you know they were really into it.”

Anne also explained the value added aspects of students completing pathways. The end result for many students includes better decision making, industry certifications and advanced post-secondary education opportunities. Anne noted, “You know they are interested and you know, being able to give them a document that they can see and put their hands on, I think it helps them to make better decisions for themselves.” Anne was able to articulate that these decisions lead to certificates provided through the technical college. The career pathways, offered through dual enrollment, are often the first step for students to enter post-secondary education. Dual enrollment was highlighted as a positive outcome of career pathways. Anne reported, “We have a good handle on our programs and the ones we don’t offer we’re going to refer students to go to the technical college to pursue those pathways.”

Much evidence pointed to Anne’s feelings that career pathways helped students stay focused and excited about school. She informed the researcher of multiple experiences where students would take summer and online courses to make way for career pathway courses. She illuminated, “We have a lot of students that are very driven to complete their pathway. But we

have students who take classes over the summer so they have room in their schedule to complete pathways.” Anne also noted that third level courses are exciting for students because they enjoy the relevant and practical application. She expounded, “They love doing the third level course because it’s so hands on and it helps them to really figure out if they are interested in that career.”

Anne identified the benefit career pathways have on students being workforce ready. Though she was not aware of the local workforce readiness plan, her understanding of issues with workforce preparation in Aqua County was noted. She asserted:

Well the whole goal of the pathways is to make sure that students are workforce ready and provide students with hands-on skills. My understanding is to provide students with skills which they may not get in their core classes. Career pathways are preparing students for the workforce, because we know that not every student is going to college.

Anne questioned whether the local workforce community was aware that Aqua High School was implementing career pathways. However, she acknowledged a limiting factor for workforce preparation in Aqua County was due to the lack of industry. She described, “This is a bedroom community. With the film industry new to the area, Anne noted that she has reached out to the local technical college about offering a broadcast video pathway through dual enrollment.

Anne presented an unexpected advantage about the positive outcomes of career pathway implementation as illustrated in the following story:

And we’ve actually had – I know of least one student who -- financially her family struggled. She wanted to do the healthcare courses so that she could work as a CNA to help support her family and she wasn’t a great student. She did struggle in some of her academic classes but she was so focused on getting that CNA certification so that she could get a job while she was in college, you know, to help support her family.

The researcher was reminded through this story about the financial struggles within families and the purpose career pathways serve to students economically and educationally.

Anne's positive perspectives about career pathways were due to her feeling about their impact on the school culture. She definitely felt like more emphasis had been placed on ensuring success of career pathway implementation. She elaborated, "I think there has always been a strong emphasis and we have tried to improve our programs by having our teachers go through industry certification." She further explained how this focus had led several programs to win several state awards.

The focus of implementing career pathways provided direction to make the school more accommodating for students. Anne was very positive and shared how career pathways were changing the school culture. As a result of career pathways, programs were expanded to offer more pathways and engage more students in pathways. Anne recalled:

Our previous CTAE Director worked very closely with the local technical college in really pushing our kids. We have a healthcare pathway and we have always had students. However, they have a limited number of seats for the third year (which is a pathway completion course). She really pushed to go to the technical college and she worked with the technical college to get an instructor to come here after school to offer the course. This ensured that our students did have the option to complete the pathway.

The overall culture of the school was changing to ensure that educational choices for students were expanded. The addition of career pathways was also increasing awareness throughout the school about the implementation of career pathways as a student choice. Anne affirmed that Aqua High school was beginning to take a holistic approach to education.

Anne was also excited to see that testing duties had been removed from the responsibility of the counselor. She stated, "In the past we've always had so much to do with testing. We don't have graduation testing anymore. Testing has always been a huge burden for our department and so that's taken a lot of time."

Although Anne described the negative aspects about the logistics (scheduling, new course names and updates, changing forms, etc.) of recent career pathway changes and updates, she

clarified that changes were good. She clarified, “But I feel like it was a good process. I am glad the state – even though I complained about changing the course numbers and course names made the changes. I feel like it was a worthwhile process.”

Anne described the positive aspects of the career pathways. Her excitement for career pathways was formed as a result of what she viewed as improvements in student engagement and school culture. She also identified workforce readiness and parent engagement as positive outcomes of her work with career pathways. She did, however, experience anxieties as she worked with career pathways.

Anne’s anxiety level increased as a result of the changes made by GADOE with course numbers and course names. There was more turmoil within her school as a result of the late timing of the release of course name and number changes. She asserted, “We didn’t get that information until the end of March or April which kind of put us in a bind because our goal is to start registration by February.” Throughout the interview, she continued to emphasize the lack of timeliness in releasing new information by GADOE. The timeliness issues were directly related to receiving the information after the local school registered students for the upcoming school year.

Anne’s experience with career pathway professional development also depicted some negative perspectives. She did not attend many of the professional development opportunities provided by the GADOE. The CTAE conference which she did attend was a disappointment. She described that the event had been promoted as a quality conference by the CTAE director, but she was less impressed.

Anne had limited negative experiences with her career pathways’ work. Her negative perspectives were primarily formed as a result of the timing of new course names and numbers

being released. In addition, she was disappointed with limited and inferior professional development on career pathways. In summary, Anne's positive perspectives definitely outweighed the negative. She stated, "Yes, we all feel very strongly about CTAE and pathways."

Changes in Counseling Decisions and Practices

Anne provided a glimpse into the factors affecting the overall decisions which students make regarding the Georgia's Career Pathway System. She highlighted the changing role of middle school counselors in providing awareness activities for middle school students. Anne also described the change in information provided to high school students which included awareness, decision making, and tracking progress toward completion of career pathways. Parental engagement was also pointed out as being a critical change in the counseling practices. Finally, Anne pointed out the significant role dual enrollment has played in the changes to decisions and practices embraced by high school counselors regarding their work with career pathways.

Anne indicated that the role of middle school counselor has become much more important in the success of career pathway implementation. She offered that middle school counselors are important in the awareness aspects of career pathways. Anne confirmed that a strong working relationship existed with the middle school counselors. She stated:

We have middle school students come to our campus with their parents but before that we actually go to the middle school and we do a presentation for them. We go over the registration form with them. We talk to them about pathways. Our CTAE director usually goes and, you know, tells them what pathways we offer, you know, and we explain how pathways work because that's a concept that they don't really understand at middle-school level.

However, gathered evidence pointed out that the relationship was primarily focused on the 8th to 9th grade transition. She reemphasized the importance of the 8th grade to 9th grade transition later in the interview.

Awareness and information strategies were recognized by Anne as a change in the decisions and practices counselors made as a result of their work in counseling students about career pathways. She emphasized that students needed awareness information to assist in choosing career pathways. Regarding information for student advisement, Anne indicated that the counselors “make sure that we give them the information that they need to choose a pathway.” She also referenced administering interest inventories has become more critical in providing information for students about career pathways. She stated, “We go through the process of doing an interest inventory or activities like that. There’s so many activities that we can do through that website.”

GACollege411 is a student web-based program supported by the Georgia Student Finance Commission which assists students in making career decisions. Anne indicated that GACollege411 had been instrumental in helping students with career pathways. She emphasized that her county is limited in industry and exposure of these types of careers for students. Therefore, GACollege411 has also been used a tool to increase student awareness about careers. She stated:

We really advise our kids about GACollege411 and getting on there and, you know, doing interest inventories and, you know, you can watch short clips of videos of different careers. And so, you know, lots of time in our community I think kids – their exposure is so low to everything that’s out there and that’s a barrier.

Anne highlighted that student awareness of careers outside the community was a primary focus for her counseling unit. The diversity of pathways helped with the awareness issue; however, Anne was strategic in identifying activities which helped students focus on the most appropriate career pathway for her students.

Anne acknowledged small group advisement was a key change in the decisions and practices of high school counselors as they worked with career pathways. She underscored the

increase in small group advisement which has occurred since the implementation of career pathways. Anne stated, “That’s something we’ve never done before, and we haven’t done the advisement piece with the students before. We have one counselor and one administrator go into the classes, so that’s new for this year.” Anne made multiple references to the small group advisement. Collected documents also supported the focus on small group advisement. The review of student advisement sheets highlighted the focus on career pathways as an important part of the advisement process. Figure 4.1 is a sample of a portion of a student advisement sheet.

Figure 4.1

Sample Aqua High School student advisement sheet

Class of 2017 Registration Form—10 th Grade							
Student Name:				Gender:			
State Required Units for Graduation	You should mark an X on the line beside the course that you want and/or need to take in 10 th grade. Please review all notes inside the boxes before choosing one. Please note that all AP classes are on a college level with a college level textbook.						Teacher Initials Required
English (4 units)	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 th Grade Literature and Composition <input type="checkbox"/> 10 th Grade Literature and Composition Gifted/Honors						
Mathematics (4 units)	<input type="checkbox"/> Analytic Geometry <input type="checkbox"/> Analytic Geometry Gifted/Honors <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Algebra* <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Algebra Gifted/Honors* <input type="checkbox"/> STEM Advanced Algebra** <small>*Advanced Algebra and Advanced Algebra Gifted/Honors are only available to students who took Analytic Geometry in 9th grade or have teacher recommendation. **STEM Advanced Algebra is only available to students who took STEM Analytic Geometry in 9th grade and are in the STEM program.</small>						
The following is a list of the course sequences for completing Pathways. It is the expectation that all PCHS students will complete at least one pathway during high school. A student may complete a pathway in Advanced Academics, Fine Arts, Foreign Languages, and/or Careers.							
Foreign Language Pathways			Fine Arts Pathways			Advanced Academic Pathways	
Spanish I	French I	Latin 1	Art I	Theatre Arts I	Advanced Chorus I	Advanced Instrumental Ensemble I	Advanced Band I
Spanish II	French II	Latin 2	Art II	Theatre Arts II	Advanced Chorus II	Advanced Instrumental Ensemble II	Advanced Band II
Spanish III	French III	Dual Enrollment Latin Class	Art III	Theatre Arts III	Advanced Chorus III	Advanced Instrumental Ensemble III	Advanced Band III
							In order to be a Pathway completer in this area, a student must complete at least 3 courses in a given subject area and 1 AP or Dual Enrollment course in the same subject area. Students must also complete 2 foreign languages.
Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Pathways							
Business and Technology	Entrepreneurship	Therapeutic Services/Allied Health & Medicine	Teaching as A Profession	Plant and Landscape Systems	Forestry/Natural Resources Management	Forestry & Animal Science Systems	Forest Mechanical Systems
1. Intro to Business & Technology 2. Business Technology 3. Business Communications	1. Intro to Business & Technology 2. Legal Environment of Business 3. Entrepreneurship	1. Intro to Healthcare Science 2. Essentials of Healthcare 3. Allied Health & Medicine (2 Hr Block)	1. Examining the Teaching Profession 2. Contemporary Issues in Education 3. Teaching as a Profession Internship	1. Basic Ag Science 2. General Horticulture & Plant Science 3. Nursery and Landscape	1. Basic Ag Science 2. Forest Science 3. Natural Resources	1. Basic Ag Science 2. Forest Science 3. Animal Science & Biotechnology	1. Basic Ag Science 2. Agricultural Mechanics I 3. Forest Science

The advisement sheet helps direct students as they integrate the required academic courses and their chosen career pathway. The advisement sheet provided a basis for collaboration between the student and the high school counselor during advisement sessions. Anne further acknowledged that she felt like student advisement was effective. She referenced the student engagement and empowerment aspects as being positive outcomes of student advisement. She explained:

Well, we feel that it's effective because, you know, we gave the information to students and, you know, we watch them complete their individual graduation plan and so, you know, they were really "into it" you know. But also they asked a lot of questions; they were very engaged during the process, and we've also had parent phone calls, you know, since we did that piece, you know, asking questions. So we know that the students went home and discussed it with their parents.

The effectiveness of student advisement was a positive change noted by Anne throughout the interview. She noted a stronger level of accountability for student advisement as expected by the leadership team and described these expectations. Anne described the accountability feeling, "It is much more important for students to pick a pathway in the 9th or 10th grade. For most pathways that is the only way they're going to be a completer. We're trying to advise kids much more." She also referenced the need for more professional development focused on small group student advisement.

The need for additional information provided to students was another area of change for counselors. Anne discussed her experience as a student at Aqua High School. She claimed her student experience would have been enhanced if she had the framework of career pathways. She indicated that student advisement and additional information would have helped her make better career decisions. Anne shared:

Well, when I think back to when I was in high school and that was a long time ago. I'm thirty-five. But, you know, there was no – I went to high school here in Aqua but there was no guidance. You know I don't know if there wasn't a push for counselor or if our counselor just didn't have time to do it, because we had one counselor. But, you know,

we were never advised. I don't even know how I graduated because I don't remember him ever talking about how many credits you need – needed to graduate or anything and, you know, there weren't – Well, I guess there were CT – maybe there weren't. I don't know. You know we had yearbook and P.E. but I mean the push wasn't there at all. And so when I compare when I was in high school to now, you know, we do so much or try to do so much to advise our kids and not just the students but the parents also.

Anne confirmed that career pathways provide direction for students. The connection to a career passion helps students understand the relevance of education.

The researcher identified gaps in information provided through the tour observation of the school, common areas, and career pathway classrooms. While most classrooms had career pathway information, some classrooms did not have print materials relative to career pathways. Halls had limited print material on career pathways posted throughout the school with most information provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher could not identify, however, a specific plan of action to have pathways branded throughout the school.

Dual Enrollment was highlighted throughout the interview. Aqua High School uses dual enrollment as a key counseling practice to expand the availability of career pathways for students. Key partnerships have been formed with two college partners. Anne has used these partnerships to allow students to complete pathways and begin new pathways. Anne emphasized dual enrollment throughout the interview and identified it as one of her passions. She stressed:

We have a great dual enrollment program. We have around thirty students that go to Gordon -- and we actually provide a bus for them -- and then we have around twenty students that go to Southern Crescent. Those programs have grown substantially since I've been here and so that's -- One of my passions, though, is dual enrollment.

She further acknowledged that dual enrollment was a goal for the high school. In doing so, Anne also declared that informing students about career pathways helped students make good decisions about dual enrollment. She stated, “We also do a brief overview of dual enrollment,

too, because we want to go ahead and start plugging that into their minds, you know, and letting them know that is an option.”

Anne also confirmed the increased parental engagement as a result of career pathway implementation. She identified the increase in communication to parents and the need to help parents become more informed. Anne stated:

In January we'll have two dual enrollment information nights. One will be on the campus of Gordon, and one will be on the campus of Southern Crescent. And so that's something we always do and that's for the students and the parents.”

Anne also stressed the escalation of conversations with parents about career pathways. She felt that parents, especially of 9th grade students, were typically more informed. She recounted:

Then usually either that same day in the evening or later that week we have a parent night where the students come here with their parents and we again go over the registration form with the parents and then advise the parents about pathways and what pathways we offer here.

A review of documents confirmed information within the parent nights included conversations about career pathways and dual enrollment. Anne further claimed that parent information was critical because of the number of parents who did not graduate from high school. She stated:

You know we provide documents like this on our website so that the parents can see it because we want to educate our parents also. A lot of our parents have not – they're not college graduates and we have parents who didn't graduate from high school also. And so we try to produce documents, advisement documents that are easy for them to understand also, you know, so that they can help their students.

She agreed that a positive aspect of career pathways was parent engagement. Furthermore, Anne acknowledged how a focus on parent engagement was new to the counselors.

In relation to the impact of Georgia's College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI), Anne relayed some anxiety and tension regarding the accountability felt from administrators about the career pathways' indicator scores. She indicated there was more pressure placed on counselors to schedule and advise students to become career pathway completers. The focus for

career pathway completers was explained by Anne, “We’re definitely more accountable now as far as changing schedules goes and advising students because of course we want to have the highest score possible.” Anne further described that the stress of the accountability hindered helping students explore career pathways. She illustrated:

The only critical thing I can say about us being held as accountable for the number of pathway completers is that some students they don’t know which pathway they want to pursue and in one way I feel like they should be able to experiment in high school. You know most college students change their major I think -- the last I heard was seven times before they graduate and those are adults. So, now, we’re expecting kids at a very young age to pick a pathway and to stick with it, and a part of me thinks they should be able to experiment.

She questioned the emphasis on 100% of students becoming career pathway completers. Ann offered the suggestion of better identifying a more reasonable percentage which would allow counselors the flexibility to help students make better career decisions.

Data indicated changes to counseling decisions and practices. These changes included the need for a strong collaboration between the high school counselor and the middle school counselor. Counseling practices also shifted in focus by providing more awareness information and personalized advisement to assist students in making better decisions and choices. New resources and programs also added to the changes in practices conducted by high school counselors. Parent engagement also requires strategic attention by the high school counselors. Overall, Anne saw multiple changes in her practices and counseling decisions.

Barriers to Career Pathway Implementation

The researcher identified potential barriers in the areas of students, school and district, and local workforce environment at both the local and state level. The barriers identified in this section are ones which the participants had to determine solutions to overcome.

Anne shared multiple barriers relative to the direct and indirect impact on students. The primary barrier related to students being mature enough to understand the content of career

pathways. Anne pointed out that many students were too young to pick a pathway. She also stressed that students often change their mind. She stated:

The problem that I see with students being pathway completers is that they're so young to pick a pathway that oftentimes they change their mind and that can be a barrier to them being a pathway completer you know – know because we're asking them – in order for them to be a pathway completer they have to choose their pathway by tenth grade so that they can have the three years. I mean they just have so many ideas in their head at that point you know.

She also emphasized that students transitioning to high school from middle school do not understand the pathways. Anne acknowledged, “Our CTAE Director usually goes and, you know, tells them what pathways we offer, you know, and we explain how pathways work because that's a concept that they don't really understand at middle-school level.” Finally, Anne noted that students are confused with the sequencing of pathways. She described the confusion which exists and emphasized that students are not accustomed to the completion of a pathway over a three year period. She described, “You know if they had completed two classes in a pathway they would know that, you know, because they get confused on sequences.”

The lack of an opportunity for exploring career pathways resonated as a potential barrier. Anne highlighted that students need room in their schedule for awareness and exploration. Anne said, “I always run into with students who are focused in one area and they take a class in that pathway in ninth grade but then they find out that they're not into it.” This phenomenon creates barriers for students who wish to complete a pathway. Students are limited to their future offerings which create more pressure to stay on track. Anne explained, “Most of the time it's the students who are off track, who are struggling to graduate. They may try one pathway and not be interested and they may not find a pathway that they can connect to.”

Anne also identified peer influence as a barrier to career pathway completion. Anne admitted:

Their friends! You know we're in such a small rural area that lots of times they don't see the big picture and they're not exposed to a lot of careers. You know they know that their best friend's mom's a nurse and their other best friend's mom's a teacher and so sometimes they think those are the only options and there are so many things out there.

Within this context is also the barrier of students not being exposed to a variety of career options. Aqua County is limited in the workforce opportunities available. Therefore, as Anne explained, "You know, lots of time in our community I think kids – their exposure is so low to everything that's out there and that's a barrier." Anne stressed students need resources to further their understanding of potential career pathways which might match their aptitude and abilities, and she described the school's use of GACollege411 as a strategy to help with career pathway exploration.

The researcher determined that the school and school district can create barriers to career pathway implementation. Personnel and staff can become barriers for pathway implementation. High school counselors are assigned many duties and responsibilities. Testing administration and special education requirements were identified by Anne as potential barriers to career pathway implementation. Anne admitted:

In the past we've always had so much to do with testing. You know this year we don't have the graduation testing anymore, but it's always been a huge burden for our department to handle all the testing and so that's taken a lot of our time. Also, we handle 504s and so that can be very time consuming.

Anne further underscored the time constraints of counselors by answering affirmative to the question, "Does that time factor affect how much focus you can actually put on career pathways?" Research indicated that high school counselors feel marginalized in performing their jobs as counselors. Again, Anne affirmed by agreeing with the statement, "counselors don't feel like they really get to do their job of counseling." Anne also acknowledged that counseling departments have been short staffed throughout the recent recession. She stated, "No, and a part of that is because we've been so short staffed the last few years. You know I knew that wasn't –

We didn't have the time to devote to something like that." Anne supported the fact that time, counselor to student ratios, and additional responsibilities created barriers for implementation of school-based programs such as Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Potential barriers related to other resources also contributed the fidelity of career pathways' implementation. Scheduling was identified as an issue. Anne reported, "And then like we just talked about another barrier is scheduling with our STEM and so, you know, we just do the best we can to try to accommodate as many students as possible." Smaller schools such as Aqua High School created potential barriers for career pathways. Anne agreed to the statement, "I've always felt like that the smaller the school system the more challenges to get Pathway completers unless you only offered a minimum number of pathways and all students were required to take only the pathways offered." Funding also affects the number of career pathways offered by a school. Anne admitted, "And let me tell you one of our barriers. We used to have an automotive program and we don't have that program any longer because of funding or outdated equipment. I think they said it was because of funding."

Teachers can pose potential barriers for implementation of career pathways. Anne described the influence teachers have on enrollment as issues of perception and ownership. For example, Anne questioned the understanding teachers have about career pathways. She reported:

You know we've talked to them about pathways; our administration has talked to them about Pathways, but I don't know how much they encourage students to pursue a pathway. I don't know that they ever answer questions about pathways, you know, aside from our CTAE and our Fine Arts teachers.

Anne also explained that teachers are more concerned with their own technical content. She viewed this as an ownership issue. She shared:

I think high school teachers often times – from what I've seen – they're kind of their own island and they're so into their own content that I think a lot of times they miss the big picture, you know, and especially like when I think about math and science. You know they're just interested in their content and students passing their content.

Teachers may be creating unintentional barriers based on their perceived value of career pathways. However, the barrier may be more intentional due to teachers being very protective of their environment.

The self-efficacy of the counselor regarding career pathway implementation was examined by the researcher. Anne was confident in her ability to implement career pathways though she recognized she was probably not at the top of counselors in the state. She struggled with knowing what she would benefit from regarding career pathway professional development. She did report that webinars about student advisement would provide her relevant information to assist with future implementation.

A final barrier which exists is related to the local connection of the school and counselor to work force development strategies. Aqua High School is limited in local job opportunities. Anne described the limited opportunities for students to understand career options available for them. Anne claimed, “Our workforce here in Aqua County? We do not have much industry at all!” She further acknowledged that Aqua County is a bedroom community, elaborating that, “We have a lot of – I mean most of our parents that work do not work in this county. They commute somewhere.”

However, Anne was not aware of a local community workforce readiness plan, and she confirmed, “No, I’m not aware of that.” She further admitted to not working with the Chamber of Commerce with the exception of a job shadowing program. However, students in job shadowing programs typically have to go out of Aqua County for job shadowing opportunities. She elaborated:

When we do the job shadowing a lot of those students will go out of county. You know they’ll go to Griffin or Thomaston to do the job shadowing because there’s nothing here. You know we don’t have a hospital. I think there are a couple of factories but, you know, there’s really not a lot for them to choose from. We don’t have a vet’s office. You know

I was just trying to think about the things that they like to do. There's one pediatrician office and one doctor office but that's really – you know there's not a lot. We have a grocery store!

The lack of job opportunities serves as a barrier to helping students realize their career passions.

The barrier may be further impacted by the minimal involvement of the counselor with the local chamber of commerce and work force readiness initiative.

Case Summary II

Jamie Paul – Partner High School

Jamie was the second participant interviewed. Passionate about career and technical education with 15 years' experience as a high school counselor, she was also recently promoted to a district level Work Based Learning position. The researcher unquestionably identified that Partner High School was focused on implementing career pathways with a high degree of fidelity. Jamie was able to explain the purpose of career pathways and their connection to workforce development. The researcher appreciated her desire to be the local expert about career pathways and primary communicator about career pathways with other counselors.

Jamie had deep insight into the benefits of career pathways for students. Her strong feelings about the positive impacts surpassed concerns about the administrative hurdles that some of her colleagues have endured for successful implementation. Jamie provided much information about how career pathways help students make connections and keep them engaged in school.

Jamie did identify the lack of timeliness in communication about changes from GADOE as the biggest anxiety in the counselors' work in implementing the pathways. She also shared some frustration with the lack of attention given to the counseling plan. She noted concerns about the need for administrators to review the counseling plan to ensure accuracy and

usefulness. Jamie was, however, very excited about the pathways and committed to being the messenger for the future development of career pathways.

The career development goal for her school included career pathways. When asked about her school's career development goals, Jamie stated:

Overarching – Our overarching was to make sure that students start career planning early, in the ninth grade. The goal was that they start before they came from middle school to the high school, but definitely to start thinking about what their plans were: “What do you want to do?”

Jamie acknowledged frustration with the development of the local counseling plan. Even though a plan from past years existed, she indicated that the counseling staff didn't expend much effort in updating and modifying the plan on an annual basis because of the lack of input and review by administrators. The researcher determined that high school counselors at Partner High School felt marginalized in their efforts to develop an annual counseling plan.

Perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System

Jamie was more than positive about career pathways. As head counselor for Partner High School, Jamie had created a strong sense of urgency for implementing career pathways. The researcher determined through interviews, observation and document analysis that Jamie had created a high degree of expectation for career pathway implementation. She was positive about the impact career pathways could have on students. To summarize her feelings about the direction career pathways provide students, Jamie shared a story of one classmate:

Her momma told her she needed to major in education because she could always find a job, so that's what she did. During that time, the internship happened the last year. So she went through three years of taking all these classes and she went out and did that internship and she realized this was not for me. Now, presently, I don't think she's worked a day in education because when she left school she went and got a job at what was then Nation's Bank. I think Bank of America, Wachovia, or --- somebody bought them out but she got – loved it, ended up going back to school to get her degree in – her MBA and she has done something in business ever since. But if she had taken education classes in high school – because I have kids out right now in work-based learning, doing

an internship over at the elementary school. If she had done that in high school, she could have told her momma, “No, no, this is not for me. Let me try something else.”

The researcher determined that Jamie was deeply engaged in the work of career pathways. The observation demonstrated a strong collaboration with administrators, counselors, and career and technical teachers. Students also demonstrated a connection to Jamie and career pathways.

Jamie felt that the implementation of career pathways benefited students and positively impacted the culture of the school.

She felt like the counseling plan needed a higher level of review and scrutiny, especially given the importance of career pathways in the counseling plan in relation to the counselors’ roles as testing coordinators and proctors. A review of jobs and responsibilities of high school counselors aligned with a good counseling plan might strengthen career guidance responsibilities. She explained:

But as far as program-wise it is very beneficial and to administrators to have that kind of feedback because we have so many counselors in the county that they do testing. I was just at one school the other day and we had Georgia Milestones testing and they were out proctoring tests and they also do hall duty.

With the exception of the counseling plan not being reviewed and feedback not provided to counselors, Jamie felt that appropriate strategies were in place to enhance career pathway implementation.

Jamie described multiple positive perspectives about her work with career pathways and the impact on students. The most positive impact was helping students see the end goal as Jamie explained through this example:

We had the German Consulate to come and speak at Partner High School and one of the things that they said was the difference between German kids and American kids is when you ask them where they’re going, what are they are plans after high school? A German kid will say, “I’m planning to be an engineer. I’m planning to be a doctor.” And an American kid will say, “I’m going to Georgia. I’m going to Georgia Tech.” That is not your end result. That is your step to get to what you want you’re planning to do. But a

lot of our kids don't see past that middle step and so what I – I guess what I feel is that I think the Pathways are now helping the kids to see the end goal now.

A student identifying an end goal was an encouragement for students to continue a pathway to a career. Jamie asserted, "I think that Pathways actually gave some reinforcement to some of the things that we as counselors have already been saying are some credibility to the fact that we have always encouraged kids to continue in that pathway." She also pointed out that students begin to see the progression of their work.

Jamie continued to emphasize the importance of career pathways in helping students explore courses/pathways which connect to their interests. She indicated that exploration of career pathways kept students encouraged:

The career tech classes were everything from auto shop, the mechanic side and the body shop; the welding, the engineering, architecture; the CAD, where they were actually doing the computerized – graphic design, culinary. I mean and kids were very much encouraged, all of them. So that is where my first experience was, that is when I really knew that counselors and career tech worked hand in hand.

Jamie indicated that the diversity of career pathway offerings was beneficial for students. The researcher determined that she was excited about the additional resources career pathways provide to students to keep them engaged in school. She also identified the connection to academics as a positive experience student's encounter. She claimed, "I think it's important because it helps the students see the connection between what they're doing in their English, math, and science classes. More than receiving a diploma – but how those classes actually relate to future careers."

With regard to her work, Jamie emphasized students' interest in and engagement with career pathways. Evidence of students' interest is reflected in their connection to career interest inventories. Jamie recalled:

What I will tell you that I have seen a difference in the kids who have truly done the activities. When we're doing the classroom guidance, when I am advising them I've had

kids to refer back to “Well, the career inventory said I should do so and so and so.” Parent calls regarding pathways was another piece of evidence showcasing student engagement.

Jamie further described that she felt career pathways were making a difference in the students. However, she noted that hard evidence was not yet available. She also acknowledged students being more aware of career opportunities and explained, “So as far as engagement, sometimes I feel like kids are disengaged because they lack of knowledge of the opportunities.”

Jamie also explained the significance beyond engagement and exploration when students complete pathways. The end result for many students includes better decision making, industry certifications, and advanced post-secondary educational opportunities. Jamie noted, “There was a career center where kids were very much encouraged to go over. They got CAD certifications, internships. We had kids going to Disney over the summer to do internships. They ended up with welding certifications.” Jamie understood the connection between career pathways and post-secondary education but indicated dual enrollment was not a part of the career pathways’ offerings at Partner High School.

Jamie’s positive perspectives were also impacted by her feelings that career pathways had on the school culture. She definitely felt that career pathway implementation had improved the relationships between counselors and career technical teachers and noted, “You can see more collaboration and counselors being brought to the table as far as input, and as far as career tech, and that was not the case in the past. It was definitely isolation.” She further explained how this increase in collaboration is improving conversations between counselors and teachers. Jamie conveyed, “So we’re now having some serious conversations about changes, that in this county you couldn’t have before, which I think is a great thing.”

Implementing career pathways provided direction to improve the relationships among school and district personnel. Jamie shared how new leadership was instrumental in bringing

positive change to the implementation of career pathways. She also pointed out the improved relationship between counselors and the CTAE Director. As a result of new leadership and improved relationships, more focus has been placed on expanding career pathway offerings which will engage more students in career pathways. Jamie emphasized, “Because they wanted the stuff right at the school and – It’s definitely who you have in certain positions that makes a difference.”

The overall culture of the school was changing due to the urgency leadership was placing on career pathway implementation. Jamie stated:

There’s been more urgency. Now, should we have been doing this? Hey, two years ago I went to the CCRPI meeting -- and I knew this was coming. But now everybody is just trying to figure out CCRPI. Once that first year rolled out, everybody’s trying to figure out how they can earn points for career pathways. “Why aren’t they in Pathways? Because you don’t offer Pathways.” That has changed! They were offering classes that they wanted to teach in their area that wasn’t necessarily a pathway. Our CTAE Director has changed that.

She further acknowledged that Georgia College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI) created the urgency. Nevertheless, she promoted the positive aspects of CCRPI. She emphasized that CCRPI advanced the conversations about career pathways which led to more collaboration. For example, Jamie stressed, “This year we piloted collaborative lessons to make sure students were in the English class, the science teacher’s class, and the career tech class because they were trying to do some activities that were in collaboration with each other.” However, she noted the accountability of the CCRPI enhanced career pathway collaboration and highlighted CTAE programs.

The implementation and addition of career pathways was also increasing a school wide urgency promoting student choice and improving communication. The researcher noted some gaps in communication still exist. However, there is more collaboration among counselors, career tech directors, department chairs and even teachers than there was before the

implementation of pathways. There are still some awareness, communications, and terminology aspects that need to be addressed in order to optimize implementation fidelity.

Jamie was also excited to see that counselors had higher expectations and more resources for career counseling as a result of the implementation. She stated, “Career Pathways and BRIDGE has helped, too, because I felt like things needed to be done differently. That then gave me the vehicle to say, “They expect us to do this.” Jamie was also positive about the connection between career pathways and BRIDGE:

I keep talking about BRIDGE with the pathway stuff, and the reason I do that because I personally think they go hand in hand. The things that the Bridge Bill is trying to put in place actually helps to ensure that the kids are in a pathway.

There are more resources in Jamie’s tool box for career development. She explained, “So I would say that’s the most impact from a counseling standpoint. We have more tools now to use when working with kids.”

Jamie also described the negative aspects of the recent career pathway changes. Her anxiety level increased as a result of the changes made by GADOE with course numbers and course names. The lack of communication she received impacted her level of apprehension as a counselor. With regard to advising, she asserted, “And very much a frustration level because the time you spent advising the kids and you find out, “Oh, that pathway is gone.” She admitted she felt like the changes were worthy to ensure career pathways were implemented correctly. Throughout the interview, she continued to emphasize the lack of timeliness in releasing new information by GADOE. Jamie recalled, “And the fact that the State Department waits until January and February of every year to change the course numbers after we’ve scheduled students.” She added, “For the first couple of years there were – It seemed like every year that a

course was changing, something was being realigned, and all this happened in February and March.”

Jamie’s experience with career pathway professional development also reflected some negative perspectives. She emphasized taking advantage of professional development; however, most counselors did not attend many of the professional development opportunities provided by the GADOE. She noted, “Counselors -- if you didn’t get out to meetings, then you were not informed. So I think getting the information out and making sure that everybody was involved – knew – was one of the problems with the rollout.”

The researcher sought to better understand Jamie’s reflection about her self-efficacy in implementing Georgia’s Career Pathways. She compared her self-efficacy to a light bulb when she explained:

I guess I’ve always been passionate about it, but the light bulb went off especially last year when we started going around to the businesses and I was hearing the things that they were saying and what they were finding with the kids that actually came to seek employment with them is when it really – the light bulb went off that we were missing an opportunity to really allow kids to do career exploration.

She noted additional contributions to her self-efficacy in the areas of knowledge base, professional development, and experience. She emphasized that counselors need a stronger requirement for professional development.

The researcher identified that the lack of a relationship with school personnel also contributed to anxieties about career pathways. Jamie clarified:

I had a relationship with the department chair of CTAE. She would come in my office, ‘Just giving you a heads-up; so and so is changing.’ But I had other counselors who nobody told them and they just happen to go in the computer and find out that a course name was changed.

Jamie was aware that other counselors in her school system demonstrated negative feelings about the relationship issues within the school. However, she was very positive that career pathways had improved the relationships between CTAE Directors and high school counselors.

Jamie had limited negative experiences with her career pathways' work. Her negative perspectives were primarily formed as a result of the timing of new course names and numbers being released. In addition, she was disappointed with communication and expectations for all counselors to attend professional development. In summary, Jamie's positive perspectives definitely outweighed the negative.

Changes in Counseling Decisions and Practices

Jamie provided insight into the influences affecting the decisions which students make regarding Georgia's Career Pathway System. She highlighted the renewed emphasis on the engagement of middle school counselors and career advisement at the middle grade level. Jamie also described the career development language counselors had to learn and adapt to better influence students in the career pathways decision making. In addition, providing student access to new information was a change in counseling practice. And finally, additional advisement sessions were noted as being a critical change in the counseling practices.

Jamie indicated that the role of counselors in middle school advisement has become much more important in the success of career pathway implementation. Jamie confirmed that a strong working relationship existed with the middle school counselors, and she highlighted strategies used to help students explore career pathways:

What we actually did, they came over and did tours of the elective classes. We've done various things in the past. We've had a video that the Broadcasting kids and the Education kids actually put together. The education interns went around and videotaped segments from each elective. So we did a presentation that way because the eighth graders come over to tour the high school. The last couple of years they've actually got to walk through the classroom to actually see them. We've had the education interns –

and this was kind of an experience with them to be able to get and actual present because they'd rather hear it from the kids.

The researcher identified evidence which indicated the relationship was primarily focused on the eighth to ninth grade transition. The review of documents and the observation revealed that the relationship helped students begin high school with a career plan.

The need for providing additional information to students was a strategy which has taken on greater emphasis through the career pathway implementation. She noted that students needed more awareness material to assist in choosing career pathways. To achieve this, Jamie indicated that the counselors had restructured the guidance office as one strategy for improving information provided to students. She stated, "We have more information about careers in the guidance office so we restructured the guidance office. Our office will become more of a career and guidance center. We provide more information about careers for students to use." Jamie also referenced the use of the Georgia Department of Education website as being useful in assisting students; however she replied that the state website was not always the easiest to navigate. A tour of the office as a part of the observation confirmed the restructuring and the focus of career pathways as a core value of the counseling center. The bulletin boards adjacent to the counseling center also highlighted career pathways.

GAcollege411 is a web-based program supported by the Georgia Student Finance Commission which assists students in making career decisions. Jamie indicated that GAcollege411 had been instrumental in helping students with career pathways. She emphasized that her county is limited in industry and exposure of careers for students. Therefore, GAcollege411 has also been used as a tool to increase student awareness about careers. She stated:

We really advise our kids about GAcademy411 and getting on there and, you know, doing interest inventories and, you know, you can watch short clips of videos of different careers. And so, you know, lots of time in our community I think kids – their exposure is so low to everything that’s out there and that’s a barrier.

Jamie was able to produce documents highlighting GAcademy411 activity sheets used with students. Figure 4.2 is a sample of portion of a GAcademy411 activity sheet.

Figure 4.2

Sample Partner High School GAcademy411 activity sheet

9th Grade GAcademy411 Activity

Students login to their www.GAcademy411.org account using their established username and password

- Select High School Students and BRIDGE
 - Under the heading “As a 9th grader you will need to:” click on **Explore and save three additional career options to your portfolio**
 - Search a career by using one of the three options
 1. Type a specific career name
 2. Use the Career Exploration Tool
 3. Browse career by clicking on one of the lists: Peach State Pathways, Georgia’s HOT Careers, Career Clusters/Program Concentrations or Military Careers
-

Jamie highlighted that student awareness of careers outside the community was a primary focus for her counseling unit. The diversity of pathways helped with the awareness issue; however, Jamie was strategic in identifying activities which helped students determine the most appropriate career pathway.

Jamie noted that career advisement sessions assists students in making career decisions. She indicated that advisement sessions help students explore various careers: “We went from having classroom guidance where we would talk about graduation requirements and reminding them of things that they needed to be doing every year to having a second advisement that was

all about career.” Jamie emphasized that student’s reference and uses their career inventories more than in previous years. Thus, she feels like the career advisement sessions are effective.

She confirmed:

What I will tell you that I have seen a difference in the kids who have truly done the activities. When we’re doing the classroom guidance, when I am advising them I’ve had kids to refer back to ‘Well, the career inventory said I should do so and so’.

Jamie was excited that advisement had moved from graduation advisement to career advisement, noting that this shift was a change from previous advisement sessions with students.

Jamie provided further justification for the increase in classroom guidance identified as a strategic tool used by high school counselors along with other tools such as GACollege411 and career inventories. Recalling the classroom guidance, Jamie noted, “Advisement for the kids. We rotate going through different departments trying to meet with all the kids for advisement, helping them understand, and by doing that it also helped to educate teachers.”

Jamie highlighted that student awareness of careers in the community was a primary focus for the district level administration. She highlighted two strategies undertaken by district level leadership to focus on understanding both career opportunities and student interest. Jamie was very excited about the additional focus on career pathways under the leadership of the current superintendent.

Jamie acknowledged a better understanding of the connection between workforce readiness and career pathways through a current initiative by the superintendent. She explained:

Last year as a counselor I was on a committee with Dr. Scott (pseudonym) and we went around to the businesses. And I’m just going to tell you that probably was one of the most eye-opening, from a counselor’s standpoint, of what we needed to do differently.

She explained that the industry visits helped her understand the job potential available in her own county. Greater than the understanding of the product the company produced was the insight into expectations of employees. She highlighted:

We went around to the businesses and one of the first places we went was Panasonic. We went to Panasonic and one of the things that he said was that they had a hundred and fifty job openings that they couldn't fill. It's not that our kids aren't intelligent, but they don't want their work ethics. The work ethic isn't what they want there. So they look elsewhere to fill the position because they need kids that are going to come in and problem-solve, not just do what they know how to do because they have no skills, but when they come up against a problem, figure out what -- how to fix it and move on instead of coming to a supervisor and saying, "I have this problem," and asking for somebody else to help them figure out how to solve it. Just because you have days that you can take doesn't mean that you should take them off.

The superintendent's initiative confirmed the importance of district level leadership in support of career pathways. Jamie admitted the urgency changed with new leadership and their engagement helped foster changes in counselor practices.

Jamie highlighted the current development of a student interest survey as the second initiative to help bring local awareness of career pathways. She explained the challenges of helping local schools identify appropriate pathways based on student interest, and she underscored the complacency of the school administration to continue with previous offerings. Jamie admitted, "What the kids say that they're interested in during scheduling time is based on what we're offering, not always based on what they truly are interested in." She further explained confusion about pathway terminology between students and industry. Jamie shared:

The goal is -- It just got approved by the county, not this past board meeting, this past Monday but the Monday before break, I think -- to go and survey the kids with what their career interest is. The county did kind of a survey last year. It was called Fayette Visioning. But the questions weren't -- some of them were a little confusing. Let me tell you why. What the businesses call one thing, the Pathway's call something different, and so because of the terminology -- and that's one thing that we talked about that we have to be very careful with doing.

Jamie expressed that a disconnect exists between career pathway expectations in school and expectations in the workforce community. She again emphasized the importance of district level leadership in changing the conversation which in providing direction for changing counselor practice.

The researcher confirmed that information provided through the tour observation of the school, common area, and career pathway classrooms aligned with changes in practice and conversation. While most classrooms had career pathway information, they also identified skills required for successful employment. School corridors had limited print material on career pathways posted throughout the school. However, counseling bulletin boards, counseling centers, and classroom bulletin boards were filled with career pathway information. All CTAE classrooms validated that Jamie's counseling practices aligned with her passion and interview. Much of the information on flyers and posters was provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher was able to identify a specific plan of action to have pathways branded throughout the school.

Dual enrollment was minimized throughout the data collection process. Partner High School does not use dual enrollment as a key counseling practice for expanding the availability of career pathways to students. Jamie further acknowledged that providing dual enrollment information was important for the school. She clarified, "We did that every year because we have kids that were interested in dual enrollment – We had a meeting for dual enrollment." However, currently no career pathway dual enrollment exists for Partner High School. Jamie also confirmed parental engagement through increased communication as a positive aspect of career pathway implementation. However, she described situations when parents did not completely understand the goal of career pathways and featured the following example:

I had a parent one day -- and this was when I was at Jonesboro -- told me that she wanted her child out of Construction. You know I asked, "Why?" "Well, he's going off to college." I said, "Well, if I'm not mistaken when I met with him, he wants to be an architect," and she said, "Yes," and I said, "That's the closest we have to what he wants to do." At least he can get down and start. I mean granted, he wants to do the plans that lead to this but what better to know how the plans should look if you can actually do the hands-on side. She looked at me. I said, "So the construction class just isn't for the kids who aren't planning to go off to school," and she sat back and she thought about it. But

it's getting the community to understand and get beyond the stigma of if you're in a career tech class that means that you're not college bound.

She further explained the stigma of vocational education and the importance of creating a stronger awareness through the marketing of career pathways.

A final analysis of the case indicated changes to counseling decisions and practices which included the need for strong collaboration between the high school counselor and the middle school counselor. Counseling practices also shifted in focus by providing more awareness information and career advisement to assist students in making better decisions and choices. New ways to provide career pathway information also added to the changes in practices conducted by high school counselors. District level leadership assisted in creating a better understanding of the impact of career pathways. Also, district level leadership increased the urgency and importance of the conversation about career pathways. Overall, Jamie saw multiple changes in her practices and counseling decisions. Ultimately, she was very excited that the focus was on helping students achieve career pathway success.

Barriers to Career Pathway Implementation

The researcher identified potential barriers in the areas of the students, the school, the district, and professional development at both the local and state level. The barriers identified in this section are ones which the participant was challenged with overcoming.

Jamie shared multiple barriers relative to the impact on students. The primary barrier for students was being able to choose a career pathway with the limited number of career pathway offerings in a high school. She emphasized that schools have resource limitations which prevent the offerings of certain career pathways. Jamie expounded:

One of the struggles I feel with that is a student may – you may go through all of this in the eighth grade as far as these are what the pathways are; what are you interested in? And then they go to high school to actual pursue it. One, they get frustrated if their choice is not an option but the school can't for all of them, so there's a limit there. I think

capacity at the schools is where some of the – and, too, making teachers understand that it's not about you teaching what you necessarily like to teach but what the kids want that will help for them to actually complete a pathway.

Jamie described the limited career pathway choices as opportunities to create partnerships for expanded pathway offerings. Also, she explained that teacher awareness and understanding of career pathways can help teachers embrace the idea of teaching multiple classes within a pathway.

Jamie also noted that limited offering by class period of career pathway classes are a hindrance for students. She stressed the need for expanding offerings:

Students didn't always have the opportunity to take a career tech class and at least make a pathway. They would have to choose between band and career pathways. 'I want to stay in band but I really want this' - because it was either Fine Arts and Foreign Language or Foreign Language and Career Tech.

Jamie described how transitioning Partner High School to a seven period day provided more opportunities for students to choose career pathways. She also reported that the shift minimized the internal conflicts students had when making choices between career pathways and fine arts or foreign language elective courses.

She also emphasized that employers often criticize that students do not understand and know basic work ethic skills. The lack of these skills typically prevents students from enrolling in internships with local employers. Jamie acknowledged:

We went to Panasonic and one of the things that the company representative said was that they had a hundred and fifty job openings that they couldn't fill. It's not that our kids aren't intelligent. They said our kids don't have work ethics. So they look elsewhere to fill the position because they need kids that are going to come in and problem-solve, not just do what they know how to do because they don't have any skills.

Finally, Jamie noted that professional skill training is absent from the career pathway training. She conveyed that she felt like that the counselor could do a better job of making students aware of the expectations of business and industry. She admitted, "So I realize that counselors could do

a whole lot more. We talk with those kids one-on-one about their plans; counselors could be doing things differently to ensure students are little better prepared.”

The researcher determined that the school and school district, to include personnel and staff, create barriers to career pathway implementation. High school counselors are assigned many and varied duties and responsibilities with testing administration considered a primary barrier. She admitted:

I feel for other counselors who, you know, spend their whole first semester testing. Because that can definitely happen with the graduation testing, writing test, and PSAT. Then you turn around and re-test again and then the end-of-course test. You can literally spend a good bit of your time administering test.

She further underscored the time constraints of counselors by reiterating their other assigned duties. She reported, “I was just at one school the other day and we had Milestones testing and they were out proctoring tests and they also do hall duty.”

Potential barriers in relation to other school-based resources also took away from the fidelity of career pathways’ implementation. Scheduling for third level courses was identified as an issue. Jamie reported, “That third level is only offered one period and if it’s during the time that they’re taking another class, then it becomes scheduling and the kids have to, you know, choose.” Individual schools such as Partner High School have more challenges with teacher capacity to maximize career pathway completers. Jamie asserted, “A lot of them end up in a pathway they don’t want because they couldn’t get in the pathway they wanted. So the teacher capacity at the schools is – It’s a barrier as well.” She also stated, “I think capacity at the schools is an issue. Making teachers understand that it is not about teaching what you necessarily like to teach but what the kids want that will help for them to actually complete a pathway.”

Jamie acknowledged that the lack of relationships among teacher, counselors and administrators created barriers for successful career pathway implementation. She shared the potential for friction between career tech teachers and counselors and shared a conflict between departments within a school, “There was a career center there at EL Campbell High School, but it was not the same. There was definitely a divide.” Anne also described an example of the need for CTAE teachers to be in close collaboration with counselors, and she emphasized, “So you’ve got to get the message to the people who are actually scheduling students. I mean the CTAE teachers may know about the changes but they don’t put those new course numbers in the computer.”

Jamie also indicated that counselors lacked awareness of career pathways. She underscored, “Well, I’ll start off with saying I think that not every counselor is aware, or fully aware, of other than what they may read on their own.” She agreed that counselors who were aware of career pathways took personal initiative to read and deliver activities which promoted career pathway implementation. However, she indicated neither the state nor local system held counselors accountable for learning about career pathways. She claimed, “No real teeth were initially put in it so people – every school was kind of doing their own version of what they felt meant accountability and to get the kids to do it.”

Jamie acknowledged that better communication would eliminate some of the barriers of career pathway implementation. She also highlighted the challenge of information flow from the district to school level:

I think getting the information out and making sure that everybody was involved was one of the problems with the rollout. Even as years have gone on, you know, some things were happenstance or the person didn’t go out or their person at the county wasn’t abreast to what was going on, then there was some lag in what’s being carried out.

Jamie alluded that a more strategic plan and process for information was needed. She recognized the lack of leadership in helping local schools implement career pathways and recalled:

Some of the stuff I was aware of but some of it was happenstance. Some of it came from somebody in another county who was talking about going places. I can't say that I wasn't a hundred percent aware of things. What I can say, it was not necessarily encouraged.

Jamie highlighted the importance of awareness and education about career pathways. She also clarified the need for a communication plan which involved multiple stakeholders including parents. She reported, "So I think that's where some of the negative engagement has happened because they weren't aware, and they weren't aware that it was for their type (college bound) of student." However, she stressed that her passion motivated her to reach out and create an environment and culture for successful career pathway communication.

A final barrier related to the local connection of the school and counselor to professional development strategies. Jamie claimed that the allocation of school level resources impeded professional development opportunities. She reported, "And in a county that at one point had the resources to be able to send people wherever – you know when this first rolled out there could have been definitely some different things being done." Jamie also indicated that she had to personally stay abreast of professional development opportunities. She further questioned the motivation of other high school counselors to do the same. She stressed, "I personally - especially once I became department chair - tried to stay abreast of changes and what was going on and asking questions. I'm not sure whether everybody had that same motivation." In the end, Jamie questioned whether or not the counseling profession had the motivation to reach out and learn about career pathway implementation.

Jamie indicated that Partner County has many opportunities for jobs and careers. She felt counselors as a whole did not understand the different possibilities for students. She was aware of workforce initiatives and had personally participated in many activities with local business

and industry. She stated that the potential barrier within workforce development was the difference in language. Jamie accentuated, “What the businesses call one thing, the Pathways call something different! Because of the terminology difference we have to be very careful when conducting joint activities.”

Finally, a separation continues to exist between the parent’s ideas of a career pathway and compared to vocational school. She admitted that parents need further explanation to understand the difference and thus allow their child to participate in a career pathway. Jamie highlighted a conversation with a parent, “I had a parent one day told me that she wanted her child out of construction. You know I asked, “Why?” ‘Well, he’s going off to college.’” Jamie further admitted, “I had some of those same struggles when I came to Pine Ridge High School (Pseudonym) making parents understand and students understand.”

Case Summary III

Pam Bennett – Pine Street High School

Pam was the third participant interviewed. Pam had very positive feelings about career and technical education that were impacted by her mentorship by a local Career Technical Director. Pam stated, “Because of her, that’s how I was able to see the connection between college and career readiness and the CTE pathways that we were offering in the school.” She had 13 years’ experience in education with 5 years as a high school counselor and a current status as the Freshman Academy counselor. The researcher identified that Pine Street High School offers numerous career pathways and recently formed career academies resulting from a School Improvement Process Grant. Pam was very knowledgeable of career pathways and was able to state the purpose and sequence of career pathways.

The career development goal for Pam's school included career pathways. When asked about the career development goals, Pam stated, "The annual counseling plan is an area of growth. Typically, what we have to do, we map out a calendar of days that need to – we know we have to do testing." While the annual counseling centered on testing, Pam asserted that her career goal was for all students to have a game plan which she stressed multiple times throughout the data collection process.

The researcher found Pam to be very passionate about helping young people. Her intense focus included helping students develop a career plan for their future to include a backup plan. Pam really wanted to help students understand the connection between their education and career. In a direct and straightforward manner, she wanted students to understand career pathways as a means to achieve their goals, to include early graduation as applicable. The researcher noted that Pam's perspective was shaped by her optimism about the impact of career pathways on student engagement and potential internships and apprenticeships.

The researcher determined that Pam was somewhat separated from the remaining counselors due to her position as the freshman counselor. The separation was from both a cultural as well as physical perspective. The results from data collections were also limited based on her concentration on the ninth grade student population; however, her perspective added to the data analysis because of her emphasis on helping students start off with a career pathway.

Perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System

Pam was positive about career pathways and the potential long term benefit of students having a "game plan". As freshman counselor for Pine Street High School, Pam had strong positive feelings about having all students engaged in a career pathway. The researcher

determined through interviews, observation and document analysis that Pam wanted students to have a game plan and that career pathways served as a framework for development of program of studies. She was positive about the impact of career pathways on students. She emotionally recounted the story of one of her students who received Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification:

There was a young lady that -- she had a baby. Matter of fact she's in the program now. She calls me Aunty Bennett. She had her baby earlier this semester, and I talked to her last year when I found out. When she told me she was pregnant, I said, "Well, baby, you know, I don't know what's in the future for you because I don't know what you and your mom are going to decide to do, but you're in this program." She said, "I know," and she had a game plan. She said, "Ms. Bennett, I know I'm pregnant and I know I have to take care of my child and, you know, me and his father, we're still together, but I know if I get in this program next year then I'll be able to graduate and at least I'll be able to get a job, knowing that." I said, "Okay, well, you have a game plan."

The researcher determined that Pam was engaged in the work of career pathways. The observation validated a diverse offering of career pathway; however, the branding of pathways was not well represented in the school. Some posters were evident, but the high school building was not pervasively populated with career pathway information. The researcher did not gain a sense of career pathways being a part of the total high school culture. Pam felt that the implementation of career pathways benefited students and served as a framework for a career plan.

Pam felt like the counseling plan was an area of growth. Even though career pathways are part of her daily work, and as a result, she felt that her focus on career pathways is impeded by the testing duties expected of counselors as coordinators and proctors. She explained, "We know we do testing several times a year and then from there we map out the remaining work-- We all sit down with our calendars and then we map out what we're going to do." With the exception of the annual counseling plan not being developed, the researcher felt that appropriate strategies were in place to enhance career pathway implementation.

Pam described multiple positive perspectives about her work with career pathways based on the positive impact on students. She noted the most positive impact of career pathways was helping students create a game plan. Pam shared her message to students:

I need you to have a game plan because at some point you're going to leave this freshman academy and when you leave here you're going to choose a pathway that you are going to follow. Some of you all will go on to college, some of you all may go to a technical school; some, this may be it. But if this is it for you, I need for you to have a game plan." So that's why I like the career aspect.

A career pathway is equivalent to mapping out a plan. Pam asserted, "So I want them to kind of map out, have an idea." She also pointed out that students can use a career pathway as a backup plan.

Pam emphasizes the importance of career pathways in helping students connect academic and career courses. She indicated that the connection of career and academic courses helps students find relevance in school. She explained:

And so that's just kind of – It needs to tie together so I try to help them tie it together because we have an issue with ninth graders not understanding credits, so that's a struggle, and that's the first lesson I do with them is trying to teach them about credits and then I show them how to tie it in to the GPA and try to keep – keep them in mind, like "Hey, if you want to do these things, if these are your career goals, then you need to be doing this, this, this and this right now.

Pam noted the challenge in students understanding the need to stay on track for graduation. She explained that getting off track limits their career options. Pam also confirmed that career pathways assists with students graduating from high school. She stressed, "That is the goal. It's a passion because I realize the community in which I work and a lot of students if they would stay on track they're more likely to graduate from high school." Pam further acknowledged that career pathways assist students in engaging with more fully with their academic studies. And finally, she described the career pathways to career connection by recounting comments from a home school student enrolling in a healthcare career pathway, "Now I know I want to go into the

medical field and it's because I had the opportunity to do it here that I know what I want to do with my future."

Pam indicated that the recent changes made by Georgia Department of Education increased the diversity of career pathway offerings. She also highlighted that these changes were beneficial for students. She described the flexibility of career pathways:

I think that it allows for more flexibility with offering more Pathway completers so where before when you compare them in some areas the first class is the same but the second class would differ for some pathways and they had a different third year. Now, it's the same first two classes and then its different third year classes to complete the pathway, which I think that's a good idea because you can kind of finish more kids that way.

The changes provided the opportunity for students to explore and engage in multiple pathways.

The new career pathways also allowed students to choose careers not understood by most counselors. Pam featured:

I had one child like the first or second week of school she said some career that she wanted to do. I had never heard of it and I was like, "You know that at fourteen?" She said, "Yeah." It was something, biotechnological-something-another. I was like, "Really?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "You made my day."

Students are being provided choices in career pathways that provide a level of engagement in their academics and their future careers.

Pam explained that career pathways influenced students' interest in and connection to the workforce by providing students access to internships and apprenticeships, Pam recalled:

I was, I was in a rural community but – It's like forty-five minutes away from Newport, Virginia, where they have the shipyard, and so if kids took my father-in-laws construction program and they were successful and had a good GPA, they could apply to the shipyard and start off making in their apprentice school, like eighteen, fifty an hour, in school at eighteen-years-old and, you know, having a Title I school that's a lot of money. That's a lot of money for anybody right now but – eighteen, fifty an hour and you're getting training and when you finish training you have a decent career that can be self-sustaining.

Pam further described that career pathways were making a difference to students. She repeated throughout the interview the importance that students have a “game plan” to include career pathways.

Pam also explained the value to students in completing pathways to earn industry credentials. The end results for many students include better decision making, industry certifications and advanced post-secondary education opportunities. Pam noted:

Well, we’ve had kids that leave here with their CNA and for some kids, you know, that’s – “Ms. Bennett, I just want to be a CNA.” Which is fine, you can go and you can have a career or work in a doctor’s office or a hospital, if that’s what you want to do.

Pam also understood the connection between career pathways and post-secondary education. However, she indicated that dual enrollment was not a part of the career pathways’ offerings at Pine Street High School.

Pam’s perspective was directly related to her knowledge and experience of working with career pathways. She was knowledgeable about career pathways with an understanding of how academic and foreign languages pathways were included in the overall structure. She stated:

I want to say in Georgia there may be seventeen. I think there’s an additional Energy Pathway here. But there are different pathways there. They have different classes that go with them and then out of that at the school level there are different areas that the kids can go into.

She was well versed in the language and went on to explain the inclusion of academic pathways.

Pam explained, “Now, I know the state has said we can do like academic pathways and world language.” The requirement for a career pathway through state or local requirements was identified as a need by counselors. Pam asserted that counselors need a requirement to ensure that students became career pathway completers. She also acknowledged the conversations among counselors were positive as a result of implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System. She stated, “I think there has always been conversation about kids being pathway

completers, but I think with us shifting – when we shifted to career academies, I think that made the conversation come up more.”

Pam mentioned the impact career pathways have on school culture and workforce readiness. From her previous position at a Title I school, she shared success stories highlighting how students were engaged in their classes by having an identified career pathway. However, again she highlighted stories about students who were successful with career pathways which contributed to their career success. She emphasized, “You’re getting training and when you finish training you have a decent career that can be self-sustaining.” The increased in dual enrollment opportunities was acknowledged by Pam as a positive connection between career preparation and workforce readiness.

The shift to Georgia’s new accountability measure increased the prioritization of career pathways among administrators, counselors, and teachers. Pam noted that the urgency became stronger with the implementation of the College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI). She stated emphatically, “How can I say this? We have a greater sense of urgency as far as making sure students are pathway completers.” She went on to emphasize that CCRPI had everyone more focused on earning points with more career pathway completers. She gave several examples of the school’s principal allowing schedule changes to assist students in becoming career pathway completers. She further confirmed that principals were more understanding of counseling decisions and practices which ultimately increases pathway completers. Pam indicated that Programs of Study, supported by administrators, ensured more career pathway completers.

Pam's perspective was primarily aimed at the difference career pathways are making with students. She shared real stories which provided evidence for implementing career pathways. Though Pam was assigned to ninth graders, she was instrumental in getting students on the right track. She shared her perspective about career pathways in light of her previous experience as an academic teacher:

And I was like "Oh, my goodness." It was such an eye-opener. I never realized the correlation between, yeah the kids are going to class and they're taking these core classes – because I was the core teacher – but then they get to take these CTE classes and if we do XYZ with these CTE classes then all these different opportunities can open up for students. It was like, "Oh, my goodness."

Pam was elated that the emphasis on career pathways was connected to the state level title to "college and career readiness." She emphasized, "But the whole push to be college and/or career-ready that definitely is a change. It's a good change and a necessary change."

Pam acknowledged the excitement of parents when she conveyed, "They had heard so much about us going to career academies and so they were excited to see what we had to offer here." The excitement resulted from the positive impressions of career pathways as a framework for student advisement. The parents were also elated to better understand the diversity of pathways offered at Pine Street High School. Pam further noted, "They're impressed. They didn't know that we offer so many things here. When they come in and I tell them this is what we have, it's like 'I didn't know you all had that.'"

Pam's negative perspectives were related to the changes made by the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE). She stressed that GADOE did not consider the timeline most school use for registering students for classes annually. She conveyed:

My only gripe is – if I can call it that – the length of time it took for them to approve and the schools were caught up in the "Okay, are they approving; are they not approving?" "What's the new course number?" That was the only concern, the trickling down effect.

Pam expressed her excitement for the changes to the career pathways. However, she adamantly expressed a desire to have course name and numbers distributed to local schools in a timelier manner.

Pam also expressed anxiety with the number of times a pathway changed. She pronounced, “It was like – I think it was Broadcast. Broadcast name has changed every year since I’ve been here as a counselor.” She also explained, “We have and try to match it up with the state and then as soon as we did it, as soon as we finished registration, “bam,” there’s a new pathway. There were multiple times during the interview that the issue with name changing was emphasized.

The internal conflict between academic teachers and career technical teachers was mentioned as a negative anxiety within the school building. Pam felt that career technical teachers were generally excited about career pathways, but academic teachers had not embraced career pathways. She indicated that academic teachers continued to feel their classes were the most important because of the connection to graduation requirements. She also informed the researcher that student choices about career pathways were often tied to the quality of the teacher. She cited several examples of how students can be motivated to select a pathway because of the teacher’s enthusiasm. However, on the other hand, some students were discouraged from selecting certain pathways because of the perceived lack of teacher quality. Overall, the timeliness of changes to implement was Pam’s biggest anxiety. She and other counselors were angry when having to make course name and number changes retroactively. Pam’s goal would be that GADOE provide better communication about the future changes to career pathways.

Changes in Counseling Decisions and Practices

Pam provided insight into the influences affecting the decisions students make regarding Georgia's Career Pathway System. She acknowledged limited initiatives to enhance career pathway implementation through the 8th grade connection. Pam also explained the importance of programs of study to better influence students' decision making about career pathways.

Providing students with access to new information through various career events was also found to be a change in counseling practice. And finally, additional advisement sessions were also pointed out as being a critical change in the counseling practices.

Pam noted that the role of middle school advisement has become somewhat important in the career pathway process. She highlighted frustration with the district's collaboration efforts involving counselors. Pam reported:

Well, that impacts me because my ninth graders are supposed to be coming in with these plans and so how can I advise the eighth-grade counselors to explain to them what we have in the high school without knowing what's going on. The success of career pathway implementation depends on a collaborative environment.

Pam also expressed duplication of effort within BRIDGE legislation which affects 9th grade students. Pam described the frustration:

I understand the purpose, but then to a fifteen-year-old, when you're the layperson having to do deliver the activity with the kids, it's not realistic and you get a lot of pushback. Students state, "We did this." I understand you did this, but you did it last year and the state says you have to do it this year, so you're going to go ahead and do it again.

However, Pam appreciated the efforts of middle school counselors. She alluded to the fact that students need to be made aware of career pathways at an earlier age; however, the researcher did not identify an intentional effort to improve the working relationship with middle school counselors.

The need for students to receive additional information was a strategy which has received greater emphasis through the career pathway implementation. Pam highlighted multiple informational events scheduled by counselors to help students make good career pathway choices. She mentioned, “So of the things that I’ve done is conduct electives fair so the kids can see what’s available. I know my ninth-graders are clustered down here and they don’t know what’s available to them.” Pam also referenced the use of the pathway presentations as useful in assisting students. She confirmed, “I’ve asked the teachers if they would do presentations and send kids to do presentations about the pathways.” Pam noted that students will pay better attention if students conduct presentations.

Pam highlighted that the development of a Program of Study (POS) for each career pathway is a primary focus of her counseling efforts with ninth graders. The diversity of pathways helped with the awareness issue; however, Pam was strategic in identifying POS which helped students identify and track their career pathways. She explained, “Programs of Study is that a written document for each pathway. The POS maps all four years of high school for a student which includes academic and career pathway courses.”

Pam also described how the POS has provided a foundation for educating students about career pathways. She highlighted the conversations that occur between her and the student. She expounded:

And so when I made the programs of study, the thought-process was you’re going to be a Pathway completer, and so I kind of pre-said to my ninth-graders when we do registration, “This is you. You’re planning for tenth grade. We want you to be a Pathway completer.” I start that in ninth grade when I say, “You’re going to choose three in the same pathway. Then you can choose whatever other electives you want to take, but you’re going to be a Pathway completer, in something.” So that’s the big shift because before it was Little Johnny could take whatever. We would try to get them to be Pathway completers but Little Johnny would take whatever.

Pam identified that individual guidance sessions using the POS assists students in making career decisions. She indicated that advisement sessions help students better understand the connection to graduation and graduation credits.

The increased conversation and interest in dual enrollment programs offered through the local technical college was highlighted in the interview with Pam. She described how she and other counselors are beginning to view dual enrollment as a strategy of increasing the diversity of pathways. She asserted, “But we always have a lot more students that can do the third-year class if they can get into that program. We’re trying to utilize the local technical college which is like five minutes away so the students can take that third-year class.” She discussed the perceptions some parents have regarding the quality of the technical college. However, she pointed out that the perception in the neighboring county is very positive about the technical college. Pam explained that students need to take advantage of what was in their own community.

Pam highlighted the use of the recently piloted GADOE Counselor Keys Effectiveness System as a part of student advisement. She acknowledged that Counselor Keys was aligned to the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) standards. She stated, “I’m one of the counselors that’s doing the pilot program for the counselor keys, myself and the department chair.” She also recognized that the local Science, Technology and Engineering and Math (STEM) initiative was the result of better informing students about their career pathway choices.

The researcher confirmed that information provided through the tour observation of the school, common area, and career pathway classrooms somewhat aligned with changes in practice and conversation. While most classrooms had career pathway information, they also identified skills required for successful employment. School corridors had very limited print material

about career pathways posted throughout the school. Much of the information was flyers and posters provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher was not able to identify a specific plan of action to have pathways branded throughout the school.

The analysis of the case indicated changes to counseling decisions and practices. These changes included the need for better collaboration between the high school counselor and the middle school counselor. Counseling practices also shifted in focus by providing more events to provide career pathway information through elective fairs and pathway presentations. The most dramatic change occurred with the development of the POS. A visual inspection of the POS confirms the strength of this guidance document. Pam shared a POS for Nursing. Figure 4.3 is a sample of the nursing POS.

Table 4.3

Sample Pine Street High School Program of Study for Nursing

<u><i>Healthcare Science- Nursing</i></u>	
<p><u>Freshman</u> English 9 (Honors*) Coordinate Algebra(Accelerated*) Civics/Geography (Honors*) Biology (Honors*) Health/PE or JROTC Foreign Language or Computer Applications</p>	<p><u>Sophomore</u> English 10 (Honors*) Analytic Geometry(Accelerated*) World History (Honors*) Physical Science (Honors*) Foreign Language or JROTC Intro to Healthcare Science Academic Elective</p>
<p><u>Junior</u> American Literature (Honors or AP*) Advanced Algebra(Accelerated*) U.S. History (Honors*) Anatomy (Honors*) Application of Therapeutic Services Foreign Language or JROTC Psychology or Academic Elective</p>	<p><u>Senior</u> English Literature (Honors*) 4th year Math Economics (Honors*) Chemistry (Honors*) Nursing Essentials Foreign Language, JROTC, or Academic Elective</p>

Barriers to Career Pathway Implementation

The researcher identified potential barriers in the areas of students, school and district, and professional development, primarily at the local level. The barriers identified in this section are ones which the participant was challenged with overcoming.

Pam shared multiple barriers relative to the impact on students. The primary barrier related to students being able to choose a career pathway in the context of understanding the high school credits needed for graduation. She emphasized that students typically don't understand the credits which they earn in high school and elaborated on how 9th graders grapple with the concept:

It needs to tie together, so I try to help them tie it together because we have an issue with ninth graders not understanding credits, so that's a struggle, and that's the first lesson I do with them is trying to teach them about credits and then I show them how to tie it in to the GPA and try to keep – keep them in mind, like “Hey, if you want to do these things, if these are your career goals, then you need to be doing this, this, this and this right now.

Pam shared that students struggle to understand that if they don't earn credits early in their school career they won't be able to take career pathways courses they might enjoy. She stressed that apathy contributes to the issue. Pam also contributes lack of maturity as a major challenge. She explained, “I think it's a maturity issue because they don't see the correlation. Like they don't understand credits and they don't understand that if they don't get their credit you can't graduate from high school.” She further described that not understanding the credits earned in high school impacts their career pathway choices. Pam highlighted, “Well, if I fail all these classes over here I can't take these career pathway classes. I'm really interested in culinary arts because I want to be a chef, but I can't take culinary arts because I failed three classes.”

Pam recognized that students also lack vision for the future and in the ninth grade; students “don't have clarity about their futures.” She accentuated the need for looking forward. However, Pam pointed out, “Our kids lack the vision and that's why I use ‘game plan’ all the

time. They lack for vision.” She asserted that 9th grade students don’t see the future as clear as 12th graders or adults. Pam reported, “But then I find out they don’t have anything in mind. They haven’t even thought about it, not even on their radar. What I would like is for them to kind of put something on their radar.”

Pam admitted why she created the Programs of Studies (POS). She clarified that students were not completing career pathways. Students were jumping from one pathway to another.

Basically, without a POS students were not focused on a specific class. Pam explained:

The issue that we had was kids would take pathways, they would jump on the bandwagon for a year and then they would want to jump to another pathway, and so we would struggle with having Pathway completers. Little Johnny will say, “Well, I like this teacher, so I want to take this teacher’s class,” and then the next year “Well, my friend is taking Ms. So-and-so and I think I want to take Ms. So-and-so.” Well, Ms. So-and-so is teaching business and this one was teaching culinary art. And then they will graduate and they will not have completed the pathway, and that was a big issue.

Pam recognized that students needed to have a framework through a defined POS with a career pathway as a foundation for planning. However, she also acknowledged that students need the academics tied to a career pathway. She claimed, “That’s a challenge that I have. It’s hard to try to tie in academics with the careers because they don’t get it. They don’t get it so that’s one of my obstacles that I face.”

Pam connected issues of communication and the relationship with the CTAE Director as potential barriers to career pathway implementation. Pam described the limited career pathway choices as an opportunity to create partnerships for offering more pathways. She recalled that her perspective about career courses was changed as a result of a strong relationship with her CTAE Director. The relationship between the counselor and Career Technical teacher is crucial to improve communication. She shared a local situation where communication is more by chance than by strategy: “She will come back and relay some information just – but it’s kind of like in

passing. It's not, 'Well, hey, here's what you all can maybe work with the kids on,' that type of thing."

Pam identified a lack of alignment between career pathway teachers and academic teachers. The lack of a relationship might minimize the impact of the implementation of career pathways. Pam noted, "You knew the teachers, but it was kind of this mystery and there was a disconnect." A strong relationship contributes to the understanding of the importance of a student setting career pathway goals.

Pam also mentioned that other items such as professional development, 9th grade counselors, and work force awareness contribute to potential barriers. Pam indicated that professional development was sufficient, but professional development did not provide all the solutions. Pam informed, "A man was doing a presentation. He was talking about the opportunities for different pathways that are now available to students. He showed us this model, and I looked at it with my master-scheduler's eyes, and I said, "This won't work."

Pam also indicated that professional development focused on helping students identify which career pathway was most appropriate to enroll was desperately needed. The final area of professional development need was targeted at the middle school counselor. Pam stated, "Middle school counselors just aren't firm enough in the pathways because they don't know our course offerings so that makes it difficult for them to educate the kids."

Pine Street High School follows the practice of assigning counselors by grade level and age of the student. Pam's office is not located within the main career center. She clarified, "I talk to them because I tie it in with careers and so my role with the pathways is not as extended as the other counselors because they get to see the other grade levels." The practice of having a ninth grade counselor should be recognized as a promising practice as a means of getting all

students engaged in a career pathway. However, the 9th grade counselor needs to be an integral part of the total counseling program in both the physical setting and the culture of the organization.

Pam's level of knowledge about engagement in work force development is a potential barrier. She has a working knowledge of the connection between career pathways and workforce development, but her lack of working with local agencies minimizes the benefit for students to better understand the professional and technical skills needed to be successful in a career. She also commented, "I think different areas you can get exposed to different things and I think the region where we live may not have as much resources as other areas."

The researcher determined that the school and school district, to include personnel and staff, create barriers to career pathway implementation. High school counselors are assigned many varied duties and responsibilities with testing administration considered a primary barrier.

Case Summary IV

Mary Ellis – Oak High School

Mary was the final participant interviewed and the most energetic, excited, and experienced counselor interviewed for this research project, and it was apparent that that Oak High School embraces career pathways as a part of the school's culture. She has served Oak High as a counselor for 25 years with a total of 26 years as a counselor. Mary was able to articulate their purpose and understood the sequencing of courses required for career pathway completion. Mary was also able to share several success stories as a result of the school's focus on career pathway implementation. The career development goal for her school included career pathways. When asked about her school's career development goals, Mary stated, "Of course they start out

in the 8th grade, studying what they believe they want to do. We actually have their career goal and career pathway on their registration form because we want to build on that.”

The idea of the career pathways provided Mary with a better framework for working with students and other schools. The researcher also sensed strong excitement and passion in Mary about the possibilities that pathways provide for kids and for engagement with the community. The idea of branding career pathways with students, parents, school, and community was exciting for the high school counselors. Mary underscored, “Let’s not change it, because career pathways are beginning to resonate in a lot of places.”

However, Mary confirmed that she did have a written counseling plan for Oak High School. She reported that her counseling plan was based on the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) standards and domains. She also indicated that their work with helping students identify and complete career pathways is an integral part of the school’s counseling plan. She also mentioned that the annual counseling plan was required to be submitted to the district office and that district level leadership reviewed and provided input for the plan.

Perspectives of Georgia’s Career Pathway System

The perspective of the participant regarding Georgia’s Career Pathway System was very positive. She referred back to the fact that Oak High School was involved in implementing career pathways prior to the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) implementing the systematic approach in 2005. Most of the favorable perspectives centered around the positive impact on students. She also mentioned the impact career pathways had on school culture and counseling. There was an indication that career pathways connected directly to local workforce readiness.

There existed a strong believe that the role of a counselor was to take care of the students, expressing her personal connection when she shared, “My kids are my passion. It doesn’t matter what’s going on. They’re first. The phone rings, the phone doesn’t get answered. Somebody comes to the door, it’s not taken care of—my kids are one-on-one.” She mentioned on multiple occasions how the counseling unit is focused on taking care of the students. She claimed, “It’s simple. You just do what you’re supposed to do to take care of kids. That’s what I see my job as; I’m here to take care of the kids in this building.” She again reiterated, “Our passion is to take care of our kids. Whatever it takes, we take care of our kids.” The researcher recognized the passion Mary has for students throughout the entire data collection process.

The most compelling positive perspectives about Georgia Career Pathway System revolved around the impact career pathways have on students. Mary expressed the idea of career pathways opening doors for students. She asserted:

In fact, almost every time I do guidance with juniors and seniors I always mention pathways and how crucial it is to have a skill when you leave high school because it can open a door for a part-time job to help pay for college or it can open a door for you to go to school and get a degree in it or to get a certificate or a diploma in it and be a productive citizen.

She described how the technical skills learned through career pathways are the foundation for opportunities. Mary was very excited as she made the connection between having a job and having a career. She shared her personal story:

My semester of typing class paid off and all I did was take it so I could type my papers in college. That was the only reason I sat through that class. Until I went and applied at the school county office and they put me in a warehouse typing book catalog cards for a catalog. And I have to explain to them what that is because they don’t know what that is. And I said it was hot. It was dirty, but I worked there for two years. And the personnel person looked at me my third summer and said, “I tested you to see what your work ethic was and because you’ve done this I’m now moving you into the office.” Who would have thought? But I tell them you’re going to start at the bottom and you work up. You don’t – It’s rare to start with salaries up here. But all because of that typing class. And then they hired me to teach.

She claimed that her focus as a counselor is to help students make this connection. She stated that she uses career pathways as the basis for her individual guidance session, and she further emphasized that career pathways helped students connect with their passion.

Mary described how a student's connection to a career provides motivation for them to stay in school and be better engaged in their academics. Student motivation was recognized by Mary as being crucial in helping students develop career development goals. The motivation gained from a career connection increases a student's desire for learning and developing skills earlier in life.

Mary underscored:

We have the intro to animals, the plants and we have a bio-tech class that a lot of our students choose to go ahead and do that one even though they completed the pathway. They want that further knowledge so that when they go to college they will have a better background, and we push them to do that.

Mary also stated that students feel accomplished when they both pursue and complete career pathways. She noted, "Because we had students to sit for tests at the end of last school year where there were classes that they completed all three levels and coming out of there and knowing, "Wow, I did do this." She further shared that students go on to earn industry certificates which add to their sense of accomplishment.

The motivation to accelerate learning coupled with a sense of accomplishment builds confidence in students. She described how the career pathways increase the confidence level of all students by incorporating the fine arts and academic career pathways. She stressed, "Our Fine Arts kids, who complete three, and of course they are usually completing four and our academics who are taking AP classes, they also have that sense of "Well, I'm a pathway completer just like you." Mary appreciated the diversity of the current listing of career pathways.

Mary focused on the students who are first generation high school completers and college students. The researcher recognized a higher passion within Mary as she described scenarios of students being the first in their family to graduate from high school and attend college. She excitedly described the scenario, “We’ve had students be the first in their family to graduate from high school, and for them to go on and to have a career pathway where they can go to a tech school or later on maybe college.” Mary shared her belief that career pathways helped make the connection between career and academics which provided the student the desire to continue in high school. She highlighted a student who made the connection between a career and academics:

I have one young lady I’m thinking of in particular was sort of lost. She wanted to be a chef and last year as a sophomore – junior we got her into the Culinary Arts of Advanced Academy. I have watched this student just totally blossom. She comes into to tell me today we did so and so because she’s gone half the day. She struggled in math. All of a sudden the math has settled down. We’re getting the math. And she’s one that we’re going to try next year to do culinary.

Mary emphasized that the career connection with students is crucial to maintaining expectations for academic achievement. Once the high school academic/career connection is accomplished, students are able to make the connection to a future career. This connection provides the basis for a student to stay on track and realize a goal has been fulfilled.

Mary also appreciated the value of career pathways in clarifying career ideas for students. She claimed that many students are influenced about career pathway choices by peers and media. Students can explore these careers in high school and rule them out. She clarified that the goal is to have completers, but she also explained that for students to find out what career pathways don’t work is important as well. Mary asserted, “On the opposite side a child says, ‘This is not for me.’ ‘Let’s find what is for you.’ Are we 100% correct? No. We will never be 100% correct. But if one child is successful, then we’re successful.”

Mary described the outcomes of being a career pathway completer. She stressed the connection of a career pathway to post-secondary education. She mentioned:

Everybody needs some kind of post-secondary, whether it's a certificate, a diploma or a degree, and they hear that from me. Every time I do guidance I throw that in because I want it to penetrate that every single child needs some kind of post-secondary. Diploma doesn't cut it anymore.

She further emphasized that the completion of a pathway provides the possibility of a certificate.

Mary also stressed that students engaged in a career pathway are learning 21st Century Skills such as resume writing, interviewing skills, and communication skills.

Finally, Mary was excited that GADOE had added pathways. She felt that a diversity of pathways allowed for the inclusiveness of all students in the school setting. Mary shared how her school has recently added programs to accommodate more diverse pathway offerings. She stated that the goal for her school has been and will continue to be focused on all students finishing high school as a career pathway completer. Mary pronounced, "The goal in this building was for every single student to have both the diplomas."

Mary noted positive perspectives about the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System included parental engagement and perceptions. She asserted that parents wanted their child to be engaged in a pathway and as a result were more likely to be involved through phone calls and school visits in order to ensure enrollment. The idea of students completing pathways was also supported by parents. Mary exclaimed, "Many times they will say, 'I really want my child to finish this,' especially those students that are in CTAE pathways they hope to pursue as careers. When the researcher asked Mary about parental pushback concerning pathways, she responded that parents viewed pathways as a positive contributor to their child's future. She recounted:

I think they're seeing it in a positive manner. And when I do my 9th grade meeting and I say, "You all know this is vocational. However, now they're career pathways and they're

more geared to what industry and businesses need for the workforce that your children are coming up to,” and they understand that, most of them do.

Overall, Mary was excited about the impact of career pathways on parental engagement in the decision making process for high school students. She alluded to the need for the counseling staff to do more to engage parents.

The College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI) was primarily positive area noted by Mary. She did not feel any added pressure regarding career pathways as a result of GADOE implementing the new accountability system. She actually appreciated the added encouragement from the top down. She stated, “Well, I don’t feel the pressure because like I said we were already doing it. I appreciated the fact that it was coming from the top.” She acknowledged the inclusiveness of the fine arts and academic pathways as a positive for increasing the diversity of pathways in her school. She claimed, “Everybody is on the same playing field, academics, fine arts, and CTAE. They’re not out there on that limb all by themselves. It’s a team working together.” However, she did admit to being in situations where she would prefer to make counseling decisions based on the individual student needs. She provided several examples of students wanting to change career pathways but was discouraged to do so because of the career pathway performance indicator.

School culture was highlighted by Mary as a positive perspective by high school counselors about their work with career pathways. Mary was very encouraged that career pathways were all-inclusive and was embraced by the entire high school. She explained, “And that’s the positive part of pathways now. Pathways encompass CTAE, academic, and fine arts. Kids exclaim, ‘Oh, I have a pathway, too,’ which is a positive piece as well. So I’m glad that has been a part.” Mary elevates the importance of career pathways as she explains how the school experience becomes more distinctive. She stated:

But I think it's more – It's distinctive. When we were doing the dual diploma, okay, you got a dual diploma, but now it's a pathway and our teachers, even the academic teachers, are encouraging students to finish pathways. Of course CTAE is. We work very closely with them, and it's interesting when you sit down and talk to some of our students. We just finished registering seniors, rising seniors, and they tell me "I need to take this class so I can finish this pathway." That means our whole school is encompassing pathway completion.

Mary described the importance of the entire building embracing career pathways. Successful implementation of career pathways requires everyone in the building to endorse individual counseling. She described how teachers embrace the enhanced counseling:

It's just something that's engrained in this building and it's the culture of this building. With our staff, with CTAE, we work very closely with them. We work very close with the rest of our staff, but it's our culture. We meet one-on-one with our kids so that we – How else are you going to direct them to the classes they need to take and to what classes they need to have for that pathway they want?

Mary continued to feature the enhanced culture of the building as a result of the counselors' work with career pathways. She underscored the importance of the addition of a college and career academy that provided students the prospect to investigate and major in additional career pathways.

Mary claimed that the longevity in expecting all students to have a career pathway served as a major reason for the success of students at Oak High School. She also alluded to important role of school and district level leadership in maintaining consistency about expectations for students. She asserted, "Consistency in the twenty-five years here. Like I said I've had five different principals, the standards have not changed, the expectations have not changed." As previously stated, Mary has been a counselor at Oak High School for 25 years. She underscored the importance of longevity in leadership:

We've been doing that for years at Oak High School. I had a mentor when I first started in counseling and she believed in that, and I also believe in it. Like I said, today a diploma's not going to cut it. It just will not cut it. It may get them a job, but it's not going – I don't believe it will get them the career that they want to be able to take care of themselves and a family.

Mary agreed that students need to be more competitive in today's job market. She understood the need for students to leave high school being both academically and technically prepared. She also stressed the need for career pathway classes to teach professional skills such as resume writing, interviewing skills, and teamwork skills.

Mary noted the added complexity that high school counseling has experienced as a result of the career pathway implementation. She discussed the higher knowledge required by counselors. Mary informed the researcher of the course sequencing required by the implementation of career pathways. She also identified changes in counseling decisions and practices. Mary shared that counselors working with career pathways possess strong individual guidance and collaboration skills. With strong support for counselors at Oak High School, she shared that her counseling unit was committed to continuous improvement regarding the fidelity of career pathways' implementation. She confirmed, "We continue to want to improve and to do better by our kids so we try to listen to as many of those as we can."

Career pathways have had a positive impact on the relationship of counselors within the school and within the system. Teachers expressed their gratitude with the attention of counselors on individual student advisement. Strong support exists for counselors at Oak High School. Mary shared a teacher's comment, "I just want to say how thankful I am that this counseling office meets with our student's one on one and guides them as to what they need to be taking." The support was also recognized within the district. The counselors at the feeder middle schools collaborated with high school counselors to help educate students early about the process of choosing a career pathway. However, Mary continued to remind the researcher that the longevity of career pathways implementation contributed to these types of working relationships.

Mary was able to articulate the connection of career pathways to workforce readiness. She described the role of the district CTAE Director with the local work force development and related agencies. Mary made the connection of career pathways to workforce preparation when she reported:

We have a committee in this county and the CTAE director has worked very closely with them so that the pathways we have in our meet the needs of the workforce. The kind of employees that they're looking for are the kinds of jobs that will come out of our pathway completion.

Mary continued to explain the work with career pathways related to both work ethic skills and 21st century skills. Mary was also able to describe the end result for career pathways completion as the awarding of an industry recognized certification.

Negative perspectives provided by Mary were very limited. Overall, the perspectives were directed at timelines and changes at the state GADOE level. Mary also provided perspectives she heard from other high counselors. She described operational problems such as scheduling, facilities, and funding prevents students from taking advantage of career pathways. However, these negative perspectives were very narrow in size and scope.

The major negative perspective about career pathway implementation was focused on the lack of timeliness with regard to the changes in career pathway names and course numbers. Mary laughed as she described how some course names had come full circle. She cynically shared, "And what is comical is some of these have gone full circle, like Early Childhood. We're now back to Early Childhood I, II, and III, so I didn't have to learn any tricks on that one." However, she adamantly supports a state requirement for career pathways. Mary suggested:

The one piece I really wished we had was that it was a state requirement that every child who gets a diploma has to have a pathway completed. That would give more teeth because there are times when we have seniors who say, no, I don't want that third class.

The researcher was surprised that Mary would recommend such a policy. Nevertheless, the appeal for such a policy represented Mary's belief of the value of career pathways.

Though Mary's own negative perspectives were limited, she did share the negative perspectives she encountered from counselors within the profession. She noted hearing such statements as "here we go again" and "something else to do." She countered both of these comments with the fact that her school has embraced career pathway for a very long time. She also described the fact that if counselors were not doing this work, then they needed to.

Changes in Counseling Decisions and Practices

The implementation of Georgia Career Pathway System required high school counselors to work differently than in previous years. Mary's perspective was different from other counselors due to her long tenured work with the implementation of career pathways and/or similar types of career development. She highlighted the following counselling decisions and practices as critical to successful career pathway implementation: student activities and events, parent engagement, advisement, counselor leadership, and professional development.

Counseling practices which focused on students was the primary target of high school counselors' work regarding the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway system. Mary emphasized the importance of career exploration events, especially in the ninth grade. Mary also appreciated that there is value in exploring career pathways and eliminating pathways which doesn't make a connection for the student.

She noted the importance of high school counselors preparing students for future careers through mock interviews and resume writing. The need for engaging the community is necessary to successfully prepare students for future career pathways. Community engagement

is an example of a new counseling practice required by high schools to ensure successful career pathway implementation.

Mary also identified the practice of introducing students to postsecondary possibilities. She indicated that high school counselors are required to conduct career and college fairs. The events help students connect a career pathway to post-secondary education. She shared one story of a disconnect between career and college awareness. She used the following story to highlight the disconnection:

But I had a student who applied at Georgia Tech and got accepted and then he came to me and he said, “Ms. Ellis – now, this was back in the ‘90s. He said, “Ms. Ellis, they don’t have a teachers program.” I said, “No, they’re in an engineering school.” “What am I going to do?” I said, “Find another school for you.” And he’s teaching. But he never made the connection.

Mary emphasized that the connection between career and college is fundamental. She described these types of activities as significant for all students. Career pathways can lead students in many diverse directions, and students need to be aware of all alternatives.

Another area of practice assisting in the implementation of career pathways is related to district leadership and expectations. Mary referenced that district leadership provides the overarching support and direction for career pathways. Mary provided one example of such guidance and direction when she reported, “They want every counselor to meet one-on-one with every student. I’m like, it’s a piece of cake. We’ve already done it. We do this every year. This is something engrained in this building. It’s the culture of our building.” She used the example of the district level leadership focus in encouraging the school-based counseling plan to be aligned with ASCA standards.

District leadership has also embarked on increasing the diversity of pathways through the college and career academy initiative. The district recently opened a college and career academy which allows students from all high schools to attend for a specialized career pathway.

Throughout the interview, Mary acknowledged the increased possibilities for students using this practice provided by the district. She highlighted several examples of students taking advantage of the multiplicity of career pathways. Mary claimed, “The main strategy system in diversifying our career pathways is through our college and career academy. They offer almost anything a child would want at this point because that’s been set up to meet the needs in our county.”

Another advantage the college and career academy provided is the connection to the local technical college and opportunities for enrolling in pathways through dual enrollment.

Professional development focused on training high school counselors is important to the successful implementation of any high school program. Career pathways are no exception and might require a higher degree of professional development support. Career pathways’ implementation is all encompassing of the entire high school. Mary, who also serves on the district leadership team for counselors, described the various professional development opportunities encouraged by the district:

I mean we do – It’s brought up in our counseling meetings because we have county counseling meetings that counselors – We are encouraged to go. In fact in this building all three of us go. We have a counselor’s leadership team, which I happen to be a part of, and we make sure like on professional learning days that we have speakers coming in that address the issues that our counselors are having because we ask them for their input. There are webinars and that kind of thing.

The expectations of developing a strong professional learning plan are important for the fidelity of career pathways’ implementation. Mary agreed that her district provides professional development that is specific to career pathways in varied delivery formats.

The support for professional development was recognized through the data collection process. Mary confirmed that she is at a very high level of self-efficacy regarding career pathways. She did not make the claim that she was an expert, though she featured her many years of experience as a counselor involved with career pathways. She claimed that career

pathways were a part of the Oak High School's culture. She did not identify any areas of professional development need for herself or her staff.

Individual or small group advisement is also a featured counseling practice which ensures successful implementation of career pathways. Mary described the commitment of her school to provide individual counseling for every student. She also referenced that individual advisement sheets required students to identify a career pathway. Table 4.4 highlights the career pathway portion of the advisement sheet. The individual guidance required counselors to develop special skills to identify career goals. Mary explained, "Talking to them about what they want to do as a career. Some of them will look at you and say, 'I'm not sure.' Then you have to delve a little deeper and find out what skills they enjoy doing." Mary mentioned that individual guidance allows her to share her story of success. These transparent and open stories help high school counselors make a career pathway connection. Mary shared a student advisement sheet used at Oak High School depicting the career pathways offered. Figure 4.4 is a sample student advisement sheet.

Figure 4.4

Sample Oak High School Student Advisement Sheet

may be required for college. For the elective classes, rank 5 other courses that you wish to have in your schedule, with '1' being your first choice and '2' your second choice, and so on. Consider academic electives, fine arts, physical education and/or CTAE courses among these electives. You may not get your preferred elective which is why you are asked to choose five. **Enrollment in Honors and Advanced Placement classes are based upon satisfactory completion prerequisite courses. All courses are year-long.** This form needs to be signed by a parent and returned to counseling by March 5th. **Schedule changes will not be made after May 2nd.**

ENGLISH _____ 3204 World Literature _____ 3206 Honors World Literature* _____ Other _____ MATH _____ 4500 Math I Coordinate Algebra _____ 4510 Math II Analytic Geometry _____ 4517 Honors Math II Analytic Geom. _____ 4527 Honors Math III Adv. Algebra _____ Other _____ SCIENCE _____ 5533 Physical Science _____ 5754 Physics _____ 5767 AP Physics I (enrolled in Math III) _____ 5673 Chemistry _____ 5723 Honors Chemistry _____ Other _____ SOCIAL STUDIES _____ 6532 World History _____ 6543 World History Honors* _____ 6545 AP World History* _____ Other _____ FOREIGN LANGUAGE _____ 1592 French I _____ 1613 French II* _____ 1615 French II Honors* _____ 1512 Spanish I	PHYSICAL EDUCATION _____ 3012/3022 Health /Personal Fitness _____ 3062 Weight Training _____ 3102 Team Sports FINE ARTS _____ 0566 Comprehensive Art _____ 1014 Drawing/Painting* _____ 1062 Band* _____ 0830 Chorus* _____ 0760 Theatre Fundamentals _____ 1105 Music Theory JOURNALISM _____ 3882 Yearbook * _____ 3910 Newspaper * * Indicates that a pre-requisite or teacher approval must be met.	CTAE _____ 2480 Early Childhood Ed. I _____ 2717 Early Childhood Ed. II* _____ 8572 Intro to Healthcare Science _____ 2692 Essentials of Healthcare* _____ 2592 Intro to Digital Technology _____ 0233 Digital Design _____ 0200 Intro. to Business/Tech _____ 0189 Financial Literacy _____ 0202 Legal Environ of Business _____ 2624 Intro to Drafting Design _____ 2214 Architectural Drafting Design * _____ 2542 Basic Agricultural Science _____ 2540 Plant Science/Biotechnology * _____ 2560 Animal Science/Biotechnology * _____ 5012 Naval Science I _____ 5032 Naval Science II* _____ 2603 Foundations Engineering/Tech _____ 2607 Engineering Concepts _____ 0478 Intro Audiovisual Tech/Film
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Mary illuminated the importance of parental engagement as a counseling practice for career pathway implementation. She defined the need to “finesse” parents to support their efforts in helping their child make a good pathway choice. She explained her strategy to gain approval as, “Mainly finessing the parent to the point of where ‘Oh, okay,’ explaining why this is really important for them to complete this class.” Mary also recognized the need to provide parents with more information about pathways. She pointed out the following strategies to engage parents: Eighth Grade Parent Night, PowerPoint Presentation highlighting each career pathway, and presence from the college and career academy. The document review process validated the awareness and education aspects provided to parents.

Barriers to Career Pathway Implementation

The identification of barriers to the implementation of career pathways was a primary focus of this research study. Mary identified very few barriers to the implementation at Oak High School. The researcher determined that the reason for minimal barriers was because Mary had been implementing career pathways for an extended period of time. Nevertheless, some barriers still exist. The barriers are thematically arranged as follows: student, school/district, parent, and professional development.

Mary identified two primary barriers based on student perspective. She explained that students have a hard time making the connection between a career pathway and post-secondary education opportunities. She shared:

I had another student who – bless her heart – brilliant young lady and she comes to me and she said, “Ms. Livingston, I’ve missed a step,” and I said, “What do you mean?” “I didn’t realize I had to apply to college to be able to go. I thought I just showed up and I could go.” So these are things in the early ‘90s that I’m able to use now to make sure “this is what you have to do,” and you have to repeat it over and over because they don’t always hear it the first time, especially if nobody in their family’s gone to college.

Mary clarified that students don’t understand the next steps and quite often get accustomed to the structured environment of the high school. Mary discussed the challenge when students start an activity and do not follow through. She emphasized:

So many times kids start this and then they stop. They may go out for a team and they get frustrated and then they drop the team. They may start a club – you know go to a club and “Nay, I don’t want to do that.” So many times our teenagers will start something and quit, start something and quit.

However, as discussed earlier, Mary believes that career pathways provide a framework and relevance for connection that result in completion. The career pathway completer status provides students with a sense of accomplishment.

Mary also identified barriers which exist in the school or district. Mary was very unwavering that a policy needs to exist requiring students to be career pathways completers as a

graduation requirement. She understands the negative aspects of this policy but feels the policy will add accountability which will improve implementation. She underscored, “The one piece I really wished we had was a state requirement that every child who gets a diploma has to have a pathway completed. That would give more teeth to make seniors take the third level class.” A second school barrier is time. Mary described the time restraints of high school counselors due to multiple duties and responsibilities. However, she expressed the support of her school administration for the work of the counselors. She also asserted that the time barrier also impacted professional development.

A minor barrier mentioned by Mary was the lack of parental awareness about career pathways. Though identified by Mary as a minor barrier, the explanation Mary provided was multi-faceted. Mary explained:

The only barrier I can think of would be with parents who don’t understand the concept. Some of them did not finish high school. A lot of our parents are professionals but we still have those at that “They didn’t finish so why should my child do this.” They don’t understand what the world is like out there right now.

Parents have the viewpoint of students receiving either a vocational diploma or a college prep diploma. This misconception has been reinforced for multiple decades with students having to make diploma choices. The second aspect of this barrier is associated with parents who did not finish high school.

Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter represent an analysis of each of the individual cases. Data were collected through an initial interview with four high school counselors. The interview questions followed a protocol aimed at collecting data relevant to each of the three interview questions. Next, the participants were asked questions which filled in the gaps from the first interview. Participants were asked to provide documents and provide the researcher a

tour of career pathway classrooms and career centers. Each case is further dissected to provide main ideas generated from the data.

The next chapter will identify the recurring themes which aligned with each research question. Each theme is complex in nature and represents the big picture findings from this study.

CHAPTER V

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. Given that the purpose of this study was to investigate high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System, the researcher sought to address three overall research questions:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

A qualitative research design included a sampling of four practicing high school counselors who were highly involved in the work of implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System. High school counselors were selected to represent geographically diverse school populations including rural, urban, and suburban school districts. High school counselors were interviewed and observed to gain their perspectives about Georgia's Career Pathway System related to their counseling decisions and practices.

Participants were interviewed two times between December, 2014 and February, 2015. Interview 1 was approximately 90 minutes. Interview 2 was approximately 60 minutes.

Additionally, participants provided the researcher a tour of career centers, commons areas of the school, and the career, technical, and agriculture education classrooms. The purpose of the tour was to gain a perspective of the messaging of career pathways within the student environment. Participants were provided a copy of their interview transcripts with the opportunity to correct any statements that would better describe their perspectives. Participants also were provided the opportunity to gather related documents and submit them to the researcher.

The previous chapter provided data and an analysis of each of the individual cases. This method of analysis allowed for a deep understanding of the perspectives of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. The daily work of high school counselors provided rich data about their perspectives regarding career pathways. The multi-leveled experiences of the four counselors also provided a diversity of perspectives.

This chapter provides a cross case analysis of the findings and identifies the themes which were drawn from the data from all four cases. Perspectives from all four participants were compared for comparability until data reached a saturation point and findings became redundant. The emergence of themes during data analysis serve outline of this chapter. The relational ideas found through the data will better explain the themes. The themes identified by the researcher were based on findings within this research and are not meant to generalize to broader populations.

The chapter is organized by exploring three main themes which evolved from the data. The framework provided the researcher information which will lead to providing conclusions, implications for practice, and future research recommendations in Chapter 6. To review, Chapter 4 illuminated the findings across four data sets: (1) first interview with high school counselors; (2) field notes and document analysis gathered in first interview; (3) second

interview with high school counselors; and (4) field notes and photographs taken during observation. Table 5.1 presents all of the findings grouped by research question.

Table 5.1

Findings Organized by Research Questions

Research Questions	Findings
What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?	<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselor's personal feeling of satisfaction • Student engagement in school and career development • Improved relationships between staff in building • Parental engagement in child's education • Workforce training for community • Improved feelings of counselor marginalization • Positive accountability of high school counselors <p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes and timeliness of changes made at state level
Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive career development activities through individual and small group advisement • Improved collaboration between middle school and high school levels • Increased opportunities for high school to post-secondary transitions • Increased focus on engaging parents in career planning for students • Expanded diversity of career pathways through creative strategies • Focused efforts on improving communication with building level leaders and teachers • Increased focus on career pathways from top down approach
How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased guidance to assist students in making long-term decisions • Improved communication efforts about career pathways impact • Better collaborations with school and community stakeholders

The researcher further reviewed the findings and analyzed them across all data sets. Three themes emerged from the cross case analysis. The following themes emerged from the data:

1. School counselors value relationships and partnerships that foster the successful implementation of career pathways.
2. School counselors embrace new practices to positively impact students' decisions about career pathways.
3. Developing a school culture conducive to implementing career pathways successfully requires consistent communication.

The themes are presented along with the corresponding research question. Data samples relevant to each theme are provided to highlight the connectivity of ideas embedded within each theme.

Theme 1

The first theme is related to the first research question, what are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

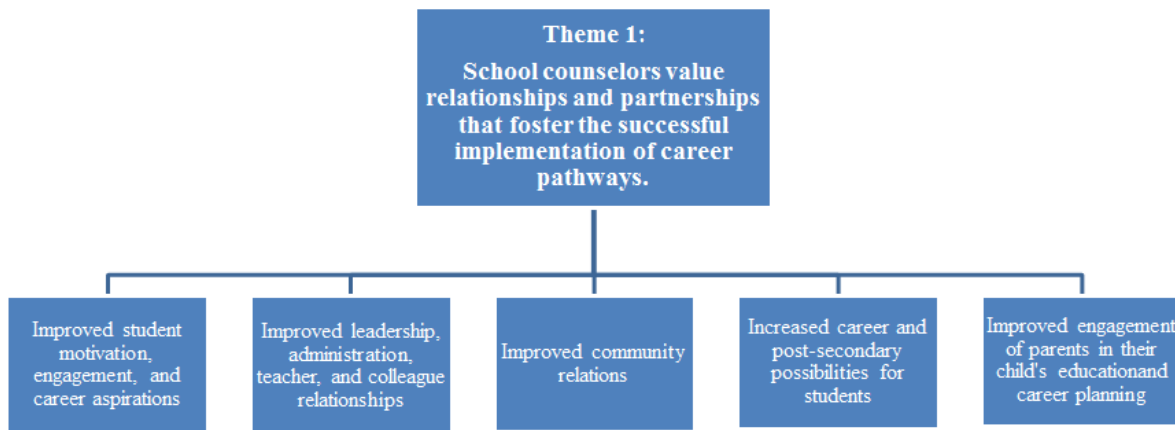
Theme One: School counselors value relationships and partnerships that foster the successful implementation of career pathways.

The implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System was an additional responsibility added to the role of many school based professionals. High school counselors were directly impacted by the implementation because of their routine responsibilities helping students with graduation plans, advising students, and scheduling courses. However, they expressed very positive feelings about the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System regardless of the additional duties. The high school counselor expressed that relationships and partnerships impacted the following: (1) improved student motivation, engagement, and career

aspirations; (2) improved leadership, administration, teacher, and colleague relationships; (3) improved community relations; (4) increased career and post-secondary possibilities for students; and (5) improved engagement of parents in their child’s education and career planning. Figure 5.1 depicts the categories for Theme 1.

Figure 5.1

Theme 1 Categories



Their positive feelings generally focused on the need for career pathways to serve as a “framework” for creating a “game plan.” Anne was most enthusiastic about the impact of career pathways as a “framework.” She recounted the difference between her opportunities as a former high school student and those available to students currently. Anne stated, “I’m glad that we have a framework to work with, because I don’t think we had anything like that when I was in school, and it would have been great.” She explained that students benefitted from varied and diverse career pathways.

Jamie was also adamantly positive about the implementation of career pathways. Unlike Anne, Jamie began her career in a career center which focused on helping students align courses to careers. This experience shaped her positive impressions of career pathways on student planning and career aspirations. Jamie conveyed that she did not feel there were any changes to her expected duties. Because of her background, she felt like a different approach needed to take place at the high school level. Jamie explained, “Career pathways helped. I felt like things needed to be done differently. Career pathways gave me the vehicle to say, ‘They expect us to do this.’”

Pam also expressed her support for the implementation of career pathways. Her perspective was strengthened by a strong mentorship provided by a Career and Technical Director (CTE). She described how the mentorship with the CTE Director set the foundation for her strong belief in career pathways. Pam stated, “It was such an eye-opener. I never realized the correlation between career classes and the core classes.” She was also influenced by her father-in-law who served as a construction teacher and helped students connect to an apprenticeship. Pam was focused on using career pathways to help students have a “game plan.” Pam gave an example of her message to students:

What’s the end result? What’s your game plan? I need you to have a game plan because at some point you’re going to leave this freshman academy and when you leave here you’re going to choose a pathway that you are going to follow.

She noted the “game plan” was the opportunity for students to leave school and connect directly to a career or post-secondary education. Like Anne, Pam wanted students to understand the importance of having a long range plan for their life. Pam was appreciative of the change her school experienced as a result of the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

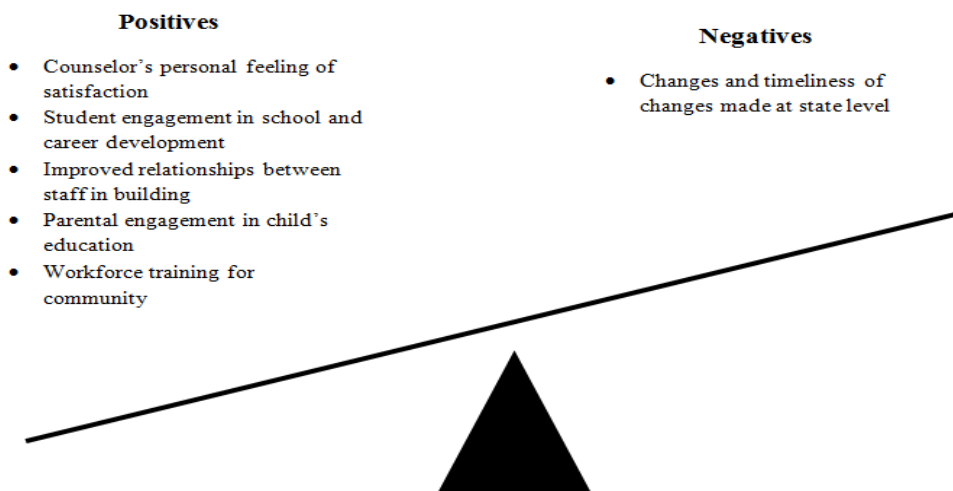
Mary was very passionate about career pathways. She claimed that her school had been implementing a focus on career planning prior to career pathways being developed. She overtly expressed a passion for students, “Our passion is to take care of our kids. Whatever it takes, we take care of our kids.” Mary expressed her long term commitment to having kids understand the link between a career pathway and a career. She used the career pathway as a means to an end. Mary employed the career pathway as a preliminary discussion point for the creation of an individualized student advisement plan. Mary underscored that Oak High School had been doing career pathways so long that pathways had become “branded.”

The positive feelings expressed by the four participants could be the influence of the value they placed on relationships and partnerships which foster the successful implementation of career pathways. Each high school was at a different level of implementation. However, all four candidates described the various relationships which impacted their work with Georgia’s Career Pathway System. Oak High School was at the highest level of fidelity of implementation. As a result of the longevity of implementation, the culture of Oak High School, Mary asserted, “It’s just something that’s engrained in this building and it’s the culture of this building.” Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the positive and negative feelings high school counselors have about career pathways.

Figure 5.2

Balance of Positive and Negative Feelings about Career Pathways

**High School Counselor's
Perspectives of Georgia's Career
Pathway System**



Improved student motivation, engagement, and career aspirations

High school counselors identified the impact on the student as the most positive aspect of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. All high school counselors pointed out various ways that students had been impacted by the implementation of career pathways. In addition, they acknowledged that the impact of career pathways contributed to an improved school culture. They observed that more motivated students, who were engaged in learning and identified career aspirations, improved school culture.

The increased motivation of students was recognized by all four counselors. Anne explained the effectiveness of career pathways helping students become more engaged in school. Anne claimed, “We feel that it’s effective because we gave the information to students. We watch them complete their individual graduation plan and so, you know, they were really ‘into it.’” She also stated on several occasions how excited and driven students were to complete a pathway. Jamie emphasized the increased motivation resulted from students seeing the connection of career pathways to their academics. Jamie also asserted, “I think it’s important because it helps the students to also see the connection between what they’re doing in their English, math, and science classes, not just credits toward a requirement to get a diploma.”

Pam further expanded the idea that student engagement was positively impacted by career pathways. She reported, “Career pathways engage kids. Career pathways make them excited to come to school. Some students only live to come to school for career pathways such as Culinary Arts or Healthcare Science.” Mary also added that career pathways increased motivation of students as a result of students taking advanced classes to better prepare for post-secondary studies. Mary provided the following example, “Students want to further their knowledge so that when they go to college they will have a better background, and we encourage them to do that.” The participants were “excited” that students were engaged, motivated, and driven about their education through career pathways. The data revealed that when high school counselors construct a positive perspective of student engagement, they generally feel the culture of the school focused on career development is improved. These three areas have a dramatic influence on the school culture studied through this study.

Improved leadership, administration, teacher, and colleague relationships

The overall aim of this study was to identify the high school counselor's perspectives about their work with career pathways. The data indicated that counselors were encouraged about the expansion of career pathways in all areas of a high school as an organization. Mary agreed that a more holistic approach implementing career pathways was experienced at Oak High School. She agreed with Anne that the relationships between leadership, administration, and teachers improved their work with career pathways. She also identified the creation of better working relations as a positive outcome of implementation. Specifically, Mary and Anne discussed the relationship building between the high school counselor and the Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) Director. Mary described the ease of getting infrastructure needs scheduled because of the improved relationships within the school. She noted that if the need was focused on students' career development, people would do whatever was necessary to ensure success of career pathways implementation.

Jamie also alluded to the positive relationship with administrators in the building. She stated, "I remember when career pathway implementation first started. I said to myself. Thank God I had a relationship with the department chair of CTAE." Jamie also indicated that the new superintendent's leadership focused on career pathway implementation which was improving collaboration across disciplines. Jamie emphasized, "Since our new superintendent began, we are seeing more collaboration and counselors are being brought to the table for input about career pathways. In the past, it was definitely isolation." Mary validated the conversation by emphasizing the continued need for ongoing collaboration. She shared:

We are going to have to be doing some things differently. Now, we need to work together, we need to think about how. So we're now having some serious conversations about changes, that in this county you couldn't have before, which I think is a great thing. We work very close with the rest of our staff, but it's our culture. We meet one-on-one

with our kids so that we – How else are you going to direct them to the classes they need to take and to what classes they need to have for that pathway they want?

Jamie acknowledged there is still work to be done to fully implement career pathways, but she was positive about the progress in collaborating. She claimed:

Maybe some gaps in communication but at the end of the day there's more cohesiveness or collaboration between counselors and career tech, directors, department chairs and even teachers than there was before the Pathways. But there's still some awareness, some communications, some terminology pieces that need to be addressed to get you to the fidelity of the implementation.

Therefore, implementing career pathways influenced improved relationships between administrators and counselors and provided a more interconnected and accommodating work environment for purposeful implementation.

The high school counselors also mentioned that a better relationship between high school and middle school counselors existed. The transition of students from eighth grade to ninth grade was highlighted as an important practice for successful career pathway implementation. Students need to have a stronger awareness of career pathways to better their decision making process. Anne highlighted, "The main thing is the 8th and 9th transition. That's the big thing that we do together. Sometimes we have issues between our students and we have to deal with them together. We always work really well together." Pam was the only counselor that did not recognize the significance of the middle to high school transition.

A final observation about the impact of implementation on the relationships and partnerships was buy-in from the teachers. Mary confirmed, "The positive part of pathways is that it not only encompasses CTAE, but also academic. We also have a Fine Arts pathway. And kids say, 'I have a pathway completed also,' which is a positive piece as well." Mary further stated:

Now it's a pathway that even the academic teachers are encouraging students to finish. We work very closely with them, and it's interesting when you sit down and talk to some

of our students. We just finished registering seniors, rising seniors, and they tell me “I need to take this class so I can finish this pathway.” That means our whole school is encompassing pathway completion.

Mary saw the most value in the relationships due to the longevity of career pathway implementation. She concluded, “It’s just not in that one department. It’s everybody pushing our kids to complete a pathway, and I’ve explained to them that it shows completion, that you start something and you finish it.”

Improved engagement of parents in their child’s education and career planning

Parent engagement in a student’s career development planning was also recognized as a positive aspect of the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System. The positive perspectives about parental engagement were identified by all four participants. Parents were eager about students having the opportunity to enroll in career pathways. Mary stressed that parents see career pathways in a positive manner. However she stated that she still has to convince parents that career pathways is the formerly titled vocational education but more tightly aligned with business and industry. Parents are often excited to see what is currently offered and are impressed with the availability of career pathways. Pam shared the following impact of positive parental perception on enrollment in career pathways explaining, “I know our enrollment has picked up from when I first started and some of it is attributed to parents wanting their kids to go to Pine Street High because of the pathways that we offer.” Jamie also shared, “But this was a parent who definitely wanted to make sure that I understood the path that their child wanted to pursue.”

When asked about the effectiveness of parental engagement strategies, the high school counselors described the interaction of students and parents about career pathways. The counselors agreed that students and parents are discussing options and as a result, more parents

are calling and visiting high school counselors for more information about career pathway choices. For instance, Anne noted:

But also parents asked a lot of questions; they were very engaged during the process, and we've also had parent phone calls, you know, since we did that piece, you know, asking questions. So we know that the students went home and discussed it with their parents.

When questioned in a follow-up interview, Anne confirmed, "What I hear from parents – I think a lot of the students especially in the third level they come home talking about their experiences because they're so excited."

High school counselor participants also stressed that career pathways provide parents the opportunity to be involved and engaged. Mary expounded, "Parents are very much engaged, and if their child is not in a specific class their freshman year, they make sure that they get in it in their sophomore year." Anne confirmed parental involvement by stating, "Yes, and they're excited about younger kids coming up and having the opportunity to be involved." She also acknowledged that parents claim that students come home excited about school.

Not only are parents excited about the diversity of offerings, but they are also impressed with the confidence level career pathways are creating for their students. Anne stated, "I can't wait till my middle-school child gets to high school and can be involved in agriculture.

Agriculture is such a great program and it's taught my daughter so much, not just about ag, but about self-confidence." Pam confirmed that parents understand the goal of career pathways, and shared, "Many times they will say, 'I really want my child to finish this,' especially those students that are in CTAE pathways that they think they want to do for a career, which is the whole purpose of it." And finally Jamie noted, "So parent engagement is helping them to understand the opportunities that are here right before them, not just within these walls, the school walls, but even outside of the school walls."

Increased workforce community relations – connectivity of local workforce development to secondary education

The connectivity between the local high school and the local business community was recognized as a positive for an improved school culture. Helping students understand the end result of a high school education and having them prepared for that goal brought about a sense of pride for the schools. The high school counselors definitely felt that career pathways assisted in helping students connect to the real world. Mary said, “The pathways we have in Oak County meets the needs of the workforce in Oak County. The kind of employees that they’re looking for are the kinds of jobs that will come out of our pathway completion.” And in a follow-up interview, Mary further explained the local workforce alignment efforts:

Aligning with local business and industry – Yes! There was a big task force committee that did work to develop and build the college and career academy. Local community colleges and technical colleges is a big piece of this as well. They’ve got all up-to-date labs. The labs I understand are phenomenal, and that’s because of businesses being involved.

Pam provided data to corroborate the claim that career pathways are helping students connect to jobs. She described, “Students are getting training and when they finish they have a decent career that can be self-sustaining.” Pam also shared, “They want to hire our kids all the time because they know that they have a quality program and so those kids can graduate from high school and go get a job.”

Preparation for the future workforce was a key characteristic of the benefit of career pathways. Anne illuminated, “Well, the whole goal of the pathways is make sure that students are workforce ready.” She provided an example of a partnership with a local technical college which will help students be prepared for the local film industry.

In addition, to the specific technical skills, high school counselors were elated about the impact career pathways have on “soft skill” development. Oak High School was recognized as being further along in the implementation of career pathways. The focus on "soft skill" training provided validation of this advanced training. While the three other schools recognized that career pathways contributed to “soft skill” training, Oak High School provided several examples of actual training strategies. Mary stated one of the aims of their school was to ensure students had 21st century skills. As the fidelity of implementation increases, students are provided with a stronger focus on work force readiness skills that are learned by students and expected by business and industry. This employability skills’ emphasis is a result of improved partnerships with the local community.

The earning of industry based certificates also creates a point of pride resulted from better relationships and partnerships with business and industry. The high school counselors recognized that the industry certifications and apprenticeships provide students with a value-added aspect to their high school diploma. They also confirmed that industry certificates help students become more employable which supports local economic development efforts. The counselors were aware of this connection, though some counselors were more connected with local work force development efforts than others.

The career pathways helped students become aware of the industry certificates. Pam gave several examples of how students were focused on receiving their industry credential.

However, Mary reported that students were earning certificates. She stated:

Industry certificates are a sense of accomplishment. We had students to sit for tests at the end of last school year. They had completed all three levels. They were completing the test knowing, ‘Wow, I did do this. I have completed this.’ And many of them had certificates and that meant a lot to them.

Additionally, Jamie stressed the importance of students earning industry certifications. She gave multiple examples of former students being employed as a result of a certification.

Post-secondary connection through dual enrollment possibilities

The final area of improved relationships and partnerships was the connection of career pathways to increased post-secondary possibilities. Data revealed that high school counselors took pride in the college connection provided through normal career guidance activities. All four counselors conveyed that career pathways led to stronger possibilities for dual enrollment opportunities. Anne specifically identified career pathways as a key strategy for expanded career pathway opportunities at Aqua High School. Anne also stressed career pathways help increase the number of students taking advanced college classes. Mary described the role that the newly built college and career academy had in expanding dual enrollment. Though Pam and Jamie identified the importance of dual enrollment, they did not claim that their schools were actively engaged in seeking dual enrollment opportunities beyond that of academic dual enrollment. However, Pam pointed out how Pine Street High School will attempt to offer pathways needed by business and those which students would be interested. She shared, “We will try to offer pathways through dual enrollment using the local technical college. But I think most of the pathways that we will offer are high-need pathways like the Healthcare Science, the STEM.”

The data suggests that participants were very positive about the implementation of career pathways. The perspectives were positive regardless of the negativity posed by the timeline of the statewide career pathways’ rollout. The counselors’ also identified the constant name changing as a point of anxiety. However, they felt that their work with Georgia’s College and Career Pathway System was worthy of their focus due to the overall impact on students opportunities for the future. They contributed that career pathways’ implementation positively

impacted relationships and partnerships. Data also suggests that the more engaged schools are with the implementation, the stronger the “branding” of career pathways implementation has on the culture of the school.

Theme 2

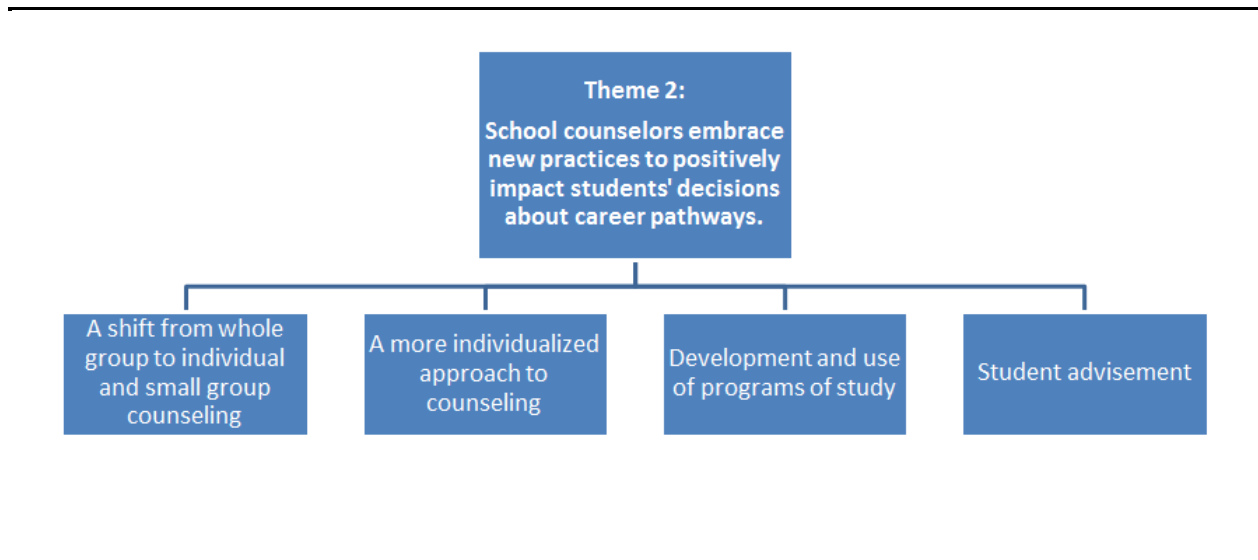
The second theme is related to the second research question, have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System?

Theme Two: School counselors embrace new practices to positively impact students' decisions about career pathways.

The implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System was a challenging task for high school counselors. The idea that all students needed to identify a pathway was a paradigm shift in the normal counseling practices of counselors. The transformation in counselor practices was set in motion as a result of multiple educational and political changes which occurred during the period in which career pathways were implemented. The high school counselors embraced new practices in the following areas: (1) a shift from whole group to individual and small group counseling; (2) a more individualized approach to counseling; (3) development and use of programs of study; and (4) student advisement. Figure 5.3 depicts the categories for Theme 2.

Figure 5.3

Theme 2 Categories



The basic language of career guidance was changed as a result of Georgia's adoption of a new graduation rule which stressed the need for a career pathway in Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education, world languages, and fine arts. The graduation rule shifted the focus from the discussion which directed a student to choose between a college prep diploma or a technology career pathway. The language changed to include a high school diploma which met the requirements for college and technology career pathway. The normal guidance of separating students into one or the other of the two diplomas was no longer the focus. Instead, counselors were required to help students identify a career pathway focus as a part of the high school graduation plan.

The 2010 Building Resourceful Individuals for the Development of Georgia Economy Act (BRIDGE) provided additional focus on building programs of study aimed at directing students toward high demand jobs and careers needed to help make Georgia competitive. The

BRIDGE legislation was very prescriptive and required schools to develop programs of studies and implement various levels of career counseling at all grade levels. All counselors in this research study identified the extra duties which resulted from implementation of BRIDGE. Pam stated, “But the whole push to be college and career-ready that is definitely a change. It’s a good change and a necessary change.”

Additional pressure was placed on the counselor when accountability for career pathways performance resulted from Georgia’s new educational accountability model known as College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI identified performance indicators which measure a school and district on their performance of career pathway completion. Additionally, CCRPI measured school and districts performances in the area of student industry certifications and student enrollment in post-secondary options. The high school counselors in this study noted that CCRPI increased conversations about career pathways and created urgency about successful implementation of Georgia’s Career Pathway System.

Pam reiterated this urgency when she stated, “How can I say this? We have a greater sense of urgency as far as making sure students are pathway completers.” Jamie also affirmed the urgency when she explained, “We are now having some serious conversations about changes. We would not have been able to have these conversations before. Which, I think is a great thing!” Anne confirmed, “There’s definitely more focus on the pathways. We are definitely more accountable now for scheduling and advising students because we want to have the highest score possible. We want to have as many completers as possible.” However, Mary stated she did not feel any more pressure because Oak High School has longevity in working with career pathways. Though the high school counselors felt a greater sense of urgency, they agreed that the implementation of career pathways provided positive accountability for counselors.

A shift from whole group to individual and small group counseling

The greatest shift in practices of counselors working with Georgia's Career Pathway system was from whole group counseling to individual and small group counseling. First and foremost, students have to be able to identify the most appropriate career pathway. Therefore, students must have access to career interest inventories. Anne described the goal of counselors at Aqua High School, "Our goal is to advise students the best we can. We want to make sure that we give them the information that they need to choose a pathway." Jamie also confirmed, "When we're doing the classroom guidance, I am advising students to refer back to the career inventory." Mary and Pam also agreed that helping students explore various career and take career interest inventories was much more important than in the past.

More individualized approach to counseling

Secondly, students required a more individualized approach to career counseling. Small group and individual counseling activities became more prominent in helping students identify career pathways aligned with their graduation plan. Mary explained that individual guidance had been occurring for several years. She summarized, "We meet one-on-one with our kids. How else are you going to direct them to the classes they need to take and to what classes they need to have for that pathway they want?" Jamie also stressed the focus on individual advisement sessions by asserting that the expectation of administrators was advisement. She emphasized, "Advisement! Advisement for the kids! Advising students individually! We would rotate going through different departments and trying to meet with all the kids for advisement. Helping them understand their options." Anne had already made a shift to individual advisement due to the addition of a counselor position in the department. However, small group and classroom

guidance were typical strategies used by Pam. Throughout the interview, she stressed the importance of career advisement in helping students choose a pathway.

Development and use of programs of study

The development and use of programs of study to guide high school decision making surfaced as a foundation for helping students align a student's career aspirations to their academic plan. All participants possessed some type of tool to help integrate the academic and career pathway plan. Anne was most proud of her plan and was excited about the use of the tool. She stated, "We wanted a document that students could use to track their progress toward graduation. We've always had a document that we used. We call it our check-off sheet. So it's empowering them to take some responsibility for themselves also." Pam also mentioned her commitment to create programs of study for students. She noted, "So listening to my colleagues that had been in the department, I thought why don't we make programs of study? I sat down and created programs of study. I want students to see their track for career pathway completion." Mary shared a similar tool listing all career pathways. Mary explained the process that she and her fellow counselors use to make sure all students are advised with a career plan as the "end goal."

Student advisement

Student advisement became a more important aspect of the high school counselors' work with career pathways. The advisement sessions ranged from individual advisement to large group advisement. High school counselors described the importance of helping student explore potential career interest. Also, the use of career interest inventories became critical to the process. The counselors expressed that GAcollge411 was an important tool for helping students identify career pathways. However, they all expressed anxiety about the number of student

accounts which could be created by a student. The counselors explained that the Ga College411 platform allowed for multiple accounts and therefore, was not something they could control. The alignment of career pathways within the GAcollege411 system was lacking. These new practices were embraced by the high school counselor because of their perceived positive perspective of career pathways.

Theme 3

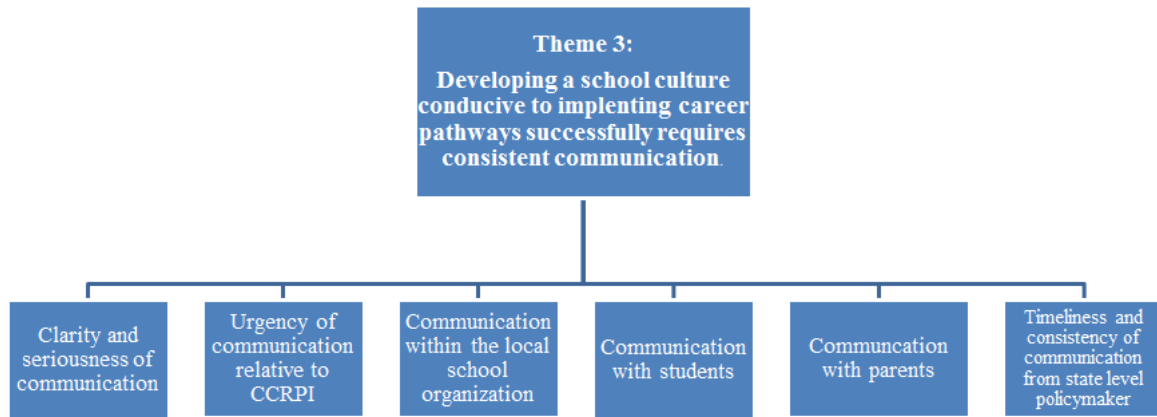
The third theme is related to the third research question, how did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

Theme 3: Developing a school culture conducive to implementing career pathways successfully requires consistent communication.

Communication during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System was critical to successful implementation. The implementation of career pathways has increased conversation about career development for students. The high school counselors acknowledged that communication was significant in the following areas: (1) clarity and seriousness of communication; (2) urgency of communication relative to CCRPI; (3) communication within the local school organization; (4) communication with students; (5) communication with parents; and (6) timeliness and consistency of communication from state level policymakers. Figure 5.4 depicts the categories for Theme 3.

Figure 5.4

Theme 3 Categories



Clarity and seriousness of communication

The high school counselors conveyed that information about the overall goal and purpose of career pathways needed more clarity. Jamie noted clarity issues related to expectations and timelines during her work with implementing career pathways. Her solution to the problem was to focus on being a conduit for information to counselors in her district. She underscored, “I became, for lack of a better word, the newsletter for our district. I took the role of trying to keep everybody else in the county informed and encouraged.”

Anne explained that receiving clear and up-to-date information was important. She stated, “It’s real important for us to have accurate up-to-date information to share with the students.” She referenced a need for more state developed communication pieces being available to students and parents. She described, “A state developed PowerPoint that we could forward to our students and parents would be helpful.” Mary and Pam did not specifically address any issues with clarity of information or general expectations of career pathways. Nonetheless, Mary

maintained that little had changed since the state began implementing career pathways at her school. Throughout the interviews, she consistently referred to career pathways as part of the culture within her building. The observation and document analysis revealed consistent messaging about career pathways.

Urgency of communication relative to CCRPI

Jamie mentioned that Georgia's new educational accountability model also increased the urgency and conversation about career pathways. She further clarified, "I felt that conversation increased because there was more talk about pathways. There was also more talk about CCRPI. We were trying to make everybody at the table understand the roles of their department." Anne also declared that the development of the CCRPI enhanced conversations among district and school administrators about career pathways. As a result, she felt more pressure to advise students about completing pathways. She replied, "From our district administration the main conversation is advising students properly and letting them know which pathways are available".

Pam also sensed that the CCRPI assisted in elevating her work with career pathways. She stressed, "How can I say this? We have a greater sense of urgency as far as making sure students are pathway completers." Correspondingly, she shared the story of her principal being accommodating when he learned that a course addition could result in having more pathway completers. She reported, "I don't think his standing on pathway completers changed. I just think it strengthened his thought-process and because of that the dialogue about career pathways is more open."

Mary, however, asserted that she did not feel any added pressure from the addition of the CCRPI. She calmly reinforced the point that Oak High School had been in the process of implementing career pathways for a long time. However, she did point out that the added

urgency of having career pathway completers was being realized in the academic classes. She expressed that the top down communication was improving the school's culture in implementing career pathways. Mary provided an example of a staff meeting conversation by sharing, "Everybody is on the same playing field, academics, fine arts, and CTAE. No one is on a limb all by themselves. It's a team working together. That's the result of the conversation coming down from the top."

As a new accountability model, CCRPI included a performance indicator directed at measuring schools in the area of career pathway completion. The added accountability increased the conversation at all levels of leadership within a school. The accountability seemed to affect all schools, and the conversations appeared to be positive in all cases.

Communication within the local school organization

Jamie expressed frustration within the local district about the lack of communication among leaders, counselors, registrars, and teachers. She gave multiple examples of gaps in communication which occurred locally as she worked with career pathways. Jamie explicitly stated, "So you've got to get the message to the people who are actually hands-on with the implementation." Anne, however, recognized the need for good internal communication between the local CTAE director and the high school counselors. She expressed her satisfaction that the local communication was effective.

Jamie referenced one method of better communication about career pathways as the development of a local website by the local Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) Director. She explained, "Our CTAE director has done a good job of aligning business terminology and career pathway terminology. She did this to help make connection within the business community."

Communication with students

The biggest change in communication for students occurred in the form of advisement or guidance sheets. Counselors recognized the need for students to have an individual guidance sheet to identify and track their progress in completing their career pathways. Jamie also described a student survey being developed by the system to better identify career pathways of interest to students. She admitted that the counseling unit at her school rearranged the career center to better promote the career pathway message to students. By observing the career center, the researcher validated the changes. Also, the career pathway messaging at Partner High School was very strong. Pam discussed her work in creating programs of study for students. She explained, “I spend a lot of time making programs of study for the school to try to align up with the pathways that we offer here.” She was very proud of her work with the programs of study and was convinced that these would help students stay on track with graduation and career pathway completion.

Anne also discussed the advisement sheet as a key communication tool to empower students in identifying a pathway and staying on track for completion. She shared, “But it’s giving them a document so that they can be responsible for tracking their units and seeing exactly what they need to graduate.” An advisement sheet was also a strong point of pride for Mary. She demonstrated how she used the advisement sheet as a communication tool with students, and their parents.

Communication with parents

Jamie recognized the challenge in communicating with parents about the misconception that career pathways were for only “those” students. She specified, “We are still trying to ensure that people understand that career pathways are for every student. Regardless of the past focus on

careers, if they are planning to go to college, technical school, or workplace.” Jamie confirmed that parents are becoming more informed through local efforts made by the superintendent and the schools. She stated, “I think the parenting engagement goes back to the same thing that I said about the kids is helping them to be more informed.” She also identified a specific focus on increasing parent engagement through activities such as parent nights. Anne sternly accentuated the importance of more communication with parents. She explained:

We provide documents on our website so that the parents see it. We want to educate our parents also. A lot of our parents are not well educated – they’re not college graduates. We have parents who didn’t graduate from high school. We try to produce advisement documents that are easy for them to understand so that they can help their students. Communicating with parents through email and phone calls were additional methods of providing information to parents. A review of the advisement documents, website, and presentations demonstrated that Anne was focused on creating clear, concise communication for parents.

Mary explained the parent interaction which occurs at her school. She again highlighted the advisement sheets which require parents’ signatures. Mary also shared the commitment of her counseling staff to engage parents in parent information nights. She admitted that not all parents understand the concept of a career pathway and that she has to provide additional support in communicating the purpose. Mary explained how she helps parents understand, “Mainly finessing the parent to the point of where “Oh, okay,” explaining why this is really important for them to complete this class. And am I always successful? No. But there are times when I am.”

Timeliness and inconsistency of communication from state level policymakers

The high school counselors identified the most overwhelming challenge with communication about career pathways was the lack of timeliness at the state level about annual changes in the rollout of the pathways. Jamie stated in a harsh but contemptuous tone, “And the

fact that the State Department waits until January and February of every year to change the course numbers after we have finished scheduling kids.” Jamie stressed her anxiety again, “For the first couple of years there were – It seemed like every year that a course was changing, something was being realigned, and all this happened in February and March.” Anne admitted that, like Jamie, she was frustrated with the timeliness of the rollout of GaDOE changes. She expressed, “I know there’s a bigger picture that we don’t always see, but that’s a little frustrating when names and course numbers are changing.” Nonetheless, she considered the changes good. Jamie reported, “But I feel like it was a good process. I’m glad that the state made the changes. Even though I complained about them changing course numbers and course names, I feel that it was a worthwhile process.”

Jamie referenced the need for a more user friendly state website. She explained that career pathway information was hard to find and not always clearly understood. However, she acknowledged consistently receiving newsletters from Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). Anne also mentioned the need for brochures and flyer from GaDOE. She felt like clear messaging from the state level would improve the students’ understanding of career pathways.

The high school counselors recognized gaps in communication. The gaps in communication exist between state and local and within the local district. However, high school counselors did feel there was more cohesiveness and collaboration among counselors and career tech directors, department chairs and even teachers than there was before the implementation of career pathways. Awareness and terminology need to be addressed to increase fidelity of implementation, and the awareness activities should focus on students and parents.

Chapter Summary

From the cross case-analysis of the high school counselor participants, three themes emerged through the constant comparison of the data. These included:

1. School counselors value relationships and partnerships that foster the successful implementation of career pathways.
2. School counselors embrace new practices to positively impact students' decisions about career pathways.
3. Developing a school culture conducive to implementing career pathways successfully requires consistent communication.

The themes were embedded in the perspectives of the high school counselor participants. That is, the themes emerged from data that were collected through participant's interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Chapter 6 presents a review of these three themes in relation to the existing literature. The implications of the study are presented and discussed. Also, recommendations for future research are discussed relative to further development of policy and practice related to career pathways.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System has been a challenging responsibility for high school counselors. The complexity of the career pathways is multi-dimensional, involves multiple stakeholders, and stands to change the current practice of high school counselors.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System, and the study addressed three overall research questions:

- 1) What are the high school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 2) Have counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
- 3) How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

This chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the study's themes and findings related to the relevant literature, and implications for policy makers, school leaders, high school counselors, and future research.

Summary of the Study

A qualitative case study grounded in constructivism was selected because the researcher sought understanding from the perspectives of high school counselors. More specifically, an interpretative case study method was chosen because of the in-depth description of a bounded

system. The interpretative tradition allowed the researcher to use the perceptions of high school counselors about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System as a strategy to better understand the impact of the system on counseling decisions and practices. The high school counselor's work with Georgia's Career Pathway System provided a real life context appropriate for a case study.

Four high school counselors participated in this study. High school counselors were interviewed twice over a period of two months. The high school counselors also provided the researcher with observations of the career/counseling center, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) classrooms, and they shared selected documents relevant to career pathways.

All participants were female representing a range of counseling experience from 4 years to 26 years. Data sources for this study included:

1. Transcriptions from semi-structured interviews with participants.
2. Career/Counseling center observations notes and photographs taken by the researcher.
3. Field notes, including interview notes and reflective interview memos

Participants were selected through purposeful and criterion sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to gain the most meaningful data. The researcher used criteria sampling to identify characteristics of high school counselors which included years of experience working as a high school counselor and with career pathways.

Participants of this study represented four high schools in the Piedmont Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA), which serves schools located in the Metropolitan Atlanta areas as well as schools in rural central Georgia. Each of the participants was certified in counseling with a minimum of five years' experience.

Data analysis for this research focused on developing themes regarding high school counselors' perspectives about their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System. The constant comparative method of data analysis was supported through semi-structured interviews, interview transcripts, field notes, observation notes, and reflective interview memos. Persistent data analysis allowed the researcher to know when saturation was met.

Individual case data sets were coded by line during the initial phase of data analysis. During the second phase of data analysis, data were bracketed using an advanced organizer to capture similar findings. Each case was analyzed to identify findings which rendered three major themes. Themes were then cross analyzed to assist in examining the data in the context of the high school counselor's work with career pathways across various degrees of counselor experience and school demographics.

Discussion of Themes and the Related Literature

The three themes that emerged from the study were discussed in Chapter 5. The emphasis of this section is to connect the themes from the background of the review of literature reported in Chapter 2.

Theme 1: School counselors value relationships and partnerships that foster the successful implementation of career pathways.

High school counselors are critical to implementing programs and strategies that enhance the student's academic achievement, social development, and career development (Gibbons, Diambra, & Buchanan 2010). Research has identified the high school counselor's support of school-wide programs as integral. Furthermore, the counselor's ability to collaborate with stakeholders and partners is a key strategy used for students to succeed in academic and career development (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Collaboration with various partners ensures that all

students succeed in both academics and career. The findings in this study about high school counselors' perspectives about the importance of collaboration aligned with the literature indicating the key role of counselors in implementing school based programs.

The implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System provided high school counselors the opportunity to collaborate with various stakeholders and partners. As high school counselors were cognizant of the positive benefits career pathways provided for students, they felt the need to partner with both internal and external support groups to expand the possibilities of career development. The findings of the study related to Theme 1 support the insights in current literature about the counselor's support of school wide programs relative to academic and career development.

Participants in this study identified multiple collaboration opportunities to assist with implementing career pathways at the local level. High school counselors' perspectives about implementation of career pathways were positively impacted by the opportunity to enhance collaboration with multiple stakeholder groups. The participants felt their work was integral to the total school improvement plan as a result of the career pathway implementation.

This study reveals high school counselors serve as collaborators able to engage various stakeholders in the process of implementing career pathways. Findings in this study depict that high school counselors viewed the increased collaboration resulting from career pathway implementation positively affected school culture. Mary, whose school had the highest degree of implementation, indicated that career pathways had become a part of the school's culture. She also agreed that career pathways were branded in her school. All participants confirmed that partnerships and relationships were being enhanced as a result of career pathway implementation. They acknowledged relationships and partnerships being formed internally

among counselors, administrators, academic teachers, and career technical teachers. They also confirmed that external relationships were being enhanced with the local workforce community, business and industry, and postsecondary partners.

Research has indicated that high school counselors feel marginalized about their work as a result of their duties and responsibilities. However, participants in this study identified that their work with career pathways enhanced the opportunities for students and did not increase anxiety levels as an “additional duty.” The findings from this study validate that high school counselors are important to the school improvement process, and high school counselors want to be viewed as integral to the achievement of students and the overall success of the school.

Theme 2: School counselors embrace new practices to positively impact students' decisions about career pathways.

Research studies confirm that high school counselors play key roles in addressing critical aspects of education. High school counselors can have a positive impact on student academic success (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010); serve as advocates for the success of all students (House & Hayes, (2002); and prepare students for college success (Gewertz, 2011) and career success, (Withington et al., 2012). The findings of this study support that high school counselors do have a positive impact on helping students engage in school by having a plan to integrate academic and career technical education. The perspectives of high school counselors in this study established that career pathways could be a key strategy in improving students' academic achievement, graduation success, and career connectivity.

Findings from this study pointed to the urgency felt by high school counselors about changing their practice to better accommodate the implementation of career pathways which motivated students to be more engaged in their education. Participants also believed students

made more informed choices about their futures. Therefore, counselors were more willing to shift from whole group to individual and small group counseling. This shift in practice was viewed by counselors as a key strategy in allowing students to explore careers and better align their current focus with their long-term career aspirations.

Participants in this study continued to be challenged with the student to counselor ratio. Their perspectives were guided by the need to go beyond small group advisement and to create a more individualized approach to counseling. High school counselors recognized the benefits of individualized conferences which included engaging students and parents in identifying the most appropriate career pathways, allowing students to make adjustments to their existing pathway choices, and ensuring that students take advantage of their academic and career pathway choices.

All participants shared in detail that their work revolves around an individualized graduation plan to track academic class progression as well as career technical education. These plans were referred to as student advisement sheets or programs of study which became a conversation tool to confirm career pathway selection as the guiding choice to outline academic and career pathway courses. Pam described this phenomenon as helping students create an “end plan” or “game plan.” The contents of the plan served as a road map for students to make future course selections and to track their progress during high school. The data supports that the high school counselor’s perspective about programs of studies is a basic foundation in transitioning to individualized academic and career counseling.

Data confirms that better student advisement is critical for ensuring all students have an individual graduation plan driven by a career pathway choice. The participants were strongly encouraged that students could make better career pathway decisions as a result of a better student advisement system. Although participants acknowledged that GAcollge411 was

adequate, they identified improvements which would lessen the bureaucratic role of counselors in the process. They also identified the need for agencies to collaborate for consistency in alignment of career pathway resources such as GACollege411 and career interest inventories.

Theme 3: Developing a school culture conducive to implementing career pathways successfully requires consistent communication.

The development of a school culture focused on student achievement is the responsibility of the entire organization with the primary leader being the principal. The review of literature pointed out the critical role of principals in the directing of day-to-day activities of the counselor (Amatea & Clark, 2009). Therefore, principals could have impact on the high school counselors' daily focus on career pathways. Thus, the how and what the counselor communicates about career pathways could be impacted by the leadership of the school. The present study allowed the participants to identify methods which the high school counselor impacts school culture. Career pathway implementation provided counselors new opportunities to communicate with multiple stakeholder groups. Findings show that high school counselors developed communication pieces relative to the stakeholder group being impacted by career pathway implementation. Therefore, findings in this research study suggested that high school counselors created positive communication messages and strategies which were targeted at expanding the possibilities of implementing career pathways.

The high school counselor participants in this study recognized the impact of their work on the school culture. They identified that clear and consistent communication about career pathways was a key component in improving the school culture about career pathways. However, counselors identified clarity of communication from the state policy makers about the purpose and overarching goals of career pathways as an area for improvement. The counselors

acknowledged that communication about career pathways from district and school level leadership also created a positive message about the benefits of career pathways. Counselors recognized the value in being included on the school improvement team as a way of highlighting messages about career pathways.

The urgency created by the incorporation of career pathways into the new educational accountability model known as CCRPI was crucial to the advancement of career pathway implementation. The participants of this study recognized the increase in conversation within the school leadership team. As a result, career pathway communication and “branding” was becoming a part of the culture of the building. Research studies indicated that high school counselors who demonstrate effective leadership and engage in consistent daily interactions within a school can advance programs and initiatives (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). The high school counselors’ focus on career pathway implementation was enhanced by positive communication efforts, and they indicated the CCRPI accountability increased the urgency for conversation and opportunity to share positive messages.

Findings of this research study suggested that communication provided by counselors to students, parents, teachers, and external organizations had a positive impact on school culture. Data revealed that counselors had very positive perspectives about their impact on the school culture through communication. They identified multiple ways that they perceived career pathways impacting the school culture including the following: more emphasis on career pathways as a holistic approach, increased diversity of career pathways, better relationships within the school, more dual enrollment opportunities, and higher expectations for students. Enhanced relationships which improve the school efforts to help all students successfully

implement career pathways was a result of better communication. Findings across all four data sets highlighted the impact of communication on relationships.

The high school counselors underscored many changes in decision making and practice which was an outgrowth of the challenge to implement career pathways. However, the data suggest that high school counselors viewed the work as having positive impact on student engagement in school. As a result, several changes in practices focused on improving communication through people, process, and product. Communication aimed to improve relationships through better communication with the people in the organization. High school counselors also focused on improving processes to encourage more participation and completion of career pathways. And finally, the achievement of students in engaging in school, obtaining jobs, and enrolling in post-secondary education was highlighted as examples of communication about the product.

Data revealed that communication provided by counselors, guided by strong leadership and accountability urgency, contributed to a positive school culture. The high school counselors were very much involved in these efforts and therefore, took pride in the positive outcomes. They openly spoke about the impact that communication about career pathways had on improving school culture by increasing the focus of their work with career pathways.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Policy Makers

The findings for this study hold several implications for policy makers interested in increasing the fidelity of implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System. In addition to these implications, recommendations where appropriate will also be offered. First, after examining some of the positive perspectives that high school counselors have about Georgia's Career

Pathway System, the following question may arise: Is Georgia's career pathway policy strong enough to fully hold school districts and schools accountable for the full implementation of career pathways? Currently, the state policy is limited to requirements identified in federal funding known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins, 2006) and Georgia's new educational accountability model known as the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).

Mary, whose school was at the highest level of implementation, suggested that more accountability should be placed on schools for career pathway implementation. For instance, she stated that the graduation rule should set a requirement that all students have a career pathway. Findings from this study suggest that while a requirement would increase the focus of district leaders to implement career pathways, there are other barriers which exist and could impede students from graduating. However, Mary was also cautious about necessary flexibility needed to work with students as their career passions changed based on new opportunities through career pathway awareness.

While Perkins requires that states and local systems implement programs of study, there is no expectation that all students take advantage of aligning courses to complete a career pathway. Through the reauthorization of federal funding, the federal government could encourage states and districts to develop strategic plans that required more possibilities for career pathway completion. Additionally, incentive grants or carry over funds could be established to reward schools with a higher percentage of students completing career pathways. The reauthorization of Perkins allows the federal and state governments to study current research that more clearly aligns changing practices of high school counselors with the overall intention of increasing pathway participation and completion.

The career pathway performance indicator has minimal impact on the total score for the schools CCRPI score. State policy might be revised to encourage a stronger level of implementation. While counselors might prefer a requirement that all students graduate with a career pathway, state policy should be structured in such a way to either lead or direct local systems to meet higher levels of participation and or completion. Additionally, state funding might be redirected to create programs of studies for all career pathways. State leadership, policy, and funding are critical components of problem solving the improved fidelity of implementation for all students.

Given the student and school engagement perspectives by high school counselors about their work with career pathways, the state could channel financial resources to further build the career pathway implementation capacity at the local level. These funds might create better resources for individual student advisement such as working to lower the student to counselor ratio. The lower ratio would provide the impetus for more high school counselors to embrace small group advisement as was suggested by the findings of this study. The lower student to counselor ratio would also help counselors meet the growing need to conduct individual career advisement sessions.

State policy makers could also develop a more proactive approach to communication with local school officials such as high school counselors regarding work with career pathways. All high school counselors participating in this research suggested that state officials need to align the roll out of changes with the registration process for students. They overwhelmingly supported the idea that state officials could deliver communication about annual changes in the fall of the school year to provide adequate time for making changes with information systems and then they would be better able to communicate the changes to students and parents. State

policy makers should also consider the level of job responsibilities required of counselors before adding additional responsibilities. Jamie acknowledged that the Capstone Project being recommended by policy makers could create additional responsibility for counselors. She advised that policy makers often look at these types of decisions more from a “political than a practical” viewpoint.

Finally, state policy makers can influence a higher level of career pathway implementation through enhanced professional development opportunities. Participants of this research study described multiple areas of potential professional developments such as scheduling for pathways, advisement techniques, career pathway terminology, and career information and projections. This professional learning would allow counselors to better guide and to inform students about their future educational and career opportunities. One major challenge was the need for high school counselors to understand the language of business and industry which could be addressed by state policymakers through an alignment of education and industry terminology.

Implications for School Leaders

Local school leaders also have the opportunity to impact the future work of counselors with career pathways. Given the positive impact on the school culture through increased collaboration both internally and externally, school leaders should acknowledge the impact high school counselors have as school reform leaders. Local leaders should increase the role of school counselors on the school improvement team and use career pathways as a strategy to increase student engagement in connecting academic studies to career aspirations. The study’s participating counselors acknowledged and embraced their increased role and responsibility on the school leadership team.

Research indicated that counselors are faced with multiple duties and responsibilities as assigned by principals. The high school counselors affirmed the varied duties and responsibilities they have had to assume. School leaders should carefully evaluate the overwhelming duties of counselors and where possible, alleviate the administrative- like duties to allow more attention for career pathway advisement. School leaders should also be objective about adding additional duties to counselors as new administrative requirements are added.

Findings from this study could be helpful to school leaders about engaging students in their own education. Counselors overwhelmingly identified the positive attributes of career pathways on student engagement, academic achievement, postsecondary readiness, and career readiness. School leaders should take a very proactive role in providing leadership for advancing career pathways. Conversation and urgency about career pathways were acknowledged as positive opportunities for high school counselors to be more accountable to the overall school improvement process. School leaders should take advantage of this opportunity to better engage students and connect them with postsecondary education opportunities and careers.

Implications for High School Counselors

High school counselors have the greatest area of implication given the findings of this study. School counselors have the responsibility to further advance career pathways through a change in decision making and practice. The biggest shift is in understanding the impact of relationships and partnerships needed to advance the career pathway requirements. Counselors should be focused on identifying both internal and external partners and developing the partnerships to assist students in better understanding their career pathway options. These partnerships can also expand the diversity of offerings for career pathways and expand possibilities for students.

The high school counselors spoke extensively about the need for professional development. However, in several instances, counselors admitted that they did not attend some of the available professional development. The participants admitted a relatively high degree of self-efficacy related to career pathway implementation. Therefore, high school counselors should be more concerned with participating in career pathway professional development to further support the local implementation of career pathways. Counselors should also be more reflective about their professional learning needs and then be more willing to communicate these needs to state and local policy makers.

The greatest gap in the perspectives of counselors was in the area of business and industry connections. While the participants had an awareness that connections existed, Jamie was the only counselor who had reached out to the community to begin better understanding the local workforce. However, she acknowledged that district level leadership had set up tours and was serving as the catalysts to help educators better understand the local industry profile and workforce. High school counselors should become more engaged in local community work force initiatives. Such engagement will not only serve as background for making career pathways decisions but will also work to strengthen partnerships for the local school and district. High school counselors should assist in creating a revolving door for business engagement in the school and be reciprocated in the local businesses being involved in the schools.

High school counselors should also consider the transition opportunities provided through the middle school. While career connections classes occur in most middle schools, a concentrated effort to better educate students about various careers was recognized by the participating counselors in this study. High school counselors should reach out to middle school counselors and assist students in identifying career aspirations. The high school counselors

should include middle school counselors in planning for career pathways' transitions from middle to high school. The engagement of middle school counselors in better understanding high school and postsecondary offerings might increase the career pathway participation and completion rate. High school counselors acknowledged that students change their minds often and are influenced by peers. The middle school counselor connection could improve the early identification of careers which will provide students better opportunities to complete pathways, earn industry-based certifications, earn post-secondary education credits, and participate in apprenticeship programs during their high school experience.

Implications for Future Research

The study of perspectives of high school counselors related to their work with Georgia's Career Pathway System was the first study of its kind since the implementation of career pathways in Georgia. While the study is limited in scope to the state of Georgia, similar questions could be asked in other states.

This study was limited to four high school counselors through purposeful and criterion sampling. High school counselors were required to have a minimum of five years of experience in working with career pathways. In a larger study, counselors at the middle school level and counselors with varying degrees of experience could share more diverse levels of perspectives. Middle school counselors could provide a better understanding of career awareness activities important for selection of a career pathway at an earlier age. High school counselors with less experience could provide a clearer perspective of professional development needs to assist in continuing or enhancing implementation of pathways.

Secondly, the scope of this particular study could be extended by studying the larger concept of career development as outlined in the American School Counselors Association Standards for Career Development. While career pathway implementation has been a major educational initiative, the scope is minimal compared to all aspects of career development. Further research might investigate the impact of career interest inventories on the decision making process. Additional studies might decipher the interaction between education and business relative to the intersection of career pathways and workforce development.

Finally, additional research is needed to identify the pre-service education of counselors. While research indicates that high school counselors are typically trained to deal with social/mental needs of students, additional emphasis might help counselors' better implement a total counseling program. High school counselors are faced with a multitude of duties in implementing a balance of academic, social/mental, and career development activities. They also have to balance these responsibilities with daily administrative duties. Perspectives of counseling about their pre-service training program could better inform the practice of educating counselors for high school counseling positions.

Finally, this study was a qualitative one with a population of four participants, and generalization of the findings cannot be made. It is suggested that large scale, quantitative studies be conducted across all areas of counseling related to the implementation and evaluation of career pathways. Such studies would give more confidence to policy makers and school and system leaders related to the workload of counselors, the pervasiveness of barriers, and the efficacy level of counselors who, ultimately, take responsibility for working with middle and high school students. From such enlarged studies, perhaps a "bigger" view of the competing and

complicating issues surrounding career pathway implementation could be understood more clearly.

Concluding Thoughts

The data in this study suggested that counselors have a very positive perspective about their work with career pathways. The positive perspective was predominantly based on their feelings that career pathways positively impacted students through better engagement, stronger academic to career and technical education course connections, and higher aspiration for both career and postsecondary education. The high school counselors also believed that career pathways improved the overall culture of the school through the building of relationships and partnerships to assist students in achieving career pathway completion.

Constructivism guided this study as a means of gaining meaning from the interviews of high school counselors. The high school counselors in this study were eager to share experiences gained through the implementation of career pathways. They appreciated the opportunity to share perspectives, promising practices, and barriers encountered through the implementation phase. Their perspectives were mapped using a bracketing approach and provided great insight into three overarching themes for consideration in future practice.

The limits of this study included its focus on high school counselors with a minimum of five years of experience. Therefore, it is impossible to generalize the findings beyond the scope of this study. However, the research provides great insight into career pathway phenomenon occurring in local schools in Georgia. The findings also provide insight into the possibilities which occur for students as a result of successful implementation. Policymakers can also take note of insights and recommendations to further develop career pathways.

While the researcher has very close professional connection to this topic as outlined in the reflexivity statement, many benefits of high school counselors working with career pathways exist. On several occasions, the researcher personally noted the great work that was started by many, not only still exists, but exists at a high degree of fidelity and future sustainability. The fact that career pathways are now a part of a statewide educational accountability system is commendable and impressive.

The remaining question to answer is how much more can be accomplished through a laser-like focus by high school counselors to become the “champions” for future career pathway development? Although the perspectives shared by the participants were very positive, the question must be begged: “How much more can be accomplished?”

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APPENDIX A
HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant _____ School _____

Interview Guide

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH GEORGIA'S CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM AND THE IMPACT ON COUNSELING DECISIONS AND PRACTICES

Comments to Establish Rapport

1. Introduction and Subjectivity Explanation
 - a. Agriculture teaching experience
 - b. Counselors as "Gatekeepers"
 - c. Thesis Research
 - d. State Director of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education
 - e. Principal/CEO of College and Career Academy
 - f. Why this topic is important to me
2. Tell me about yourself, background and experiences
3. Tell me about your experience as a counselor
4. Tell me about your schools career development goals for students.

Research Question 1

What are the practicing secondary school counselors' perspectives of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

1. Describe your knowledge or understanding of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System.

2. Describe your understanding of how the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System intersects with workforce readiness
3. Describe your understanding of how the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System intersects with your local community's workforce readiness plan.
4. What are your perspectives (feelings) of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
5. What experiences during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System influenced your perspectives (feelings) of Georgia's Career Pathway System? Positive/Negative Experiences?
6. How(if) did the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System change your normal duties and responsibilities?

Research Question 2

What counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

1. Explain the counseling standards you and your team prescribe to in the development of your annual counseling plan? Describe how you follow these standards.
2. Describe which standard(s) does the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System most closely align with? Explain.

3. How did you modify your annual counseling plan to include the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?
4. Describe the most impacted counseling decision or practice that changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System. What have secondary school counselors had to do different.
5. Was/Is professional development adequate during the implementation phase? Now? What would be helpful?

Research Question 3

How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

1. What counseling practices have you found most effective in implementing Georgia's Career Pathway System?
2. How did you know these methods were effective? What evidence existed to prove they were effective?
3. Were there specific strategies that you added to your counseling plan to incorporate the career pathways?
4. How did you feel about those times you had to change your annual counseling plan to incorporate career pathways? Describe
5. To further enhance the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System, what would you like to do in the future? How could the implementation be enhanced?

Documents

What documents could you share that was used during the implementation process?

APPENDIX B

HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE 2

Participant _____ School _____

Interview Guide – 2nd Interview

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH
GEORGIA’S CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM AND THE IMPACT ON COUNSELING
DECISIONS AND PRACTICES

Comments to Reconnect Rapport

1. Thank you for last interview.
2. Gleaned some promising aspects regarding your work with career pathways.
3. Summarize what I heard from first interview. (See Reflections)
4. Would like to dive a little deeper in some areas and explore a few areas.

Any overarching thoughts since last interview? Anything you wished you had said, once I left the building.

Research Question 1

What are the practicing secondary school counselors’ perspectives of Georgia’s Career Pathway System?

You described (or could you describe) student engagement as a positive/negative aspect of career pathways. How do you feel about this?

Can you provide specific examples of student engagement? Specific stories which informed you that career pathways is the right focus?

You described (or could you describe) parent engagement as a positive/negative aspect of career pathways. How do you feel about this?

Can you provide specific examples of parent engagement? Specific stories which informed you that career pathways is the right focus?

Because of the focus of career pathways in the CCRPI, describe how much more important is the implementation of career pathways to: Basically, how much more conversation is directed about career pathway implementation, urgency, pressure, etc.

Your district Administration

Your school administration

Your CTAE Administration and teachers

Your academic teachers

Your counseling staff

Describe any animosity you have about having to implement Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Tell me about your role on the school's leadership team relative to Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Describe your understanding of your school's leadership team awareness of Georgia's Career Pathway System.

Describe your understanding of your school's leadership team awareness of ASCA Standards?

Research Question 2

What counseling decisions and practices changed as a result of the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

Tell me about the transition between 8th grade and ninth grade. Can you describe what is being done to prepare students for career pathways in the eighth grade?

Describe the working relationship between the middle school counselors and the high school counselors regarding career pathways? If there is an existing relationship, has this always existed?

Describe any parent engagement activities which are used to inform parents about career pathways.

ASCI has a recognition program called Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). Describe your awareness of the program? Do you have plans to receive this recognition?

Describe how (if any) has College 411 enhanced the delivery of career pathways? What would improve the usage of College 411 in the implementation of career pathways? Do you use programs other than College 411?

Can you explain the role Teachers as Advisors have or could have on the implementation of career pathways?

Will you describe how the CCRPI has changed the accountability for implementation of career pathways? How do you feel about that?

Can you tell me a little about the tools that use to assist in the implementation of career pathways? (Infinite Campus, etc.)

Research Question 3

How did high school counselors manage barriers that arose during the implementation of Georgia's Career Pathway System?

How do you go about expanding the diversity of career pathway offerings for your school?

Teacher resources

Facilities

Equipment

On-line courses/pathways

Describe how you feel about your ability to implement Georgia's Career Pathway System?

The lack of (or the lack of attendance) in professional development arose a key barrier to career pathway implementation. Which affected you more? And why?

If professional development was provided to better the implementation of career pathways, what would you like to see offered and why? (Small group advisement, pathway/career awareness. Scheduling for career pathways, etc.)

Describe how would you like to see this professional development offered?

Timeliness of dissemination of information from DOE arose as a barrier to effective implementation. What would you like to see accomplished through GADOE to help schools with implementation beyond more timely dissemination of information?

Describe any counselor duties which you feel should be removed to better assist in the implementation of career pathways? Why?

Describe how you manage the balance of offering career pathways which students are interested in and career pathways that industry need to have offered?

Describe to me how you manage parental misconceptions of career pathways (college bound versus career track)? If this has been an issue?

Potential Documents to share.

What documents could you share that was used during the implementation process?

Student Registration Forms – Specifically 9th grade

PowerPoints used with students (at different grade levels)

Middle School Pathway advisement Sheets, brochures, etc. (Basically anything used by HS or MS counselor about career pathways)

Middle School PowerPoints

Agendas of training conducted locally (within school or within district)

Parent night PowerPoint, handouts, and brochures

Copy of scripts used for school messengers

Handouts used for Hope, Hope Rigor courses, SAT, ACT, AP, Career Pathways

Career Pathway bulletin boards (I can take a picture)

School or district counseling plan

School Improvement plans which include specific strategies for career pathways

Agendas of Chamber of Commerce conducted events – job shadowing,

Counselor meeting agendas