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# Reimagining Career and Technical Education: Examining the Factors That Influence Grade 7–12 School Counselors’ Beliefs in CTE and Program Enrollment

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to examine the factors that influenced school counselors’ beliefs in career and technical education (CTE) programs and how their beliefs influenced their recommendation of CTE enrollment to students in Grades 7–12. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, this study examined the lived experiences and beliefs of six Grade 7–12 school counselors that influenced their CTE program recommendations. The results of this qualitative research study indicated that contrary to the literature review, most of the participants recognized the importance of CTE and saw CTE positively, indicating the need for career awareness for students to begin before the seventh grade. The findings also revealed that lived experiences significantly influenced the counselors’ positive or negative attitude toward CTE. However, the study’s findings indicated that the counselors’ personal CTE experiences had no discernible effect on their positive or negative impressions of CTE. No significant influence was found between the counselors’ lived experiences and their beliefs in the benefit of CTE programs and their enrollment recommendations. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data include uncomfortable challenges, “what was I thinking,” creating a master plan, and a new perspective. The recommendation of CTE for students could be the key to reducing the predicted shortage of skilled workers, and the findings could be used to guide professional development for school counselors, which may improve CTE recommendations and enrollment strategies and address future needs for a skilled workforce.

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Reimagining Career and Technical Education: Examining the Factors That Influence  
Grade 7–12 School Counselors' Beliefs in CTE and Program Enrollment

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
EdD in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

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December 2021

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I want to thank God for giving me the strength and endurance to achieve my goal. Additionally, this dissertation emanated from the unlimited support and encouragement I received from Dr. Quigley; she often challenged my spirit. As my Chair, she was ready with encouraging words and faith in me, even as my faith wavered. Thank you for helping me grow as a scholar. Dr. Cathleen Dotterer, thank you for being a dedicated committee member and providing insight that guided and challenged my thinking.

My first advisor, Dr. C. Michael Robinson, welcomed me into the DEXL program, challenged me with constructive edits, and provided a needed ear. Thank you for listening and allowing me to prove my commitment to this goal. My final advisor, Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres, prompted my new mantra: “Who decides?” Thank you for making me realize that I decide, and I decided to see this vision through to fruition. Dr. Shannon Cleverly-Thompson, who prompted me to take a deeper look at myself, thank you for providing me with the insight to turn my perceived disability into a strength. Dr. Theresa Pulos, the velvet hammer, thank you for guiding my research methodology and pushing me beyond what I thought I was capable of. Moreover, to the rest of the DEXL program faculty, I cannot thank you enough for the investment you all made in my progress.

I could not have made this journey without my stalwart Cohort 7 and 7.5 colleagues. I am honored to know you, have learned from and with you, and know that I

have lifelong friends. To my mother, may you be smiling down from Heaven and know I am doing well. Thank you, for it was your strength that taught me to be brave and, most of all, how to survive. To my father, for your knowledge and leading by example that ignited the desire to continue my education. Thank you for your wisdom and for always encouraging and believing in me. To my children and grandchildren, my legacy for you: whatever you set your hearts and minds on, you will accomplish. Thank you for believing in me and cheering me on when I found it hard to believe in myself.

Finally, my husband, Maurice, you are my most ardent supporter; your unconditional love and faith in me are sustaining forces in my life. You patiently waited while I took on multiple degrees and credentials. I dedicate this final degree to you.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Colleen Jackson is currently the Retention Specialist for the SEASON Program at the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). She is concurrently employed as the Vocational Counselor for Elements of CNY at Helio Health.

Ms. Jackson attended Central Technical Vocational Center from 1986 to 1988, graduated with a diploma in Practical Nursing in 1988, and she worked for many years as a Licensed Practical Nurse, while concurrently working for the SCSD as a Teaching Assistant. She later graduated from Cayuga Community College with an Associate of Arts degree in 2009. She transferred to the State University of New York (SUNY) Oswego, attending from 2009 to 2012. Ms. Jackson received a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Careers Education in 2011 and continued to graduate in 2012 with a Master of Science degree in Career and Technical Education (CTE). She returned to SUNY Oswego in 2015 and graduated in 2017 with a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Ms. Jackson came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2019 and began her doctoral studies in the EdD Program in Executive Leadership. She pursued her research in career and technical education under the direction of Dr. Loretta Quigley and Dr. Cathleen Dotterer and received her EdD in 2021.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to examine the factors that influenced school counselors' beliefs in career and technical education (CTE) programs and how their beliefs influenced their recommendation of CTE enrollment to students in Grades 7–12. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, this study examined the lived experiences and beliefs of six Grade 7–12 school counselors that influenced their CTE program recommendations. The results of this qualitative research study indicated that contrary to the literature review, most of the participants recognized the importance of CTE and saw CTE positively, indicating the need for career awareness for students to begin before the seventh grade. The findings also revealed that lived experiences significantly influenced the counselors' positive or negative attitude toward CTE. However, the study's findings indicated that the counselors' personal CTE experiences had no discernible effect on their positive or negative impressions of CTE. No significant influence was found between the counselors' lived experiences and their beliefs in the benefit of CTE programs and their enrollment recommendations. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data include uncomfortable challenges, "what was I thinking," creating a master plan, and a new perspective. The recommendation of CTE for students could be the key to reducing the predicted shortage of skilled workers, and the findings could be used to guide professional development for school counselors, which may improve CTE

recommendations and enrollment strategies and address future needs for a skilled workforce.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

According to a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), Rice et al. (2016) stated that career and technical education (CTE) in secondary schools provides every student with an opportunity to acquire a head start on college and career readiness. Moreover, the USDOE (2019) reported that 98% of school districts in the United States sponsored campus-based CTE programs during the 2016–2017 academic school year. In 2014, the USDOE reported that 85% of students who graduated from a public high school in 2009 had finished one or more CTE courses, 76% had earned at least one full credit in a CTE subject, and 19% were CTE concentrators who had earned at least three credits in the same CTE field.

Students gain work-based skills, life skills, employability skills, and an understanding of how essential topics, such as math, science, and English, apply to real life through the many CTE pathways offered in secondary schools across the United States. CTE students gain hands-on experience in their chosen path and, by their senior year, they have engaged in practicum courses that include internships or job shadowing.

Further, students can acquire nationally recognized credentials in various programs upon completing CTE programs and passing certification exams. Health science; engineering; culinary arts; business; computer science; cosmetology; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; and automobile mechanics are just a few majors available. With these certificates, students can enter the global economy one step ahead

of many other students, either by obtaining a job in the profession that will help them pay for college or by beginning their careers immediately after high school.

However, secondary CTE programs in the United States are declining. CTE programs have been declining steadily for several decades. In the 1980s, states raised the number of compulsory high school courses and mandated that students take additional courses in core academic subjects such as math, science, social studies, and English. These additional criteria, combined with dwindling funding and an increasing belief that all students should be encouraged to get a 4-year college degree, resulted in a precipitous decrease in CTE participation (Jacob, 2017).

Some researchers are concerned that district and college leadership do not place a high enough priority on CTE programs. Jimenez (2018) asserted that CTE is viewed as an afterthought rather than a necessary component of a high-quality K–12 education. According to Jimenez (2018), CTE program participation is not obligatory but voluntary in all 50 states for high school graduation. This distinction demonstrates the separation between CTE and traditional academics and college preparedness.

Leadem (2018) found that 30% of students worldwide attended a 4-year college because they believed it was the next step after high school, and 23% attended because their parents and school counselors encouraged college as their next step. Additionally, to close the job market gap, society requires students to graduate career ready from high school. There are several highly promising and essential career pathways that are accessible with specialized training in CTE programs.

Doyle (2020) noted that the fields with predicted growth include workers in energy, home health care, security, math and statistics, education, medical assisting,

software development, and physical therapy. According to Mills (2015), a growing skills deficit imperils the United States' economic competitiveness and way of life. Today there is a shortage of competent workers in the United States.

According to a 2019 Adecco USA survey (Lui, 2019), 84% of HR managers believe that American workers are not prepared to fill many of the country's job openings. Economic, workforce, and educational realities all point to the importance of enhanced skills, expanded knowledge, and professional preparedness as a path to succeed in an informed economy (Copacino, 2017). For example, the manufacturing industry will require over three million new employees over the next decade. In contrast, two million or more jobs will remain unfilled because of skills and knowledge gaps, as well as a shortage of technical education, as stated by Giff et al. (2015). According to Craig (2019), more than two-thirds of the nation's businesses across various industries reported difficulty finding qualified individuals for highly skilled roles, with the most significant gaps in healthcare and technology.

While some research has been conducted on the most significant impact of CTE, there is a gap in the literature addressing school counselors' beliefs in CTE programs and their influence on CTE recommendations and enrollment. Additionally, the majority of CTE research studies to date have been quantitative. It is essential to investigate school counselors' lived experiences and beliefs of CTE because these beliefs impact their support and recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12 (Finlayson, 2009). The level of support then affects students' opportunities to engage in CTE programs that prepare them for careers following high school graduation. This qualitative study examined school counselors' lived experiences and beliefs of CTE programs to elicit and

describe their lived experiences that shaped their beliefs and influenced their CTE recommendations.

### **Research Questions**

The research uncovered the answers to this study's two research questions:

1. How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?
2. How do school counselors' beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?

### **Problem Statement**

Education and training are critical to the economic prospects of individuals and the maintenance of a prosperous economy. Unfortunately, a significant portion of our youth does not meet the basic threshold skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce (Nettles, 2017). CTE in the United States relies on quality advising and counseling services for Grades 7–12 students. However, negative perceptions of CTE held by school counselors, and the stigma of a vocational education being a place for students with disabilities, still exists (Brand et al., 2013). Therefore, CTE suffers from an identity problem among school counselors (Schenck et al., 2012). There is a gap in the literature regarding school counselors' lived experiences and embedded beliefs toward CTE program recommendation.

CTE programs prepare students for various jobs in the high-growth science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields; healthcare; and financial management that are included in Grade 7–12 curricula (ACTE, 2018). CTE instills a sense of purpose in students by prioritizing real-world skills and knowledge. Students gain employability

and professional skills, such as decision-making, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, time management, tenacity, self-advocacy, interpersonal communication, professionalism, safety, and project management, making these skills relevant to all career fields and serving as critical building blocks for subsequent employment and education success (Bray et al., 2010).

In a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report, Restuccia et al. (2018) indicated that there were 5% more openings than workers across all occupations surveyed. There were 13% more opportunities in skilled occupations, such as welders, administrative assistants, and computer support professionals, than there were available workers. The skills gap is especially severe in health care occupations. According to the report, there are 1.1 million unfilled health care jobs resulting from a shortage of qualified, skilled workers (Restuccia et al., 2018).

To take advantage of global career opportunities, businesses want workers with skills and education to work across cultures (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2021). Therefore, we must ensure that all students have the necessary career readiness skills to live and work in today's integrated economy and global society (Jimenez, 2020). Given that school counselors may develop beliefs of CTE based on their lived experiences, there is a need to examine the beliefs that impact school counselors' decisions to recommend CTE program enrollment.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Based on the intent of this study and research method, the conceptual framework centered on the transformative learning experience of school counselors in relation to their beliefs in CTE and their role in program recommendation to students in Grades 7–

12. Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning theory was applied to this study on school counselors of students in Grades 7–12 examining the factors influencing their decisions to recommend CTE to students. The application and utilization of Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning theory could result in a thorough study that offers best practices that may inform policy and programming.

In the late 1970s, Mezirow introduced transformative learning theory, which encouraged contemplation, reflection, and reconsideration. He changed the original assumption and expectation frameworks, framing implicit bias and influencing thought behaviors and beliefs (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow (2009) frequently claimed that his theory builds on the concept that people perceive experiences in their way and that their experiences manifest how they see the world (Taylor et al., 2012).

Transformative learning theory suggests that adults form their concepts and beliefs based on their experiences. Adults then use their lived experiences to guide their beliefs, developing their attitudes, thoughts, and actions (Mezirow, 1997).

Merriam and Clark (1993) noted that by affecting individuals personally, the experiences would increase their skills and abilities, sense of self, and perspective of their lives. Merriam and Clark further noted that although, according to Mezirow (1990), a single or significant “disorienting dilemma” can occur, a gradual transformation can also happen over time. For example, school counselors can be critical of how they view CTE and discover that they do not have a firm understanding of it. While transformative learning events might occur abruptly, they can also take the shape of a sequence of seemingly innocuous encounters, occurring over time, that gradually result in a shift in their cultural viewpoint (Merriam & Clark, 1993).

Transformative learning can be defined as the process of critically examining one's beliefs, values, and assumptions to gain insight and to develop new knowledge (Mezirow, 1990, 2000). Changing one's perspective on present and past events can initiate personal and social growth, resulting in transformative change (Mezirow, 1990).

Transformed learners are closer to becoming independent critical thinkers who can arrive at their meaning of life's events and circumstances, rather than acting without analyzing others' perceptions or doing what others have always done. As a result, learners are more self-aware, more aware of society's circumstances, and more predisposed to constantly searching for new meanings—not just searching for more facts and knowledge (Mezirow, 1990).

The significance of using transformative learning theory for this study was to understand if counselors' lived experiences influenced their beliefs in CTE and if they experienced a transformation to change their beliefs by recommending CTE to students in Grades 7–12.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced school counselors' beliefs in CTE programs and how their beliefs influenced their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12. Additionally, it adds to the literature an understanding of counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment. The information gained from this study will help to address counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment that could affect the workforce shortage of skilled employees. Moreover, information and guidance coming from counselors may substantially influence students' future educational and career plans.

## **Potential Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for the U.S. economy, the state of New York educational institutions, and societal change by increasing counselors' recommendations of CTE to students in Grade 7–12 and addressing the country's essential employment needs. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the critical need for CTE programs. The workforce suffered a blow from the public health crisis, showcasing the critical need for essential workers in important industries, such as childcare staff, nurses and health care workers, and commercial transportation—all fields that are trained within CTE programs.

If enrollments in CTE increase, and negative perceptions of CTE decrease, communities will benefit socially and economically. By recording school counselors' beliefs in and recommendations for CTE, this study contributes to the body of knowledge about secondary education. It has the potential to help others realize the value of CTE training programs and the development of our future workforce.

## **Definitions of Terms**

*American School Counselor Association (ASCA)* – a professional organization that comprises school counselors who are licensed or certified and who possess the knowledge and abilities necessary to serve students' academic, individual, social-emotional, and career development needs (ASCA, 2016).

*ASCA National Model* – the framework of a comprehensive school counseling program that consists of four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability, incorporating the four themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012).

*ASCA National Standards* – guidelines for school counselors in their efforts and to provide implementation strategies for a comprehensive, developmental 14-school counseling program that supports and maximizes all students’ academic, career, and personal/social development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

*Career pathways* – a cohesive, articulated sequence of academic and career courses, beginning in Grade 9, that leads to an associate degree, an industry-recognized certificate or certification, or a baccalaureate degree and beyond (Hughes & Karp, 2006).

*Career readiness* – the capacity for adaptation, commitment to lifelong learning, mastery of critical knowledge, and talents and dispositions, varying by job, which evolve through time along a developmental continuum (American Career and Technical Education Administrators [ACTEA], 2021).

*Career technical education (CTE)* – a course of study that equips high school students with the necessary information, skills, and abilities for various vocations by integrating basic academic knowledge with technical and occupational expertise (Bevins et al., 2012). In 2005, the government renamed “vocational education” and “vocational-technical education” to career technical education (ACTE, 2018).

*Comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP)* – holistic, developmental, and preventative school counseling plans designed by school counselors through the use of data to meet all students’ academic, career, and personal/social needs (ASCA, 2012; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017).

*Constructivism* – a theory of learning based on the assumption that individuals acquire knowledge by their interactions and experiences within their environment (Brown, 1998).

*Perception* – a cognitive process required to process information or a person’s sensory experience of the world, including recognizing stimuli and activities in response to the stimuli. Perception may include a person’s touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste (Cherry, 2020).

*School counselors* – individual working inside educational systems who recognize and respond to the need for mental health and behavioral prevention, early intervention, and crisis services that promote psychosocial wellness and development for all students (ASCA, 2019).

*Soft skills* – subjective abilities that are difficult to define but are widely applicable across job titles and industries, such as communication, leadership, persuasion, time management, and teamwork (Robles, 2012).

*Stigma* – a perceived negative attribute or thought or a vague feeling of self-perception that causes people to devalue or think less of themselves or another person (Zhao et al., 2015).

*Vocational education* – organized educational programs that offer a sequence of courses geared toward preparing students for paid or unpaid work that does not require a baccalaureate degree (Gordon, 2014).

*Vocational-technical education* – a practical experience and/or job-related technical abilities in a particular occupational field that are gained through hands-on training. It encompasses various vocations and businesses, including agriculture, home economics, office employment, retail, hospitality, and information technology (Hayward & Benson, 1993).

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 summarized this study, which examined the lived experiences and views of Grade 7–12 school counselors regarding CTE. School counselors' exposure to information about CTE is significant, and their knowledge of CTE programming's usefulness to all students can affect CTE program enrollment. Chapter 1 discussed the context of the problem in the introduction, the problem statement, the study's purpose, research questions, the theoretical framework used, and the study's significance.

This study was organized using a traditional five-chapter framework. Chapter 2 contains a literature review. Chapter 3 details the study's research design, methodology, participants, instruments used in data collection, including the questions and procedures used. Chapter 4 discusses how the findings answered the research questions by utilizing the participants' own words as the primary data source, then it categorizes and highlights the study findings and factors affecting the recommendation of CTE to Grades 7–12 students. Chapter 5 concludes this study by discussing, summarizing, and interpreting the findings to describe the implications, address the study's limitations, and recommend future research and action. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the entire research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

Examining how Grade 7–12 school counselors view CTE is critical for future CTE recruitment at the secondary level. Understanding their beliefs in conjunction with a counselor's degree of recommending available CTE programs may benefit decision-makers in addressing the U.S. skilled workforce shortage. There is a gap in the literature examining school counselors' beliefs in CTE and their influence on CTE program recommendations and enrollment. Kelly and Price (2009) reported that a lack of awareness about CTE programs might be the primary factor influencing school counselors to guide students toward traditional 4-year college programs.

Gaunt and Palmer (2005) stated that educators must understand why students do not select CTE programs. Additionally, Gaunt and Palmer (2005) studied the image and perception problems that plague CTE. They found that school counselors play a significant role in why students do or do not enroll in CTE programs. The study indicated that 42.9% of high school students reported that influencing came from their school counselors, indicating that school counselors significantly influence students enrolling in CTE programs (Gaunt & Palmer, 2005). Similarly, Xing et al. (2019) found consistent results with the Gaunt and Palmer study. Counselors influenced the students' decisions to enroll in a CTE program. Xing et al. (2019) also noted that some CTE students reported that their high school counselors encouraged them not to enroll in CTE programs.

Research indicates that school counselors significantly influence the program students choose and their level of preparedness at graduation (Gilfillan, 2017). School counselors guide students into programs and offer specific guidance on college and career opportunities after graduation (Anctil et al., 2012). Gilfillan (2017) postulated that counselors play a significant role in placing students into CTE programs. Rosen and Molina (2019) stated that some counselors may hold views on students' abilities, which are rooted in their race and socioeconomic status, that factor into the CTE options presented to these students. There is a need to know the factors that influence a school counselors' decision to endorse student enrollment in CTE programs.

This chapter reviews CTE's literature, history, stigmas, and importance for today's workforce. The literature also reviews school counselors' beliefs in CTE and their importance to CTE program enrollment. The purpose of this study was to understand better the school counselors' beliefs influenced by their lived experiences and their influence on student CTE program recommendations and enrollment. The information gathered in this study may be used to influence counselors' future recommendations for CTE program enrollment, which may affect the skilled labor shortage. A greater understanding of school counselors' beliefs in CTE and their influence on program recommendations and enrollment should help assist school counselors in areas they believe support is required. The findings from this study are also intended to provide feedback to leaders to assist them in increasing the recruitment of students into CTE programs.

This chapter opens with a history of CTE in the United States, emphasizing legislation. It then delves into the stigma and image surrounding CTE and why they exist.

The literature on CTE and the workforce is analyzed to determine the relationship between the two in society. This review will examine the history of school counselors and review the literature available on school counselors and CTE influence. Finally, this study will look at CTE in today's schools and the current situation of CTE.

This chapter drew on a variety of distinct research literature sources. The primary source of research was the St. John Fisher Lavery Library's databases. Academic databases used were ProQuest Central, Credo Reference, JSTOR, Directory of Open Access Journals, Educator's Reference Complete, ERIC, Research Gate, and Google Scholars. Key terms, such as career and technical education, vocational education, school counselors in CTE, stigmas associated with CTE, history of CTE, college readiness, career readiness, dual credit, advanced placement, college board, transformative learning theory, work-based learning, apprenticeships, and Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 were used.

### **History of CTE**

Historically, education has been administered by individual states; however, the federal government has a role in delivering education by providing funding and leadership to states (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Prior to the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, the United States entered World War I. Apart from World War I, subsequent wars, such as World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, impacted vocational education. The numerous wars underlined the importance of a vocational education, which was a necessary component of preparing people for the workforce (Gordon, 2014).

According to Hayward and Benson (1993), the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act defined the federal government's role in vocational-technical education. The Act funded school

districts' efforts to integrate vocational-technical education into secondary schools.

Hayward and Benson (1993) also discovered that the Smith-Hughes Act separated vocational-technical and academic programs rather than offering a unified structure.

From 1917 through 1963, the fundamental components of vocational-technical programs remained constant, despite a shift in emphasis from national defense and severe unemployment to new technology in the 1950s and 1960s (Hayward & Benson, 1993; Steffes, 2014).

The Smith-Hughes Act had many fundamental provisions. One of the provisions required school districts to form separate boards for vocational-technical education. The separation of funds was another criterion. Finally, the Smith-Hughes Act mandated that a percentage of vocational-technical school time be spent on practical work experiences. Incorporating this element created a division between the academic and vocational-technical education programs (Hayward & Benson, 1993; Steffes, 2014).

The Vocational Technical Education Act of 1963 (Hayward & Benson, 1993) provided funding to meet youths' particular vocational education needs, representing subpopulations such as the disadvantaged, minority groups, and the disabled. The Act also mandated that vocational education would not discriminate based on race, sex, and disabling conditions. The intention was to ensure that vocational education serviced poor, minority, and disabled students; nonetheless, an image was established that vocational-technical education was a haven for the disadvantaged (Hayward & Benson, 1993). The Act further mandated that funding be made available to disadvantaged students. The legislation's stated purpose was to ensure that students with disabilities had access to

vocational training, but it generated a stigma that students unable to achieve academic studies were placed in vocational-technical education classes (Hayward & Benson, 1993).

By enacting the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, Congress endeavored to clarify the purpose of vocational education (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Numerous amendments have been enacted to effect changes in vocational education. Three areas were identified during this review: (a) federal legislation was determined to be vague and imprecise in its definitions, (b) federal grants were insufficient to meet the criteria, (c) disadvantaged communities were disproportionately underrepresented in rigorous programs that provided job training. The authors discovered that vocational educators were not extending students' occupational opportunities in ways that met employers' needs. Furthermore, the targeted populations were not always academically equipped to meet the rigorous vocational programs' competency requirements.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 was enacted to address the educational needs of underprivileged and disabled students. Students must be intellectually competent to handle the rigors of vocational programs and have access to those programs in their communities to satisfy this requirement (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Therefore, Congress enacted the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1990. The Act was renamed "Perkins II." With Perkins II, legislators attempted to address the 1984 Perkins Act deficiencies.

Historically, vocational education has been focused on preparing students to enter the workforce (Hayward & Benson, 1993). For the first time, vocational education addressed academic preparation. Perkins II was the first piece of federal legislation to prioritize academic and occupational skills and fund all student population groupings

(Hayward & Benson, 1993). Perkins II placed a premium on the integration of secondary and postsecondary education. Perkins II highlighted the importance of preparing high school pupils for a college education (Hayward & Benson, 1993).

Additionally, public-private collaborations were emphasized. Employer involvement was significant, as they recruited students trained in vocational education programs. Employer involvement enhanced the school-to-work transition. Hayward and Benson (1993) discovered that implementing Perkins II resulted in good content integration between academic and vocational courses, increased collaboration between academic and vocational teachers, and enhanced career advising and counseling activities.

Additionally, Hayward and Benson (1993) discovered a gap in providing a complete structure for high school students to enter the workforce. Perkins II marked a cultural shift in federal policy toward vocational-technical education, but the Act did not alter the basic structure of the educational system. “It remains to be the domain of a highly decentralized, autonomous group of institutions at the local level” (Hayward & Benson, 1993, p. 28). The presence of state and local educational structures capable of providing vocational educations was vital to the program’s success, so Congress authorized Perkins III in 2006.

The primary distinction between Perkins II and Perkins III is that vocational education was renamed CTE (career and technical education). The bill’s supporters said that the term vocational education was outdated and disparaging and that CTE more closely matched the legislation’s goal. The bill passed despite opposition from the White House, which argued for a stronger academic focus on the program. Perkins III-mandated

vocational programs adhered to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) academic reporting criteria. School districts were required to disclose vocational students' performance on state high school examinations and graduation rates (Cavanagh, 2006).

Until June 30, 2019, The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) governed career and technical education. Congress enacted Perkins V, The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, on July 31, 2018, and it took effect on July 1, 2019. Perkins V placed a greater emphasis on students' academic achievement who were enrolled in CTE programs (USDOE, Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

Perkins V concentrated on four key provisions. The first provision mandated a greater emphasis on academics and the development of more rigorous programs. States were expected to add secondary and postsecondary components that connected rigorous academic standards to appropriate professional and technical education programs (USDOE, Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

Additionally, the Perkins V legislation mandated increased state responsibility. States were required to develop valid and reliable key performance metrics in consultation with the USDOE. Graduation rates and academic success levels for students were two of the required benchmarks (USDOE, Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

The third provision dealt with local accountability. All states were required to obtain an agreement with all local recipients regarding performance indicators. Local recipients who did not meet the agreed-upon performance indicators were asked to submit an improvement plan. The fourth provision extended states' flexibility in funding secondary and postsecondary CTE programs (USDOE, Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

Perkins V was reauthorized by Congress in 2018 and signed into law by President Donald Trump. The reauthorization changes intended to (a) increase access to education and the skills necessary for success in high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations; (b) strengthen collaboration between state and local programs, the business community, and workforce development systems; and (c) improve program quality and student success (Perkins V, 2018).

### **CTE Stigma**

The notion of vocational education as a dumping ground for less academically oriented students (Daggett, 2003; Levesque, 2003) was identified as a major concern by the USDOE in 1994 (Cohen & Besharov, 2002, 2004). Concerns were raised about the absence of homework and the insufficiency of course sequences that did not meet federal criteria for academic and vocational courses. Vocational education programs were asked to respond by changing their emphasis away from vocations and toward industries and concentrating on college. It was during this period that the American Vocational Association (AVA) changed its name to ACTE (American Career and Technical Education) to avoid the stigma associated with the term vocational education (ACTE, 2018).

Additionally, the association urged its members to adopt the new designation of CTE rather than vocational education. The 1990 and 1998 Perkins Acts placed a renewed emphasis on program development, standards, and academics for career and technical education. Special populations funding was lowered, and data on key performance metrics were established (Castellano et al., 2004).

CTE programs have been stigmatized as courses for students who are not academically inclined and not expected to attend college (Cohen & Besharov, 2002, 2004; Daggett, 2003; Levesque, 2003). This stigma pushes students to follow one of two paths, academic or vocational (Levesque, 2003). Mitkos and Bragg (2008) noticed that students with lower talents were labeled as “limited” (p. 376), whereas students with greater abilities were advised to take a “more prestigious route” (p. 376).

Levesque (2003) found that 25% of students in the United States were assigned to vocational courses, and they were not expected to attend college, which contradicted the concept that all students should have the opportunity to attend college. Additionally, Mitkos and Bragg (2008) found that counselors counseled students on college and guided them toward one of two paths: 2-year or 4-year colleges. They did not readily offer the CTE option to students.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2018), high schools and colleges must collaborate to develop college readiness standards that emphasize career and technical education to prevent remediation at both levels of education. Employers and students reported in various 1990s surveys that students were being steered away from vocational and technical education and blue-collar professions because counselors pushed college for everyone (Cohen & Besharov, 2002, 2004). Employers said that a competent worker would earn more than a college graduate if they could locate persons with the required vocational skills, implying that colleges failed to do their job. Employers struggled then and struggle now to locate experienced technicians to fill roles in health, technology, and advanced manufacturing, even after several years of high unemployment (USDOE, 2012).

## **CTE and the Workforce**

For students, CTE programs provide a direct link between school and employment. Work-based learning provides businesses with an opportunity to train their employees directly and students with an opportunity to earn money while they learn (Torpey, 2015). This opportunity is also an excellent pedagogical tool with significant growth potential. Employers have frequently been hesitant to hire interns and apprentices owing to funding concerns, applicants' logistical challenges, and a lack of expertise. However, businesses are beginning to recognize the critical role apprenticeships can play in developing work-ready candidates (Kantrov, 2014). Federal involvement in apprenticeship programs is also expanding, as Perkins V (2018) has increased its focus on work-based learning practices. Federally registered apprenticeships have been found to be beneficial. Reed et al., in a 2012 report for Mathematica, indicated that registered apprentices earn more per year than comparable nonparticipants, which bodes well for future funding for work-based learning.

There are growing efforts to connect secondary and postsecondary CTE. The USDOE, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE, n.d.) promotes a program of study that includes more exploratory CTE coursework in secondary school. This coursework is followed by more occupational skills-based CTE coursework and a credential in postsecondary school (USDOE OCTAE, n.d.). This system necessitates the establishment of formal collaborations between educational institutions and local employers. In brief, CTE programs impart work-ready skills in the educational gap between a standard high school diploma and a traditional bachelor's degree, albeit they can serve as stepping stones to further higher education.

## **The History of School Counselors**

The school counseling profession was established in the early 1900s, and it originated as vocational guidance. It was founded by Jesse Davis (1871–1955) and Frank Parson (1854–1908), and it has evolved to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012, 2019), which focuses on all students’ academic, career, and social-emotional development (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017).

Prior to the release and implementation of the ASCA National Model, personnel offering vocational guidance through assessments were referred to as “guidance counselors” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). It had long been acknowledged that high schools should employ guidance counselors to assist students with academic placement and transferring to college, the military, and work, and to prepare students to be productive citizens (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The emphasis was placed on students’ transition from school to a career, rather than on their social-emotional and mental health needs (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017).

A school counselor’s job in mental health counseling expanded under the progressive social movement led by John Dewey (1859–1952) and Carl Rogers (1902–1987). The emphasis shifted to a student-centered interaction focusing on social and emotional needs. The 1958 National Defense Education Act facilitated this transition. This Act provided funding to strengthen and improve America’s education system by providing scholarships for guidance counselor training to help promote postsecondary education. The typical guidance counselor operated reactively. They also served a few students in crisis and concentrated on college preparation for a select few cognitively gifted students (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017).

According to Dollarhide and Saginak (2017), preventative and academic activities received attention in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of developing well-rounded students capable of coping with life stressors and transitions. This trend served as the impetus for the establishment of elementary and middle school counseling. From kindergarten to high school graduation, the role of a guidance counselor who guided students throughout their development was firmly established (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017).

Despite the addition of preventive/educational services, school counselors' primary role and responsibilities, and the terminology used to represent the profession remained a point of contention into the 1980s. The 1990s saw the birth of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012, 2019). ASCA then refined the function of the school counselor, in response to standards-based education, to fulfill the needs of all students by closing the opportunity and achievement gap (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008).

To ensure all students' career, academic, and personal/social development, the ASCA formally introduced its National Model in 2003, outlining the structure of a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP) (Hatch, 2014). The ASCA National Model emphasizes the importance of the school counselor's role in implementing a core curriculum through a CSCP, which includes personalized student planning and responsive services, while also guaranteeing that all students get academic, career, and social-emotional assistance (ASCA, 2012; Astramovich et al., 2013; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008).

When President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law in December 2015, the political landscape shifted likewise regarding the role of

the school counselor (ESSA, 2015). ESSA superseded the previous version of this law, NCLB (2002), which was deemed impracticable by school districts (ESSA, 2015).

ESSA is notable for advancing equity for marginalized students, requiring students to meet rigorous academic standards; tracking student achievement; fostering the creation of innovative, evidence-based interventions; and focusing on the lowest-performing schools (ESSA, 2015). Schools in the United States must demonstrate progress with all students' remediation and interventions, particularly with disadvantaged students, to close the achievement gap.

Additionally, school counselors must be accountable for spending their time and the interventions they use to assist these students who struggle more than their peers (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2017). The school counseling profession is tasked with utilizing the ASCA National Model's conceptual framework to meet the needs of all students, particularly those who are underserved (ASCA, 2012; Hatch, 2014).

### **School Counselors and CTE Influence**

With all of the opportunities accessible to students in CTE, school counselors must advocate for CTE and advise students on these pathways (Finlayson, 2009). If prior lived experiences left a negative impression on school counselors, perhaps other experiences and knowledge about existing CTE initiatives and programs, regarding how CTE benefits career-focused students and college-bound students, would aid counselors in overcoming the stigma associated with vocational education from the past. According to research, students require accurate, well-informed guidance from school counselors to assist them in selecting an education and career path that will last well beyond high school graduation (Finlayson, 2009).

School counselors are empowered to guide and advise students throughout middle and high school in selecting courses that will prepare them for jobs that are in high demand in our nation's future workforce and that will be of considerable interest to the students. These trained professionals substantially influence whether or not students participate in CTE. Gaunt's (2005) study substantiated this assertion.

Thornburg (2016) expressed it succinctly: "High school counselors are the primary conduits for career information dissemination to students" (p. 20). School counselors should be directly available with current knowledge about expected workforce demands and aware of the professional pathways available in CTE to guide students carefully into career paths that match their interests and talents.

Handy and Braley (2012) discovered that school counselors who appreciate the value of hands-on learning would typically promote CTE classes to students. Adams (2014) demonstrated that counselors are a vastly underutilized and inadequately educated resource in promoting CTE programs.

According to Spaulding and Steffen (2011), school counselors have stereotypical beliefs of CTE, and the careers available in CTE are under pressure that results from a lack of resources and training. The researchers postulated that school counselors would benefit from professional development in conferences and workshops to learn more about existing CTE options (Spaulding & Steffen, 2011).

Jordan and Dechert (2012) confirmed that enhanced perceptions of CTE would increase students enrolling in CTE programs. According to Thornburg (2016), "this study has the potential to impact social change by compelling improvements in counselor training programs to educate high school counselors better" (p. 19) regarding CTE, its

benefits, possibilities, and requirements. Summers (2013) noted that “counselors may need to maintain or increase their awareness of occupational needs that are currently manifesting in our economy and how to try to alleviate these needs” (p. 7).

Stipanovic et al. (2012) discussed program pathways within CTE in their study about the history and refunding efforts of CTE. The researchers stated that the USDOE produced a framework for CTE program pathways that contained 10 components. One such component was defined as guidance counseling and academic advising: Guidance counseling and academic advisement assist students in making educated career choices (Stipanovic et al., 2012). The authors validated the necessity for additional counseling for students in the same study by highlighting multiple other research efforts to choose suitable courses that align with students’ chosen careers. These expanded initiatives opened up new possibilities for providing counseling and services in high schools that offered CTE pathways (Stipanovic et al., 2012).

Along this same line, the California Department of Education (2007) published a framework for CTE in public high schools. One of the framework’s components addresses career awareness and guidance. To summarize, counselors have a unique position and responsibility to offer resources and guidance that assist students in developing the skills necessary to choose, train for, and manage their careers.

Counselors require CTE-specific training and information to advise all students through appropriate choices and scheduling (California Department of Education, 2007). They require a thorough awareness of CTE course sequencing and integrated into 2- and 4-year programs as well as an understanding of CTE programs, industrial sectors and pathways, and career opportunities. Counselors can utilize these technologies to access

industry-sector resources to assist students in planning their education around a technical career objective (California Department of Education, 2007)

Loera et al. (2013) conducted a study of 267 urban students in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades to examine motivation and academic engagement in CTE. Their study examined the relationships between students and factors such as adults' influence on their decision to enroll in college, their desires to attend college, and the quality of their CTE program of study. This study employed a social-cognitive approach to explore how CTE environmental elements affected students' educational and professional ambitions.

Questionnaires were utilized to assess students' impressions of teachers, parents, and other educators, such as counselors, to ascertain their satisfaction with their counselors' advice and guidance for college and career choices. According to Loera et al. (2013), if teachers construct and introduce students to career-related curricula, they may be more likely to continue their education and career preparation beyond high school and feel more prepared for the future. The researchers recommended that additional research be conducted on career and academic guidance satisfaction by school professionals who provide career and educational advice, such as teachers and counselors.

Smith (2015) discovered further that students viewed their counselors as critical in guiding them through course selection and college and career counseling in Smith's qualitative study of African American students and their perspectives of CTE. Smith suggested that students view school counselors as influential and critical in choosing their career path and courses. Additionally, she referred to counselors as the "conduit" that allowed students to access their classes (Smith, 2015).

However, in research focused on career counseling, Reddy et al. (2015) cited a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey of high school counselors that indicated that just 8% of counselors saw their primary function as assisting students in planning and preparing for work beyond high school. According to the same study, 51% of high school counselors ranked assisting students in planning and preparing for postsecondary jobs as their lowest priority (Reddy et al., 2015).

According to a study by Osborn and Baggerly (2004) of career counseling and testing in Florida, counselors wished to increase their time involved in career counseling. They examined how administrative responsibilities and other non-counseling responsibilities offset the time spent counseling students about their courses and prospective careers. According to this Florida study, only 16.8% of counselors reported spending most of their time on career counseling (Osborn & Baggerly, 2004).

Pierce (2017) discovered that counselors in Mississippi believed they lack the time resources necessary to focus on career planning; as a result, their primary focus was on college planning. Thornburg's (2016) study discovered that counselors spend less than 5 hours per year counseling each student on career guidance.

Spaulding and Steffen (2011) asserted that high school counselors have stereotypical views of CTE, further stating that the careers available in CTE are under pressure because of lack of resources and training in CTE, and high school counselors would benefit from professional development in seminars and workshops to learn more about the current options available in CTE. Counselors expressed positive views of CTE, but they did not appear to spend enough time advising students toward CTE pathway selections to prepare them for future careers.

According to Pierce's (2017) research, Mississippi middle and high school counselors embrace CTE and its opportunities. Counselors surveyed agreed that CTE significantly supports students in achieving their postsecondary goals. Pierce's participants further acknowledged that CTE provides students with a significant competitive advantage in employability, exposes students to more career alternatives, and benefits engaged students. The counselor participants reported strongly encouraging students to enroll in CTE programs and expressed an understanding that CTE programs are appropriate for college-bound and career-bound students (Pierce, 2017).

On the other hand, another study concerning the value of a particular component of CTE, business education, Railsback and Hite (2008) examined public high schools in a Midwestern state from the perspective of high school principals, counselors, and boards of education. They chose to target counselors, indicating that they frequently promoted or dissuaded particular students from enrolling in business education (Railsback & Hite, 2008). Their research was descriptive, as they focused on three groups whose beliefs impacted course recommendations and student schedules.

Railsback and Hite (2008) surveyed 341 administrators and 341 counselors at public high schools and 304 elected board of education presidents using a questionnaire. The principals completed 31% of the 986 surveys, the counselors completed 40% of the surveys, and the school board presidents completed 19% of the surveys. The study's findings showed that while all three groups viewed the abilities taught in business education courses as essential for students to possess, counselors offered the least support. Railsback and Hite (2008) proposed that business education teachers collaborate with counselors to enroll students in business courses that emphasize practical life skills.

According to Huss and Banks (2001), school counselors have a significant influence over course selection. They are critical players in CTE, but school counselors are not advocating for CTE in certain circumstances.

According to Finlayson (2009), students require accurate, well-informed advice from school counselors to assist them in selecting an education and career path that will last well beyond high school graduation. The Herr (1987) and Rossetti (1989) research confirmed that high school counselors significantly influence students' future selection decisions.

According to Abayomi et al. (2013), counselors' awareness of the curriculum pathways students must take affects the guidance delivered to students when choosing a course of study. Samuels (1991) reported that when school counselors were asked about their impressions of service-sector occupations, they discovered that counselors did not offer those career options to the students they advised.

Handy and Braley (2013) used perceptual control theory to explore and categorize the perceptions of CTE held by administrators, counselors, CTE teachers, and core academic teachers. They used surveys and face-to-face interviews in their qualitative study of 110 educators. The researchers discovered that a counselor who believes having hands-on experience is essential would encourage students to enroll in work-based learning opportunities or internship opportunities. Handy and Braley (2012), by using a grounded theory approach, discovered that some counselors provided guidance and direction to students who considered CTE to be unhelpful for students destined for higher education.

Handy and Braley (2013) discovered three emergent themes in their survey: an individualized approach to learning, the importance of integrating CTE and coursework, and barriers to integration. Counselors at the high school level must be knowledgeable, concerned, and objective when advising students on course scheduling; they must also communicate the benefits of CTE (Handy & Braley, 2012).

Loera et al. (2013) examined the factors that influence motivation and academic engagement in CTE. They found that students made wiser and more informed educational and career choices when their counselors encouraged and supported their choices. As a result, if counselors do not promote and encourage students to explore CTE options, students are unlikely to choose these pathways while selecting high school coursework.

An effort in 2018 by Advance CTE and ACTE, it was found that 84% of prospective high school students and 82% of their parents trusted school counselors to deliver accurate and helpful information on CTE. Brown (2003) examined the picture of CTE in a study that aimed to improve current opinions of CTE. One of the primary goals of the strategies presented was to dispel the widespread belief that all students should attend college and pursue 4-year degrees.

Brown (2003) cited Cohen and Besharov (2002), stating that these leaders believed trade and technical schools should provide more enticing opportunities for high school graduates. CTE now provides more choices for high school students and graduates. Brown (2003) also proposed that counselors be retrained on the available options in CTE. Additionally, she stated that many school counselors disregard CTE in favor of the 4-year college option (Brown, 2003).

School counselors have significant influence over course selection and, thus, are critical players in CTE; yet, they do not always advocate for CTE (Huss & Banks, 2001). Another study discovered that school counselors can play a critical role in advancing CTE. Lewis (2001) included recommendations that could be implemented within school districts' guidance and counseling programs to increase awareness and knowledge about CTE. While the data from the study is slightly out of date, it remains pertinent to the subject at hand.

Spaulding and Steffen (2011) conducted a series of study projects in Illinois examining counselors' beliefs in CTE. Their first project sought to ascertain the counselors' knowledge and awareness of CTE opportunities in agriculture. They intended to examine counselors' knowledge and perceptions of CTE in the second project and identify ways to assist counselors in becoming more aware of CTE to guide and counsel students effectively.

Spaulding and Steffen (2011) conducted the first section of the investigation by sending a paper survey about agriculture education to a stratified random sample of counselors in Illinois. The project employed an internet survey to collect data on all aspects of CTE. According to Spaulding and Steffen (2011), the Delphi technique was used in the third phase of the investigation. Spaulding and Steffen (2011) discovered that school counselors frequently had stereotypical perceptions of available work opportunities, were unaware of higher education opportunities in CTE fields in Illinois, and encountered time constraints and a lack of resources.

Jordan and Dechert (2012) confirmed that enhanced perceptions of CTE would increase students enrolling in high school CTE programs. Finlayson's (2009) research on

counselor beliefs in Grades 7–12 indicated that most counselors felt it was more important for students to spend time on academics than on CTE. On the other hand, over half of the counselor participants confirmed that CTE programs could help high school students avoid dropping out. Additionally, elementary and secondary school counselors stated that girls and boys should be encouraged to participate in CTE (Finlayson, 2009).

According to Finlayson (2009), 51.2% of counselors in both groups disagreed with the statement that taking CTE programs prevents students from continuing their education after high school. Finlayson concluded that counselors should make a more significant effort to educate students about CTE programs and career options.

The experiences of public high school counselors (i.e., professional development, training, and other coursework) incorporating CTE were studied as a significant influence on their beliefs in CTE. Thornburg's (2016) study sought to determine high school counselors' educational backgrounds, their awareness of CTE, and the amount of time they spent advising students. Thornburg employed a cross-sectional design to examine the effects of the earlier variables on counselors' views of CTE. His study examined 286 school districts throughout the state of Kansas.

Thornburg (2016) stated that CTE programs are used as a last resort for the best students and the first resort for those students who struggle academically. He discovered that counselors' knowledge level is critical and significantly impacts advising students regarding course scheduling in high school. Thornburg's study discovered that nearly 84% of respondents did not have a CTE background, yet many respondents were positive about CTE.

Johnson's (2016) study examined a Colorado program that created 220 new counseling positions over 8 years. Counselors that selected to fill these positions received additional training in dropout prevention and college access initiatives. Dropout rates decreased from 5.5% to 3.7%, while college enrollment and persistence climbed by 13%. Significant in terms of CTE is that student involvement in CTE "more than doubled" (O'Connor, 2018, p. 38).

CTE serves as a link between academia and the American workforce. Finlayson's (2009) study of middle school and high school counselors' CTE perspectives confirmed that students who see a direct connection between school and the future are more particular about their career and postsecondary ambitions. Summers (2013) asserted that counselors may need to maintain or develop an awareness of the occupational needs in our economy today and how to try to eliminate these needs through CTE.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature review confirms that school counselors play a significant role in providing career readiness information to students. The review provides an empirical evaluation of the observed phenomenon that motivated this researcher to obtain descriptive knowledge regarding the functional roles of school counselors in providing students with career readiness counseling and recommending CTR program enrollment.

Early research provided insight into the roles of the counselor during the evolution from vocational and guidance counseling to the professional school counselor. The advancement of the school counseling profession provided professional guidelines and required competencies to provide quality services to students.

The literature review indicated a gap in available research data regarding the phenomenon. The literature research also provided information on some components of career readiness counseling, such as understanding available CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels. However, there was no specific information regarding how school counselors perform these functions or the specifics.

Quantitative data, surveys, and reports provided general information; however, qualitative studies were limited. The national surveys provided sufficient general data regarding school counselors' beliefs in CTE. However, lists and broad categorical descriptions do not provide the depth needed to understand school counselors' transformative learning experience. This gap in the literature validated the need for this type of study and its potential implications to the profession of school counseling and in recommending CTE programs to students in Grades 7–12.

There is an increased demand for essential workers in the United States, which can be satisfied, in part, by engaging and advancing historically underserved and disadvantaged learners. Given CTE's practicality and broad appeal, it is notable, if not surprising, that there is bipartisan support for CTE training and apprenticeship programs, witnessed by the recent approval of Perkins V. Despite the growing interest in, and funding for, CTE programs, CTE has not received nearly the same research attention as traditional K–12 and postsecondary programs.

Chapter 2 presented a literature review of CTE, indicating that school counselors significantly influence the programs students choose and their level of preparedness at graduation (Gilfillan, 2017). School counselors guide students into programs and offer specific guidance on college and career opportunities after graduation (Anctil et al.,

2012). Gilfillan (2017) postulated that counselors play a significant role in placing students into CTE programs. Rosen and Molina (2019) stated that some counselors may hold views on students' abilities, which are rooted in their race and socioeconomic status, that factor into the CTE options presented to these students. There is a need to know the factors that influence a school counselors' decision to endorse student enrollment in CTE programs. This literature review showed that through recording school counselors' beliefs and recommendations for CTE, this study can contribute to the body of knowledge about secondary education. It has the potential to help others realize the value of CTE training and the development of our future workforce.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology for this study, including the research context, participants, instruments used, and data analysis process, to answer the research questions.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Beliefs in CTE held by guidance counselors may have a direct impact on whether they are directing students to CTE programs (New York State Comptroller, 2020). The issue is school counselors placing students into CTE programs for the wrong reasons, while other students are steered toward college preparation programs and away from CTE classes. This, in turn, leaves students unprepared for the workforce (Dougherty, 2016).

Research indicates that school counselors have a significant influence in the program students choose and their level of preparedness for careers or college at graduation (Gilfillan, 2017). School counselors guide students into programs and offer specific guidance pertaining to college and career opportunities available to them after they graduate (Anctil et al., 2012). Gilfillan (2017) postulated that counselors play a significant role advising and placing students into CTE programs. Rosen and Molina (2019) stated that some counselors may hold views regarding students' abilities, which are rooted in their race and socioeconomic status, that factor into the CTE options presented to these students. There is a need to know the factors that influence school counselors' decisions to endorse student enrollment in CTE programs.

The increased recommendation and enrollment of students into CTE is key to reducing the anticipated shortage of skilled workers and increasing equity between college preparation courses and CTE. The results could change the CTE program

recommendation culture. The findings of this study were derived from two guiding research questions:

1. How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?
2. How do school counselors' beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?

### **Research Design**

Phenomenology was the philosophical and methodological framework chosen for this qualitative study. Husserl's (1960) specific philosophy of phenomenology, which is a descriptive phenomenological methodology, and Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological data analysis were used.

In phenomenology, the essence of the lived experience is told through the voices of the participants, then their accounts are synthesized to describe the phenomenon from a philosophical and psychological standpoint. Recorded interviews capture the voices of the participants. A descriptive phenomenological psychological approach maintains the subjective-psychological perspective of the participants. This design includes the participants' behaviors, thoughts, feelings, impressions, interpretations, and understandings of the lived experience (Giorgi, 2009).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that is concerned with a group of people's lived experiences (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology underlines the significance of an experience, providing insight into what the phenomenon is but not necessarily how or why it exists (Creswell, 2013).

According to Giorgi (2012), phenomenology is primarily a descriptive task that involves “articulating the intentional objects of experience” (p. 6). The intention is to describe the experience as it exists in the individual’s consciousness rather than ascribe a causal interpretation to the experience.

The descriptive phenomenological method enabled the researcher to maintain the participants’ voices without abstracting their perspective via analysis (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). While Giorgi’s five-step descriptive phenomenological technique is well-known for its application in the social and human sciences, Colaizzi (1978) also developed a descriptive method primarily to be used in the health sciences.

### **Research Context**

This study took place in Grade 7–12 schools throughout New York State. The schools located across the New York State vary in size and socioeconomic structure. They are located within cities, rural areas, and suburban community constructs with multitiered performance ratings. School counselor-to-student ratios of the participants’ schools vary for the schools in this geographic area. Location selection provided various similarities and differences among the participants’ experiences. Identification of the participants occurred through this researcher contacting the New York State School Counselor Association (NYSSCA), requesting email addresses of school counselors, and asking for volunteers for the study. The first six individuals who responded and met the criteria were selected for the research. This number of participants was sufficient to obtain the depth needed for this phenomenological research. According to Creswell (1998), five to 25 participants directly related to the phenomenon is a typical sample size. Fifteen volunteers were contacted and provided with further information about the study.

## **Research Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of six school counselors of various grade levels in Grades 7–12. The selection of participants occurred through purposeful homogenous sampling. All chosen participants were provided with and completed a written consent form. The participants also had the authority to withdraw from the study at any time. They also had the right to question any details or specifics that pertained to the study. The data collection procedures took place through individual participant, semi-structured interviews via Zoom. An email containing the research recruitment letter (Appendix B) was sent to the executive director of the NYSSCA, which was then forwarded to all active NYSSCA members. Upon receiving emails expressing interest in research participation, a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) was sent to the counselors to determine eligibility for participation. Semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions that allowed the participants to share their lived experiences relating to their beliefs in CTE programs and the influence of the counselors' recommendation of CTE programs to students in Grades 7–12. The semi-structured interview questions were the sole instrument for the researcher's data collection.

The participants were purposefully chosen from Grade 7–12 urban, suburban, and rural schools throughout New York State. Purposeful sampling is a technique extensively used in qualitative research to identify and select participants with a wealth of information to make the most use of limited resources (Patten, 2015). Purposive sampling entails identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are particularly aware or experienced about phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The participants were chosen for this study based on their ability to provide detailed and

individualized narratives of their lived experiences. The findings were hoped to reveal potential benefits, hazards, and emerging themes necessary and significant for counselor development.

Participation was voluntary and only the participants who expressed interest received follow-up contact, given the nature of the research being dependent upon the truthfulness of the participants. The researcher contacted all interested participants through email or telephone to discuss a mutually agreeable interview day and time. The researcher obtained St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A). As stated in Gliner et al. (2017), the protection of human subjects in research must be guided by following ethical guidelines, which occurred in this study.

The participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, to gather information regarding race, gender, education level, years in the profession, and existing and previous titles at the time of the research. Table 3.1 shows the participants' demographics with the names changed to numbers to protect the participants' identities.

**Table 3.1**

*Participant Information*

Participant	Gender	Race	Years in Profession	Current Grade Level(s)	Previous Roles	Highest Degree
SC01	F	W	25	7	9, 10 counselor	CAS
SC02	F	W	16	8	6, 7 counselor	Master's
SC03	M	B	10	9–12	P.E. teacher	Master's
SC04	F	W	20	11, 12	Juvenile detention center counselor	Master's
SC05	F	H	6	9, 10	First job	Master's
SC06	M	W	28	12	9–11 counselor	Master's

## **Demographics**

This study included six volunteer participants. The participants were Grade 7–12 school counselors who taught in urban school districts ( $n = 2$ ), suburban school districts ( $n = 3$ ), and rural school districts ( $n = 1$ ). The participants provided their informed consent by agreeing that they understood the study, confirmed they were at least 18 years of age or older, and agreed to participate in this study (Appendix E). The participants were required to meet certain criteria to participate in this study. The criteria included being a New York State Certified School Counselor responsible for scheduling students in Grades 7–12. This is where CTE advisement and enrollment occur. The criteria also included being a tenured school counselor, which guaranteed at least 4 years in the school counselor position. The researcher excluded school counselors from the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) due to the researcher's employment with SCSD.

The participant group consisted of six school counselors from six different school districts across New York State, comprising four females and two males. All six participants met the criteria to participate in this study. An alternate identification was used to protect the anonymity of each participant. The participant group was diverse in many ways. The years in the profession of the participants ranged from 6 years to 28 years. Two of the six participants also had previous roles outside of school counseling. The counselors all supported various grade levels between Grades 7–12.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom conferencing, with video disabled, using audio only to maintain anonymity. Remotely conducted interviews were required, which was due to COVID-19 pandemic distancing recommendations in the region and by the IRB at the time. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The

researcher took notes on personal insights, connections, questions, and perceptions about gaps in response to the respondents' comments during and immediately following each interview. The researcher also noted any exceptionally distinctive or thought-provoking statements made by the participants and any comments made or experiences described that agreed with or differed considerably from the experiences of the other participants.

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The researcher used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six Grade 7–12 school counselors to examine their lived experiences and beliefs that influenced their CTE recommendations. A phenomenological approach was selected to describe and understand the participants' experience regarding their CTE recommendations.

Phenomenology is a descriptive, qualitative study method that focuses on the shared characteristics of a group's lived experiences. The primary objective is to arrive at a description of the nature of the observed phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Interviews are typically conducted with participants who have firsthand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. Two fundamental questions were addressed in the interview(s) (Moustakas, 1994): What has been noticed about the phenomenon? and What situations or circumstances have typically shaped perceptions of the phenomenon?

This study used Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological approach, which includes a planned member check near the end of the research. The form and content were presented to the participants, and their experiences were used to verify the results. The participants in this study were asked to critically assess and remark on the findings to see whether they were authentic depictions of what they conveyed during the interviews.

All recordings were transcribed, and data were confirmed by reading the transcripts together with the recordings. Significant safeguards were implemented to preserve the confidentiality of the participants and the information they disclosed. Participant data and documentation were assigned the numbers 01–06 to maintain participant identity. When not being examined or evaluated by the researcher, data collecting documents are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s residence.

### **Procedures Used for Data Collection**

After receiving IRB approval, the study used Colaizzi’s (1978) descriptive phenomenological method for data collection. Besides completing the demographic questionnaire, each participant was asked to participate remotely in a semi-structured open interview and do a follow-up member check for this study. The interview questions were designed to elicit the participants’ attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences regarding their recommendations of CTE. The participants were also asked questions about their recommendation of CTE to acquire a better knowledge of the phenomenon. The phenomenological inquiry was used in this study to elicit information about the participants’ lived experiences. The interview questions were designed to encourage reflection on experiences, remembrance of events, and to recall the emotions associated with the lived experiences. The researcher characterized the phenomenon in as precise and lived-through manner as possible (Van Manen, 1990). The interview questions in this study were developed to answer the main research questions using a semi-structured approach. According to Edwards and Holland (2013), a semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that involves the use of a predetermined set of open questions. This inquiry enables the interviewer to bring up fresh ideas and to go deeper

into themes or responses. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to elicit information about a framework of themes and to empower the participants to freely share their experiences without being prompted to provide an answer or conclusion (Given, 2008). In this study, the member check was utilized to help improve the research's validity, credibility, and trustworthiness by having the participants clarify responses and questions asked during the semi-structured interview and by collecting any extra data related to the study.

### **Procedures Used for Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Colaizzi (1978) recommended that each transcript be collected, read, and played back several times until understanding and comprehension of the participants' experience is reached. The recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Next, the initial codes were generated. Third, pattern coding followed. Coding is the process of identifying specific details and notations that may be relevant in answering identified research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, the data and categories were reviewed leading to theme identification.

This study utilized a descriptive approach to capture the uniqueness of counselors' beliefs in CTE programs and how their beliefs influenced their recommendations of CTE programs based on the participants' lived experiences. The researcher used Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological data analysis technique to express the school counselors' experiences. Descriptive phenomenological approaches are used to characterize lived experiences. Once data gathering was complete, a phenomenological psychological reduction was used to undertake analysis. This process

requires epoché, or bracketing, which involves blocking biases and assumptions to explain a phenomenon in terms of its inherent system of meaning (Giorgi et al., 2017). The researcher maintained analytic memos to bracket ideas and thoughts from the participants' responses.

The researcher looked through documents for information and gathered significant words and comments about the lived experience of school counselors and CTE programs. Six semi-structured interview transcripts provided, in total, 125 noteworthy responses. This researcher grew acquainted with the data by reading and rereading each transcript until a solid understanding of the material was gained. Following that, meanings were coded from the significant statements, and theme clusters were formed. The theme clusters were then examined and condensed for clarity, resulting in four emerged themes from the theme clusters discovered.

Colaizzi's (1978) specific seven-step procedure (Table 3.2) ensures a thorough analysis by keeping each stage close to the data. The ultimate product is a succinct yet exhaustive account of the phenomenon under investigation, validated by the individuals who developed it. The technique is predicated on detailed, first-person descriptions of experiences; these can be gathered through face-to-face interviews or a variety of alternate means including written narratives, blogs, research diaries, and online interviews.

**Table 3.2**

*Colaizzi's Qualitative Data Analysis Process*

Stage	Description (Action)	Purpose
1	Read and reread all participants' verbatim transcripts of the phenomenon.	Acquire the general feeling for the experiences.
2	Extract significant statements relating to the phenomenon being examined.	Generate information pertaining directly to the phenomenon studied.
3	Formulate meanings (codes) from significant statements	Illuminate meanings hidden in various contexts of the phenomenon.
4	Sort codes into categories or cluster themes.	Identify experiences common to all participants.
5	Integrate the clusters and themes into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon.	Generate a preliminary theme or themes.
6	Describe the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.	Describe the theme or themes that comprehensively reflect the universal features of the phenomenon.
7	Validate the findings of the study by having the research participants compare their experiences with the researcher's results.	Validate the findings for trustworthiness.

Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method was utilized to analyze the data in this research study. Colaizzi's distinctive seven-step rigorous analytical process delivers a concise and exhaustive account of the phenomenon under research, as confirmed by the people who lived it. This approach is predicated upon detailed first-person reports of experiences.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic constraints, these accounts were obtained through remote, semi-structured interviews conducted via the Zoom platform. The following steps outline Colaizzi's (1978) method, which was adapted for analyzing the phenomenological data of this study.

1. Transcribing and familiarization: Each transcript should be read numerous times to get a sense of the data.

2. Identify and label significant statements: It is necessary to identify and label significant statements relevant to the phenomenon being studied.
3. Formulate meanings: Meanings should be derived from the significant assertions indicated.
4. Cluster themes: Thematic clustering and categorization should group and categorize the meanings present throughout the data.
5. Write a comprehensive description: The study's findings should be included in a detailed description of the investigated phenomenon.
6. Generate a fundamental structure: A statement describing the phenomenon's fundamental structure.
7. Validate findings: Explain the underlying framework to the participants and ask them to corroborate the findings with their own experiences.

This study used a qualitative phenomenological framework to examine school counselors' lived experiences, beliefs in, and their influence on their recommendations of CTE programs. The data for this study were gathered and analyzed following Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological technique.

In constructing the composite findings for this research study, significant themes and meanings were analyzed through thorough data analysis. Bracketing the personal experiences and expectations of the participants was a critical component of the phenomenological design because it was the primary method of validating the results and minimizing researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

Analyses of phenomenological data using Colaizzi's (1978) strategy data analysis is the process of elucidating and analyzing data gathered during research and deriving

meaning from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As previously stated, this research employed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step technique for phenomenological data analysis. The data collecting and transcription processes were summarized, and the phases were examined. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth examination of data analysis. Six members volunteered to participate in this study. Semi-structured interviews were done using a prepared interview guide, and the participants were encouraged to speak freely and convey their own stories. Each interview lasted between 40 and 45 minutes and was performed entirely by this researcher. Colaizzi (1978) advocated collecting, reading, and replaying each transcript numerous times until a sense of comprehension and understanding of the participants' experience is achieved. This researcher read and listened to the data collected until she was convinced that she had gained complete comprehension of the events.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence school counselors' beliefs in CTE, how their lived experiences influenced their beliefs, and how their beliefs influenced their recommendation of CTE to students in Grades 7–12. This study will add to the literature and to the understanding of counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment.

The information gained from this study can address counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment, which could affect the workforce shortage of skilled employees, and information and guidance coming from counselors may substantially influence students' future educational and career plans.

This study examined the participants' lived experiences that influenced their recommendations of CTE and the impact of transformative learning between changes in counselors' beliefs and their knowledge and understanding of the recent changes to ESSA (2015) and the Perkins V (2018) initiatives. The purpose of this qualitative research was to interpret a human phenomenon and perspective of a situation within its natural setting (Heath, 1997). This was done by collecting data through the means of interviewing Grade 7–12 school counselors. Prior to the start of completing any research, approval was received from St. John Fisher's IRB)

Approval was received and documented prior to data collection. The participants of this study consisted of six school counselors of various grade levels in Grades 7–12. The selection of participants occurred through purposeful homogenous sampling. Participation in the study was done on a voluntary basis. All chosen participants were provided written consent. The participants also had the authority to withdraw from the study at any time, and they had the right to question any details or specifics as they pertained to the study. The data collection procedures took place through individual participant semi-structured interviews via Zoom.

Chapter 4 contains information pertaining to the results of the data analysis. The data were coded and organized into commonality themes. The data analysis describes the participants' lived experiences that influenced their recommendation of CTE.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of qualitative research is to interpret human phenomena and perspectives of a situation within its natural setting (Heath, 1997). The research was done by collecting data through a means of interviewing Grade 7–12 school counselors.

### **Research Questions**

The increased recommendation and enrollment of students into CTE is key to reducing the predicted shortage of skilled workers and increasing equity in CTE. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews. Chapter 4 is structured in order of the two research questions that guided the study:

1. How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?
2. How do school counselors' beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?

Quotes are taken directly from the participants' responses to the semi-structured interview questions, found in Appendix D. The participants reported their beliefs in CTE that were influenced by their lived experiences and how their beliefs influenced their recommendations of CTE programs to students. The research questions and related interview questions are listed in Table 4.1. The results of this study could change the CTE program recommendation culture.

**Table 4.1**

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?	Questions 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10
How do school counselors' beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?	Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8

**Data Analysis and Findings**

Chapter 4 is organized into four categories, four themes, and 11 subthemes that emerged from the answers to the semi-structured interview questions.

- Category 1, *a disorienting dilemma*, incorporates the theme *uncomfortable challenges* and four subthemes: (a) *for better or worse*, (b) *COVID-19*, (c) *that is not fair*, and (d) *help wanted*.
- Category 2, *self-examination through critical assessment and recognition*, incorporates the theme *what was I thinking*, and four subthemes: (a) *once upon a time*, (b) *assumptions*, (c) *it is irrelevant*, and (d) *many hats*.
- Category 3, *exploration and action planning through knowledge acquisition*, incorporates the theme *creating a master plan* and two subthemes: (a) *ready for the world*, and (b) *who decides?*
- Category 4, *reintegration through building confidence and trying new roles*, incorporates the theme *a new perspective* and the subtheme: *it is all brand new*.

Categories 1 and 2 address Research Question 1, and Categories 3 and 4 address Research Question 2. Table 4.2 illustrates a summary of the categories and themes.

**Table 4.2**

*Summary of Categories, Themes, and Subthemes*

Categories	Themes	Subthemes
Disorienting dilemma	Uncomfortable challenges	For better or worse COVID-19 That's not fair Help wanted
Self-examination through critical assessment and recognition	What was I thinking?	Once upon a time It's irrelevant Many hats
Exploration and action planning through knowledge acquisition	Creating a master plan	Ready for the world Help wanted Who decides?
Reintegration through building confidence and trying new roles	A new perspective	It's all brand new

***Research Question 1***

*How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?*

Two categories, two themes, and eight subthemes emerged from the participant responses to the interview questions that describe how their beliefs in CTE were influenced by their lived experiences. These themes and subthemes are listed in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3**

*Research Question 1 – Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
Uncomfortable challenges	For better or worse COVID-19 That's not fair Help wanted
What was I thinking?	Once upon a time Assumptions It's irrelevant Many hats

**Category 1: Disorienting Dilemma.** The first category incorporates the theme *uncomfortable challenges* and four subthemes: (a) *for better or worse*, (b) *COVID-19*, (c) *that is not fair*, and (d) *help wanted*.

***Uncomfortable Challenges.*** The first theme to emerge from the data analysis for Research Question 1 is related to the first phase of Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning theory. This theme spoke to the range of changes that had occurred, resulting in new information that caused the counselors to reconsider their values, beliefs, and preconceptions of CTE programs. This theme emerged broadly with all of the participants experiencing uncomfortable challenges, synonymous with Mezirow's (2001) model of an ideal-typical learning process. A disorienting dilemma initiates a transformative learning experience (Taylor, 2000). SC04 stated: "changes were taking place in CTE way before COVID."

***For Better or Worse.*** The results from the interviews triggered both positive and negative beliefs in CTE that related to the participants' lived experiences relating to the changes from vocational education to CTE. SC01 shared:

When I went to middle school, there were no CTE classes, it was all vocational education and only at the high school level, and those programs were for the special education students or the discipline problems. Growing up, there weren't really any positive experiences related to CTE programs, but nobody looked at the jobs it opened up and, well, even now, there's a difference, sure, but it still gets a bad rap, and many people don't consider CTE any better or worse than Voc-ed.

SC03 said,

Most of the content covered in CTE programs is better information that people will use in their everyday lives, unlike when it was vocational education and only for low-income students or students with disabilities whom we all knew weren't going to college.

Similarly, SC06 stated:

Vocational education or CTE, whatever you call it, doesn't matter, because it's for the students that won't make it in college. I mean, sure, there are those dual classes, programs, whatever, that get you a college degree and some career training, so okay, voc ed was worse off and didn't have any college, it was all about getting a job . . . but it's still not college, which doesn't seem to make CTE all that much better.

**COVID-19.** COVID-19 created many challenges for the education system, especially CTE programs, which are primarily hands-on programs. All of the participants discussed the challenges they encountered because of COVID. SC01 shared:

Before COVID's disruption to the education system causing schools to discontinue in-person programs nearly 2 years ago, many of the high school CTE students completed internships with area businesses. And, even after COVID created such havoc, schools continued to offer virtual internships. Employers in our community have a vested interest in assisting high school students in gaining the skills they need to work in their industries, and they really started increasing their engagement in mentoring students every year. Pretty much, even our middle school teachers engage students in projects that are relevant to the real world.

Along with organizing field trips and visits to the high school's CTE program, we applied for and received a work-based learning grant to help fund a school-based enterprise program where the middle school students created their own business and opened a school store that involved developing a business plan, buying the necessary supplies, and teaming up to operate the business. The program is run by the FACS teacher and her students, and they do a great job.

Similarly, SC02 offered:

I mean, since the pandemic, you know . . . COVID, a lot has changed. More people want the jobs and students need to be able to function in society . . . I grew up in a blue-collar, working-class family, and I was the first person in my house to go to college. Neither one of my parents went to college and don't have any debt – unlike me . . . and they did pretty good for themselves. So, I mean, I was pushed to go to college, but I believe I could've gone to a trade school and done just as well or even better. CTE programs are great for navigating real life, like when a student says, "when am I ever going to use this?" CTE explains that and applies everything to what the world is looking for.

SC04 stated that, "especially during COVID, I mean, we have to understand how a student's experience could change their entire educational experience. We all had a lot of changes lately." SC05 said, "our kids are coming back to school during a continuing pandemic, and they're going to need more from us than scheduling advice, and we need to be ready for that." SC06 stated: "This year with COVID and remote learning was a bit of a challenge. The new year is also going to present a challenge just getting students

acclimated to being back in a building full-time again.” The participants’ responses were common among them, especially with the impact they had seen with COVID.

*That’s Not Fair.* Not only did COVID create challenges for the way CTE programs look, but it also served as a powerful reminder of inequity. SC01 stated:

Even if every student in the district had a device capable of connecting to the Internet, many lacked accesses to Wi-Fi, stopping them from participation in remote and blended learning. Students lacked LTE-enabled smartphones and mobile hotspots, and the only option for them was their cell phone service provider, which really prevented them when they were bound by paying for data and ran out. Similarly, students with disabilities required both basic and assistive technology support. COVID shed attention on many of the equity challenges, not only in CTE programs but in general.

Similarly, SC02 said: “When COVID started and schools were closed, many of our students lacked the basic needs of Internet and device access, keeping them from participating in remote learning, and this is a significant equity issue.” SC04 agreed and stated:

Just having access to a cell phone isn’t enough. Everyone, all kids, Black, White, rich, poor—all of them need access to high-speed internet connections and computers that don’t just support video streaming and information access through online Google and other website searches, but software to write and revise text; create spreadsheets; conduct simulations; create PowerPoint presentations, websites, and, yeah, all that. This pandemic really spotlights the inequities in

access to digital devices and the Internet, especially on our low-income and minority populations.

*Help Wanted.* The participants all had something to say about the need for essential workers since the COVID-19 pandemic; even SC06 offered that while he believed everyone should go to college first, career second, that there was a shift in who the essential workers were in a pandemic and that CTE programs provided the essential employees. However, he also went on to say,

But, look who's filling the "help wanted" ads and who all the essential workers are. They are the people on the front line, and they have to work to support their families and themselves. They are the first ones getting sick and, well, I'm just saying, it was the nonessential workers with college degrees getting paid to work from home. So, yes, we need essential workers and CTE does that, but college will keep you off those front lines and still allow you to support your families.

SC03 shared the belief that CTE is a priority for training students because it is a pivotal component for providing the future workforce with essential workers. SC01 shared, "The pandemic has catapulted many unsung heroes into the spotlight, as we rely on these professionals more than ever. And, well, most of these essential workers got their skills in CTE programs." While SC04 shared the belief that was mirrored by most of the participants, she stated,

I see the consequences of this pandemic and the opportunity that it has created, allowing all CTE programs to exist. So, now we [have] to provide additional resources and effort to continue to make sure that students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive citizens in a post-COVID society, and they

get that education and learn those skills in the CTE classes and programs that are offered.

**Category 2: Self-Examination Through Critical Assessment and Recognition.**

The second category incorporates *what was I thinking?* and included four subthemes:

(a) *once upon a time*, (b) *assumptions*, (c) *it's irrelevant*, and (d) *many hats*. Self-examination and critical assessment enable learners to reorganize, reframe, and re-understand their experiences, integrating new information with past knowledge (Mezirow, 2000). Additionally, transformative learning theorists distinguish critical assessment from introspection or awareness of an emotional state because critical assessment entails the examination of one's own beliefs, with the likelihood that the learner's inquiry will result in the recognition, testing, refinement, or rejection of those beliefs (Mezirow, 1990).

***What Was I Thinking?*** The second theme to emerge in response to Research Question 1 and how the beliefs about CTE held by school counselors were influenced by their lived experiences. Through self-examination, many of the participants reflected on why they work as school counselors. Through critical assessment, they were able to recognize the influences their lived experiences had on their beliefs and they reflected on what their roles. SC03 shared:

There are children that inspire me by making me think, "Man, you're going to do so much." It's cliché but true: I can only hope to leave a lasting influence on the next generation. I can't wait to watch what they do for the community and families in the future. I mean, when I really think about why I became a counselor, and with this whole mess of a world we're in, it just makes sense that I

am where I need to be and we need to change people's minds about CTE and get these kids ready for, God forbid, the next pandemic.

*Once Upon a Time.* Most participants, through self-reflection and critical assessment of prior beliefs, spoke of their lived experiences and the beliefs that were influenced through them. SC04 reflected on wanting to be the counselor that he did not have; and from his own self-examination and assessment, he shared the following insight:

I enjoy working with high schoolers, and I share with them how I used to despise going to school, despise classes, and despise homework . . . . As opposed to my lousy school counselor, I had a fantastic teacher who turned my least-favorite subject into something I actually enjoyed learning about. As a result of my CTE class, I decided that nursing was not what I wanted to pursue. However, as a counselor and football coach, my job still allows me to serve children. I know it's important to build relationships to guide these young people down the right path, so I try to be that guide, you know, that person who will push the kids toward their dreams and goals no matter where they come from, you know, to create their own place in the world.

Similarly, SC05 stated that she always desired to work with teenagers and to do so in a way that allowed equal access to all programs to everyone in the school. "I adore those moments when the true school counseling role emerges."

SC01 shared that she became a school counselor to "guide" young people to become successful adults. She went on to say;

After COVID and the need for essential workers, well . . . if you notice they weren't the PhDs, the professors, the Wall Street executives, but they were the

health care workers, the daycare . . . childcare workers, construction people, the electricians, the customer service people, and I point this out, mostly to say they were . . . well, actually, they still are the frontline workers and those essential jobs are in fields created by CTE.

SC06 stated that his goal was to get people to college, and he followed up with “the need for essential workers because of COVID? Ha . . . Even RN’s need a bachelor’s degree, just one more reason why these kids need to go to college.”

*Assumptions.* Education is not about one size fitting all. After graduation, attending a 4-year college is not the sole path to a high-paying professions. All of the participants agreed that students need the opportunities to gain the skills, technical knowledge, and credentials required to achieve career success after graduating, and they spoke about the many assumptions surrounding CTE programs, including both positive and negative experiences. SC05 shared an example of what happened with her college roommate:

My college roommate didn’t take a CTE pathway in high school and ended up changing her computer science degree because it was too difficult. She wished she had taken the path in high school to see if it was something she truly wanted to pursue.

SC03 shared his experience:

As a teenager, I absolutely hated school. I hated classes, homework, and really [I] despised math and science. I couldn’t stand it. However, every time I got to leave my school and go to the hospital and job shadow, I felt the thrill of escape and the fun of doing something new. So, for all the wrong reasons, I signed up for my

school's nursing program and was enjoying spending plenty of time NOT in school. I had devised the perfect plan!

It didn't take long for me to learn my first CTE lesson: there is much more to a nursing program than wearing scrubs and getting out of class. I actually signed up for a daily, 3-hour block of anatomy and physiology, as well as an introduction to medical math, who knew there was math in medicine? I mean, I know now, but not in high school I didn't. Yep, my brilliant plan to escape school somehow locked me into 3 hours of math and science a day. This could have ended badly. But I had an amazing teacher who took my least-favorite subject and eventually turned it into something that I learned to love. My CTE teacher was a registered nurse who chose to teach nursing skills to high school students. She had no idea how her decision would save hundreds of lives and impact thousands more. She introduced me to the world of CTE. And, no, I'm obviously not a nurse today. Passing out at the sight of blood made that career choice easy. Instead, I became a school counselor, where I share the vision, I first saw in my CTE teacher. Now, I carry her vision forward so all students can succeed with the help of CTE.

SC06 wasn't quite as positive, stating,

I just firmly believe if you're going to make it in this world, you need to have that college degree first, then pick your profession. Like I said, CTE programs are good and all, but [only] for the student you know just isn't going to do well in college.

SC04 shared that she was not always a fan of CTE programs and would dismiss the importance of them and saw them as less rigorous until her daughter wanted to go to culinary school. She shared the following experience,

I have to admit, I was once one of those counselors who dismissed the importance of CTE courses. I thought of them as less rigorous than a core course like English. Then my daughter took a culinary class in high school and fell in love with the idea of becoming a chef and opening her own restaurant. But I insisted she go to college first and earn a degree; then she could pursue a culinary career. The irony is that many of the university professors also teach in the community college culinary program, so the quality of instruction is just as good at a fraction of the price. In this case, insisting she earn a 4-year degree had more to do with the stigma I attached to CTE and community college certificate programs than it did with the actual education she needed in order to pursue her career path. CTE is not a lower form of learning; it's a different form of learning. CTE courses are filled with opportunities for teachers to integrate literacy and math skills as real-life applications. And, ultimately, isn't that what learning is all about? The real-life skills that benefit the student and the community?

SC02 asked the following question and followed it up with a statement:

Why is it that being successful is associated with a 4-year degree? A car-obsessed teenager might just have goals of becoming a mechanic and working on cars. A teenage girl interested in fashion and beauty could be successful owning a salon than, oh, I don't know, than studying history. I mean, one of the smartest persons I know studied cosmetology. She graduated from high school and rented a little

three-chair salon. Eventually, she bought a building and turned it into a salon with four chairs, a massage area, a pedicure room, and a tanning area. It exploded within 6 months of opening. She was driven by her passion, and she is so knowledgeable, and [she] doesn't have any student loan debt and she is so successful. I mean, to think she did all of this while her peers were off in some 4-year college indulging in underage drinking and racking up their student loan debt. How can you not admire people like that? Kind of makes you think how useless a 4-year degree can be for some people, talented people. If you can avoid the college tuition debt and still be that successful, why wouldn't you?

SC01 had similar thoughts to share about the assumptions of CTE programs, stating:

The assumption that CTE is a dumping ground for academically challenged students in the goal of finding a decent job and earning a good income after graduation doesn't work anymore. It just really isn't sufficient to be skilled in any trade. Jobs expect their employees to have higher levels of reading and math these days, so just, uh, you know, simply being skilled in a trade is no longer sufficient. This isn't grandma's home economics lesson. Students looking to get an apprenticeship in the electrical trades need to have a strong grasp of eighth- and ninth-grade math. At least a sixth-grade reading level is required to work in the culinary business. The majority of 11<sup>th</sup> graders in my district just don't meet those requirements. Imagine how intimidating that can be for the student who wants to earn an industry-recognized certification and go straight to work after high school. Some of our students were only promoted to the next grade because of COVID, but [they] never completed any work.

***It's Irrelevant.*** Throughout the semi-structured interviews with the participants, one common topic was the insufficiency and irrelevance of some of their formal instruction and implementation advice from their graduate coursework. SC03 expressed grave concern about some of the training gaps, saying:

I don't feel like I've received enough relevant training in relation to CTE programs; it's all based on . . . well, they taught us theories, and we didn't even receive instructions on how to use them. We had a really good grasp on the theoretical approach to career counseling, but that was about it.

SC05 stated, "It was miserably inadequate in terms of providing information to students and working with them. This is, in my opinion, is where it fell short." The voices of all the participants reflected this type of comment. While some participants claimed that they were introduced to career counseling theory and some evaluation methodologies, they stated that they did not receive sufficient guidance on how to apply these concepts to students. Additionally, none of the participants could recall a specific vocational evaluation or planning criteria for secondary school counseling that could serve as a guideline for their work with students around career counseling.

***Many Hats.*** The responses revealed that all the participants believed they wore many hats and played multiple roles with their students and families. SC01 stated:

Sometimes I do some conflict mediations with kids, but we have a person who is hired through a mental health agency who really handles most of our conflict issues; so, I don't have to really handle much of that. I run focus groups on attendance and anger management at the middle school level, lots of mediation. I suppose my role isn't just to address not only the academic but the emotional and

the social because they go hand in hand. Also, I mean, my role as a middle school counselor is making sure they have the right classes to prepare them for high school. So, when they would come into the sixth grade, some students will get placed into regular classes, some students in advanced, high school regents level classes, and some students needing extra, I would put into enrichment classes, so really, it's not just college and career, it's also academics. Sometimes it's advocate, I mean, it's a lot of different roles and, yeah, that's pretty much all of it. I mean, I'd like to have more time to talk with my students about their future aspirations, transitioning to high school can be a pretty scary experience and to be able to answer some of their questions about what schedules look like.

SC02 went on to say:

Pretty much in seventh and eighth grade, the kids will come in to see me for their schedules. If they want a schedule change, you know, I talk to them as to why, how that is going to incorporate into their future plans, especially if they come in and want to schedule, you know, they have a really rigorous class and they want art instead. Not that art's a bad thing, but is that what they need? And it's really hard to talk them back into [what] they need to stay working hard and stay working rigorous[ly], so that's probably the hardest part in getting them to do that. And the girls don't like technology as much as the boys, [and the boys] don't really like FACS, but they don't have a choice in those classes. Understanding work, in addition to dealing with all the social emotional and adolescent issues that students are [having] at the age of 12, 13, and 14 [and] go through, I am a liaison between students and parents, I guide students toward what they want to

be when they grow up or what classes they'd like to take in high school. I mean, I'm a lot of things and school counselor barely sums it up. I'm a school counselor that "guides" students. I guess you could say we really do a lot of social emotional counseling, we have this year more than any other year, especially with COVID, and we had a lot of social media girl drama stuff going on this year.

While SC03 said:

Number 1, I am an advocate. I am an advocate for my students. I try to work with the department chairs for every subject in order to try and challenge them. Challenge them not only through the way they are teaching the students but also in a way that they are interacting with the students. I am in the classrooms more than I am in my office. I mean, too, I am a football coach and I like to check on my players, too, so I make my rounds. But, too, I mean administration sets the guideline. I'm directed to have the students' pathway[s] and their whole career plan mapped out, which I think is absolutely ridiculous because no ninth grader knows what they're going to do when they're a senior. It's a lot of extra time on my part, but whatever. We go through, and I talk to them about their math, their science, their social studies, their English; we talk about foreign language, we talk about band and choir; we talk about the yearbook, if they want to do that; and then we go into the process of all the other electives. Ninth graders don't get to take many electives. They're pretty well . . . they just don't get a lot of electives because a lot of things are based on a course prerequisite, so the ninth graders are about the easiest to work with on schedule planning.

SC04 stated:

So, we do a sort of freshman orientation, a little bit in the fall, with a career portfolio. What I do is go into every classroom, and I talk about . . . . I really go through our registration basically. I talk about credit and Regents' requirements and ,you know, credits that students need and actually what I do. In that career portfolio is—students keep their own transcript in there—I also meet with the juniors and seniors about twice a year as a large group for sure. Juniors and then all the freshmen and sophomores will meet at least once in a large group situation and then juniors and seniors, individually, visit always at least twice a year. Well, at least that's how it was before COVID. I'm not quite sure what it will look like with students returning and what the restrictions might still be in place. This year, I have been providing more academic counseling, well, because I am finding this year [that] they are more immature, so we need to teach them a lot of coping skills both from a social and academic aspect, but remember, I mean, some of these students in ninth grade haven't really been in a school building since the end of sixth or seventh grades and that's a long time. Sometimes it's about guiding them in just keeping with their studies, teaching them study habits, [and] homework and organization skills. I suppose you could say that my role is more or less dictated by my administration and what's going on in the world.

SC05 shared:

At the high school level, I calculated I work almost 4 months of the school year on scheduling; unfortunately, a majority of time spent as a school counselor is really spent just on this duty. Sure, there are scheduling programs, but

administration must put in the “master schedule” manually, let the program run, and there will still be days and days of manually changing schedules. It will always continue to amaze me with modern technology, that scheduling has to be so time consuming. I mean, if you have any ideas, I would love to tell you all of the parameters of what is needed. There are no computer programs. Truly figure[ing] out and address[ing] the “master schedule” building in an effective, less time-consuming way would be ideal. I also see my role as being there, you know, to motivate students to help them find their way and to guide them in many different facets in life. To be there to support students in every aspect of their lives whether with their family, talking about their academics, their interests to support them in any way possible to be well rounded.

SC06 summed it all up by saying:

As a school counselor, I am constantly putting on a million hats. I am the liaison between the parents and the school. I am a mediator with parents when they have a problem with a teacher or with a student or their own child. I speak to them and try to guide them through these issues. Sometimes I’m pulled [in] to act as an administrator for the day. On any given day, I can play any given role.

Throughout the year (before COVID), I’ll collaborate with families and other staff members to help each student develop academically, socially, and personally. My role also includes the scheduling of students’ courses in the beginning of the academic year to ensure all graduation requirements are met prior to June. This year with COVID and remote learning was a bit of a challenge; the new year is also going to present a challenge just getting students reacclimated to being back

in a building full-time. My role changes from mental health issues to administrative, to just scheduling, and this is why we need specific counselors just for career guidance, so I can do my job and get these students to college and, well, be a counselor—it’s a lot more than just scheduling a student in classes.

The participants all expressed similar thoughts and perceptions on their roles as school counselors. Most of the counselors agreed that their major role was to guide and motivate students to ensure they are successful.

**Research Question 2**

*How do school counselors’ beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?* There were two categories, two themes and three subthemes that emerged from the participant responses to the interview questions that described how the beliefs of counselors influenced their recommendations of CTE programs to students. These themes and subthemes are listed in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4**

*Research Question 2 – Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
Creating a master plan	Ready for the world Who decides?
A new perspective	It’s all brand new

**Category 3: Exploration and Action Planning through Knowledge**

**Acquisition.** The third category that emerged from the data and provides answers to Research Question 2, is *exploration and action planning through knowledge acquisition*. This includes the theme, *creating a master, plan* and two subthemes: (a) *ready for the*

*world*, and (b) *who decides*? Resulting in a transformative learning experience for the participants.

Transformative learning occurs in a paradigm shift or viewpoint shift due to the learning experience and a change in one's frame of reference. When individuals take an active role in learning about themselves and the world around them, they engage in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). As a result, transformative learning enhances an individual's sense of agency (Mezirow, 1990). The fifth and sixth phases of Mezirow's 10-phase model of transformative learning both include a sense of agency.

***Creating a Master Plan.*** The first theme to emerge in response to Research Question 2, as to how counselors recommended CTE programs to students, also aligns with the study's use of transformative learning theory. With a shift in their beliefs and how their beliefs influence their recommendations through the exploration of options, planning courses of action, and the knowledge acquisition of the skills necessary, several of the participants agreed in the need for creating a master plan. All of the participants had similar responses that were in agreement with SC05 who stated:

Districts need to align the curriculum with the industry-specific demands in each CTE program or pathway to provide that roadmap for all of the courses in the pathway—not just the advanced levels that serve as the foundation for stackable certification options. But like by combining core classes with CTE courses, such as geometry and construction, this will improve or well enhance the learning experience, show the students why math is important. But also provide workforce training and include employability and work-based learning into core content and CTE classes. You know, to align workforce expectations and link the curriculum

with content standards. But, too, we really need to create a master plan and create that 4-year graduation plan for students, way before they get to high school, before they even get to middle school. Seriously, these discussions should begin in elementary school, with employability skills included into lessons and courses.

SC02 stated “CTE programs should create a plan to integrate core curriculum and applied work-based learning to benefit students by assisting them in applying their knowledge to real-world situations,” and SC04 believed a master plan would include a student-centered approach by sharing:

An overall plan for CTE should include creating and articulating a student-centered perspective. CTE needs to plan for the inclusion and support of special populations and nontraditional roles. Not only will this include federal and state compliance with Perkins V, it will also promote equal access by providing teachers with the same curriculum sequence and exercises.

According to SC06:

Career development as a master plan is a journey, not a one-time thing. Students need a variety of activities that compliment and build upon each another. Career counseling should begin during a student’s freshman year and continue throughout their 4 years. This is why we need career-specific counselors. If we want to focus on the CTE components, we need people with the expertise in that role.

Several of the participants agreed that inventories and evaluations should occur annually to allow students to evaluate their interests and talents as they progress and investigate, experience, and research careers.

***Ready for the World.*** Several participants discussed their beliefs, and stated they recommend CTE programs to their students, so they can prepare them for the real world. SC05 stated, “CTE programs prepare students for life after school; they combine academic instruction and career explorations that students put to use, and they get the real-world skills that they don’t necessarily get in the classroom alone.” SC01 stated “CTE programs provide students with the information and skills they need to thrive in the real world of working for a living.” SC03 similarly stated:

CTE covers just about everything related to an entry into the job market. It includes job exploration, allowing students to decide what careers might just be a good fit for them in the future. It includes professionalism, workforce development, financial literacy, and digital literacy, and all these things all contribute to real-world readiness by making sure the students are educated, well-rounded, and ready for the world.

Specifically, most participants expressed the importance of exposure to CTE programs helping bridge the gap between academia and the skills they need to live the lives they want to pursue.

***Who Decides?*** The participants discussed the students’ voice and giving students a choice in being scheduled in classes geared toward college versus CTE programs, based on the direction they see themselves going after high school, as exemplified by SC06 with, “Before we talk about scheduling classes, I ask them (students) questions about what they want to do with the rest of their life.” SC02 put it this way:

To ask how I decide which track a student should follow is not an easy answer. I can say it’s up to my administration, which wouldn’t necessarily be untrue . . . or I

can say the students' parents, again, not untrue. . . . I can say I make a decision based on grades, abilities, socioeconomic statuses, but that would be . . . .

Anyway, well, I won't say that sometimes I'm not directed by my administration to place a student in a CTE class for maybe one of those reasons. Well, without being told that's the reason . . . . So, I mean whose choice is it? Seriously, I have to say it varies according to the student, and sometimes it isn't the student making that choice at all, it's just the student is the person telling me what maybe his or her parents decided and that makes it tough.

SC03 indicated that all students are not the same and stated:

Every student is different. No one student is comparable to another. It comes down to the situation, really, and is dependent on the motivation, goals, and objections of the student. Anxiety is an especially powerful motivator for success. So, there is no one-size-fits-all method, because success is, in a nutshell, subjective. Just because a few schools are so committed to 4-year university educations that they compel students to attend college, that's not the best option for everyone. So, success could well be defined as earning a high-paying industry certification and immediately beginning work after high school. I mean, really, that's when the student decides and counselors guide.

Most of the participants believed that students' course selections and efforts toward achievement should be tailored to their professional aspirations. Those who were interested in topics that required certification were more likely to embrace the CTE programs, and those interested in a 4-year degree or who were undecided were more likely to embrace the classes geared toward preparation for colleges and universities.

**Category 4: Reintegration, Building Confidence, and Trying New Roles.** The fourth and final category incorporates the theme *a new perspective* and the subtheme *it's all brand new*. Individuals gain confidence in new and interesting ways when they acquire new knowledge, consequently expanding their present abilities and developing new accomplishments. When individuals' confidence grows, they become more inclined to move beyond their comfort zones and embrace personal and professional risks. Confidence building is the ninth phase in Mezirow's 10-stage model of transformative learning.

*A New Perspective.* Most of the participants agree that change is required and that one must have a new perspective. SC05 summed it up nicely by stating:

As the economy continues with its shift toward technology, and with the growing need for essential workers, and the fact that CTE programs are now more rigorous than the vocational education programs our grandparents went to., there's a new way of looking at things, and college isn't a one-size-fits-all approach, we need a new perspective. Students need to develop soft skills, and they need to be prepared for lifelong learning. Small improvements don't work anymore, we can't continue putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound, and we need a systemic change.

*It's All Brand New.* It's all brand new emerged from all six participants during the semi-structured interviews. SC03 acknowledged that between the shifts from vocational programs to CTE, factoring in COVID, that it is a brand new culture that advocates for any type of postsecondary education stating: "the requirements for any profession, career, or activity in life can't be met by just having a high school diploma." The participants' statements focused on their positions on various topics, ranging from

increased involvement to the diverse selection of postsecondary choices now accessible. SC01 reported: “To me, college is more than that. It is a 2-year or 4-year program, a technical school, or some other type of instruction following high school.” SC02’s perspective revealed that she distinguished between the term “college” and “college-going culture.” College, to me, refers to technical schools and 2-year colleges. College-going culture—when I think about education, I consider it to be more than a 1-year institution. Most of the high school counselors emphasized the need to refine the phrase “postsecondary” while also broadening its definition. SC04 considered the term “postsecondary”:

I consider it in a variety of ways. Not long ago, it would have been addressed with, “What are you doing to promote college and make college admissions requirements readily available in the classroom?” It’s so much more than that now, because postsecondary is no longer defined simply as a 4-year university experience. I view it as any form of training or education following high school. I even consider 2-year, 4-year, [the] military, and even on-the-job training.

SC05 stated how her school informed ninth-grade students about college opportunities, “We inform our ninth-grade kids about the various options open to them, whether it is a CTE pathway, a 2-year technical college, a community college, a 4-year university, or even the military.”

Apart from SC06, the majority of the participants said that the term “college” sent a message that was confusing to some students and created a poor understanding of the many postsecondary possibilities.

## Summary

The overall summary of the results indicated that the counselors' knowledge and positive opinions about CTE rose when they encountered a disorienting dilemma and initiated critical reflections and self-assessments. However, the study's findings further indicated that the counselors' personal CTE experiences had no discernible effect on their positive or negative impressions of CTE.

The researcher began the study with the presumption that counselors did not hold good views of CTE and did not promote enrollment in CTE to students in Grades 7–12. Additionally, the researcher expected that counselors would be less likely to advocate for CTE as a viable option for students. The overall results confirmed that all but one counselor had transformative learning experiences resulting from the changes in CTE from traditional vocational education and the impact of COVID-19.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore factors that influenced school counselors' recommendations of CTE programs to students in Grades 7–12. The four categories, four themes, and 11 subthemes that emerged from the data and were discussed in Chapter 4 were: a disorienting dilemma, incorporating the theme uncomfortable challenges and four subthemes: (a) for better or worse, (b) COVID-19, (c) that's not fair and (d) help wanted. The second category, self-examination through critical assessment and recognition, incorporating the theme what was I thinking, and four subthemes: (a) once upon a time, (b) assumptions, (c) it's irrelevant, and (d) many hats. The third category, exploration and action planning through knowledge acquisition, incorporating the theme of creating a master plan and two subthemes: (a) ready for the world, and (b) who decides? The fourth and final category, reintegration through building

confidence and trying new roles, incorporated the theme a new perspective and the subtheme, it's all brand new. All categories and themes were relevant to the lived experiences of the school counselors.

Chapter 5 of this study further reviews the findings while highlighting the study's limitations and implications for future research and policy recommendations.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 opens with an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, and primary findings based on Chapter 4 results. Additionally, findings from the literature review, surprises that emerged, study limitations, and conclusions are included. Chapter 5 concludes with policy implications, future research proposals, and concluding statements.

School counselors' responsibilities continue to expand and vary (Greenwaldt & Gosselin, 2014; Gysbers, 2001), and they are becoming increasingly crucial as high school graduation criteria change. There are numerous references in the literature regarding how school counselors should provide broad student support (ASCA, 2017).

Today's school counselors' responsibilities are to coordinate efforts to meet each student's academic, social-emotional, and career development needs (ASCA, 2017). Additionally, counselors' lists of responsibilities are extensive and involved, frequently encompassing other duties such as administrative support or discipline (ASCA, 2012). This comprehensive list of responsibilities requires continuous examination of their roles to define priority areas.

As with counseling programs, CTE has evolved significantly throughout the years. CTE, formerly known as vocational education, did not serve the same objectives that it does today. Firm views that vocational education was only for special education students, students with behavioral difficulties, and other marginalized students have made

it difficult for CTE to be acknowledged for its importance in modern society (Dougherty, 2016). These beliefs regarding CTE may influence the advice and recommendations given to students by counselors. CTE is emerging as a viable option for educational reform, providing high school graduates with the skills needed for success in postsecondary education and the workforce (Bozick & Dalton, 2013, Dougherty, 2016, Gentry et al. 2007; Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). CTE empowers students with academic, technical, and employability skills. CTE further educates students to adapt and change as necessary for career success following their high school or postsecondary school completion (Bevins et al., 2012; Gentry et al., 2008; Mukuni & Price, 2016). Students who have completed three or more CTE courses in the same concentration area are more likely to graduate and be better prepared for postsecondary programs than their peers (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). CTE prepares students to enter the workforce upon graduation from high school with industry certifications, licenses, postsecondary certificates, or degrees (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). A gap in the literature exists concerning school counselors' beliefs in the importance of CTE and how their beliefs affect their recommendations of CTE.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced school counselors' beliefs in CTE, how their lived experiences influenced their beliefs, and how their beliefs influenced their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12. This study adds to the literature and an understanding of counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment. The information gained from this study may help to address counselors' recommendations of CTE program enrollment, which could affect the

workforce shortage of skilled employees, and information and guidance coming from counselors may substantially influence students' future educational and career plans.

### **Implications of Findings**

The study's findings reveal that lived experiences have an influence on counselors' positive or negative attitude of CTE. The counselors' knowledge and positive opinions about CTE rose when they encountered a disorienting dilemma and initiated critical reflection and self-assessments. A disorienting dilemma is a life crisis that forces individuals to review their assumptions, leading to new views (Taylor, 2000). Transformative learning is an individual experience, and, not surprisingly, all the participants did not react identically to their learning experience.

Contrary to the literature review, five out of six counselors in this study, did hold positive views of CTE, and they did promote enrollment into CTE programs for students in Grades 7–12. Additionally, while the literature postulated that counselors were less likely to advocate for CTE as a viable option for students, unless the student received special education services (Dougherty, 2016), this study confirmed that all but one counselor had transformative learning experiences resulting from the changes in CTE from traditional vocational education and the impact of COVID-19. They had a more favorable opinion of CTE than the literature indicated.

Many students can pursue high-wage occupations through CTE, technical training, industry credential programs, vocational institutions, and 2-year degrees. Superintendents and school principals must ensure that students receive adequate counseling and career counseling. Additionally, counselors must maintain realistic caseloads of 1:150–250 students to spend time counseling students about career interests.

During the school year, counselors must have time to participate in occupational training, collaborate with local businesses on labor market needs, become familiar with the various industry sectors and CTE paths provided at their schools, and explain postsecondary opportunities to students and families.

The importance of providing educationally equitable learning experiences for all students is prominent on the agendas of the majority of educational policymakers. This study raised concerns about CTE's social justice implications. Social justice concerns were woven throughout the study, which included conversations regarding the phrase "college for all," prejudices and stigmas, and the population that was historically served by CTE. Additionally, this study demonstrated that underprivileged students had a lack of access to electronic devices, technology, and Wi-Fi, particularly during the pandemic and as they progressed through their CTE, throughout their schooling.

Symonds et al. (2011) emphasized that the college for all rhetoric prevalent in our nation's high schools is implausible and benefits just a small segment of the population. Additionally, school counselors may require extra training regarding the many CTE programs available and how to conduct career counseling sessions with students. Initiatives should be designed to assist students in determining, early on, whether or not they want to pursue a particular career path. While Perkins V (2018) increased CTE programming to students as early as their fifth-grade year, this study discovered that middle school students have few options.

### **Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of school counselors and how their beliefs influenced their recommendations of CTE programs to

students in Grades 7–12. This descriptive qualitative study provided the opportunity to uncover the lived experiences of school counselors. However, the study did have some limitations.

Data were collected from school counselors across New York State. A purposive sampling resulted in six school counselors volunteering for this study. Four participants worked in high schools, and two participants worked in middle schools. The lack of diversity in the demographics of the participants may have limited a potentially diverse account of the lived experiences and more insight on how they affect school counselors in other school settings.

Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The researcher and all six participants were at their places of employment during the interviews and, at times, the interviews experienced Internet difficulties. While the researcher had the participants member check their own transcripts, the transcription process may have missed some key information and led to inaccuracies in parts of their accounts. Many of the participants perseverated on the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have caused a barrier for answering the questions adequately. More clarification and direct interview questions may have eliminated that confusion.

This study was limited to six school counselors of Grades 7–12 in urban, suburban, or rural schools. Consequently, the study did not include comprehensive schools, BOCES, charter, parochial, alternative schools, private schools, or nontraditional schools. This study was limited to counselors' beliefs in CTE and the impact of influence

on their CTE recommendation through the counselors' lived experiences, and the results cannot be compared to a larger group or larger studies.

While the researcher established rapport with participants and had conversations relevant to the study's purpose, the researcher had desired to collect data in person and observe participants' settings, but this was not possible because of COVID-19, and the interviews were performed virtually. Observations of the participants' environments might have resulted in a greater appreciation for the complexities of the participants' experiences. As such, the existing crisis of the COVID pandemic may have been the lens through which each participant answered their questions, which brought to light the importance of essential jobs and social justice.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several opportunities for future research. Along with expanding the scope of this current study to include a broader range of participants, additional qualitative data would be valuable in elucidating the underlying assumptions and causal relationships behind existing beliefs. Additionally, information about the schools' locations (rural, urban, or suburban), the student bodies' overall size, and the individual counselors' caseloads, current secondary CTE program offerings, and the estimated distance to the nearest community or technical college should be gathered.

Additional research may determine whether counselors believe they can advise students in their career development. A research priority would be to explore counselors' roles in a more integrated approach with a priority being given to emerging practices having the greatest likelihood of impacting student success, most importantly with underserved student populations.

Furthermore, implementing the following recommendations may contribute to a better understanding of CTE. Future research could explore parents, instructors, students, and administrators' attitudes and valuation of CTE. This data may aid in the recommendation of CTE and its associated advantages to stakeholders.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

According to the literature review in Chapter 2, school counselors have a limited amount of time to devote to career planning/exploration. Promoting college and career readiness competencies as a certification requirement for school counselors would be beneficial to increasing school counselors' awareness of career readiness as well as postsecondary educations. Given the findings of this study, it would be irresponsible to dismiss the potential that school counselors may be hired into positions that do not provide suitable professional development training. Counselor education programs owe school counselors to train them for career preparedness, not just to promote college for all.

Doing more with less has always been a struggle for school administrators. Better equipping school counselors to fulfill their students' needs may empower counselors to lead students into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce.

This information would be highly beneficial to the NYSED as it prepares for counselor professional development throughout the state in alignment with Perkins V. Finally, in the interest of increasing the focus on social justice and inclusion for all, it is proposed that there be increased studies on state leaders' commitments to both equality and excellence in CTE to foster community trust and to foster a culture of equity.

Promoting CTE programs to students in Grades 7–12, particularly those in underrepresented areas, would be a positive step toward increasing students' CTE program involvement. Such beneficial changes should continue to be a social justice effort for administrators, policymakers, and school counselors who strive to increase students' career readiness and future opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the participants' lived experiences influencing their recommendation of CTE. This included the impact of transformative learning between changes in the counselors' beliefs, their knowledge and understanding of the recent changes to ESSA (2015), and the Perkins V (2018) initiatives.

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 (Symonds et al., 2011), through preparing all young people with a solid enough foundation of literacy, numeracy, and thinking skills for responsible citizenship, career development, and lifelong learning (Symonds et al., 2011). For over a century, the United States led the world in equipping its young people with the education they would need to succeed (Symonds et al., 2011).

The history of CTE and vocational education reveals a practice that began as a method of apprenticeship designed to develop workers for a trade before people entered the workforce (Lynch, 2006). There were three main pieces of legislation that influenced the frameworks for career and technical education: (a) the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, (b) the Vocational Act of 1963, and (c) the Carl D. Perkins Act. All three influenced

technical education because a major function of the reforms was to provide funding to schools for career and technical education.

Funding has a major influence on what is offered to students because of the accountability measures built into each piece of legislation. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 and the expansion of apprentice programs led to school reforms such as the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Act of 1917 (Gordon et al., 2002). According to Hayward and Benson (1993), the role of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was to provide federal funding for vocational education in public schools. However, the Act also put restrictions on the students who participated in vocational education. Students who participated in one vocational course were restricted to a maximum of 50% of academic instruction, meaning that students could not participate in more than 50% general education curriculum if they participated in vocational education.

The authors argued that these restrictions subjected students to job-related tasks while curtailing most of their engagement in theoretical content. Rojewski (2002) argued that the two most-influential forces that inspired CTE are the federal government and the philosophies regarding the nature of vocational education. He believed that since the inception of the Smith Hughes Act of 1917, the federal government has been the primary driver for the direction and scope of CTE (Rojewski, 2002).

Although the federal government provides funding through federal mandates, the structure of vocational education is highly decentralized. Hayward and Benson (1993) explained that the Constitution does not burden educational decision-making on the federal government. Because of this, there is a great deal of inconsistency concerning decision-making in vocational education within the thousands of U.S school districts.

Therefore, the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1965) introduced a new era of the federal government's involvement in vocational education.

With the passage of this mandate, the two explicit goals of vocational education became preparing the workforce for the country's economic needs and meeting students' social needs. This mandate was less concerned with the category of vocation but rather the needs of the population being served. Looking to pass new vocational education legislation, President John F. Kennedy requested that a panel examine the oversight of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. The panel was constructed by the Secretary of Health, Welfare, and Education, and it was found that the growing service industries needed skilled and semi-skilled labor.

According to the panel, the Smith-Hughes Act did very little to fund or encourage the training of such workers. Additionally, 700,000 to 800,000 people between the ages of 16 and 21 were not working or in school (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1965). The findings of this panel informed the new criteria for the Vocational Education Act of 1963. The Act's objective was to ensure that the federal government's influence on vocational education was comprehensive in all vocations covered under the Act.

The distinguishing characteristic for defining vocational education from academic education is that persons generally described as professionals were excluded from vocational education. This distinction left many students looking to learn a skill without earning a bachelor's degree (International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1965). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 expanded the focus of the federal

government to include services for students with special needs. The mandate also funded the modernization and enhancement of the programs. The mandate prioritized vocational education allocations with 57% for special populations and 43% for program enhancement. Special populations included single parents, nontraditional students by gender, and criminal offenders (Imperatore & Hyslop, 2017).

During the 1990s, the division between vocational education and general education began to come into focus. The history of isolation began to break down to help prepare students for the modernization happening in society (Gordon, 2014). The 1990 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act added “Applied Technology” to the title. This reauthorization required the integration of academics, expected articulation between all levels of education, and stimulated relationships with industry. The Act also spelled out funding opportunities for secondary and postsecondary institutions to create pathways for students to start training in high school and continue into college (Lynch, 2006).

In 1998, the reauthorization of the Perkins Act realigned the Perkins funding appropriations by giving 85% to local agencies and 15% to the states. The state portion included a reserve for creating equity for rural districts (Gordon, 2014). The Perkins Act was reauthorized in 2006, but it remained similar to the 1998 reauthorization except for accountability. The new Act encouraged bridging the gap between academic coursework and technical content, which was the collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions. It required that the curriculum be “rigorous and coherent” (ACTE, 2006).

Historically, federal funding has driven the direction of technical programs. Even though the funding strategy overwhelmingly favored local agencies, the federal

government held them accountable for using the funding. The increased division between academic and technical education created with the Smith-Hughes Act was so apparent that legislators felt it necessary to mandate collaboration activities.

They recognized the need to reevaluate CTE and funded a \$1.4 billion reform mission to ensure that today's CTE programs prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce (USDOE, 2011). The House Committee on Education and the Workforce passed H.R. 5587, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, in September of 2016, reauthorizing and reforming the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). Supporting this legislation, former President Donald Trump signed the Perkins V into law on July 31, 2018.

This reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 reaffirmed a commitment by the federal government to high-quality CTE programs. While the federal government has continued its financial support CTE, critics maintain that vocational education, since its implementation in 1917, has systematically served the needs of businesses at the expense of students' intellectual development (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018).

To improve CTE programs and increase accountability, the 2006 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (P.L. 019-270) required all CTE programs to integrate academic and CTE subject matter into programs of study. Following this change, Bragg (2017) reported that students who "completed more high school academic course work in conjunction with CTE classes tended to perform better than those taking fewer academic classes and CTE" (p. 56).

Additionally, CTE students were more motivated and interested in their coursework with having a real-world connection. As a result, they were less likely to drop out (Conneely & Hyslop, 2018). The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (P.L. 019-270) also set the precedent that all students enrolled in CTE courses were expected to follow a career pathway designed to prepare them for postsecondary education or employment (Bragg, 2017). With CTE programs across the country that adhered to integrating academic coursework into the classroom and placing a greater emphasis on students completing a program of study related to a specific career cluster. The stigma of tracking was disappearing (Conneely & Hyslop, 2018).

At the time of this writing, CTE courses offer many career options for student exploration through the 16 U.S. Career Clusters, including over 79 pathways (Advance CTE, n.d.). Career exploration is facilitated through on-the-job training, including internships and apprenticeships, as well as opportunities to earn business and industry certifications (NYSED, 2021).

The structured approach of courses in career pathways is strategically designed to prepare students for postsecondary education and career success (Stringfield et al., 2017). These changes have challenged CTE programs to provide rigorous and relevant training designed to prepare today's youth and adults for "high-wage, high-skill, in-demand careers" (Conneely & Hyslop, 2018, p. 55). in existing and emerging industries (Conneely & Hyslop, 2018). Kazis (2005) concluded that national reform for CTE programs must include rigor, relevance, and relationships, with academic rigor as the primary goal. Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar's (2018) analysis of the existing wording of CTE goals surrounding the 21<sup>st</sup>-century global marketplace reflects an absence of Dewey's

(1916) core beliefs and ideals. Dewey’s conception of vocational education included a commitment to “human flourishing, civic participation, and social transformation— notions that are largely absent from current rhetoric in CTE based primarily on employability skills in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century global marketplace and meeting the shifting demands of the labor market” (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018, p. 195–196).

The concept of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills has been widely used, but it is more difficult to define. Generally, this term refers to “a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed . . . to be critically important to success in today’s world” (Bray et al., 2010, p. 18). Skills such as the ability to think critically, solve problems, use reasoning, and to persevere are commonly identified as essential to success in today’s workplace (Bray et al., 2010). They are foundational aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom. Evidence of an increase in programs offering digital literacy and computer science (McCain & Imperatore, 2018) reflects CTE’s commitment to creating opportunities for students to develop the skills needed to flourish in today’s global marketplace.

The United States is at a crossroads in global economic competitiveness, and it has numerous obstacles in educating students for employment. According to Varas (2016), America will face a shortage of around 1 million qualified workers by 2024, and the upcoming retirement of the Baby Boomer population will exacerbate the problem (Combs, 2015). COVID-19 has also altered some of our society’s most fundamental foundations. With millions of Americans out of work and many industries closing and facing rapid change, CTE is more vital than ever for our country’s learners, businesses, and economic recovery.

CTE instills academic knowledge and practical skills in middle school and high school students, preparing them for success in any future activity. With today's CTE placing a higher emphasis on math, computer, and critical thinking abilities, it is vital to introduce all students to employment options in CTE (Bevins et al., 2012). Globalization increases the demand for talented workers with the adaptability to work in various locations and fill jobs globally (DiMattina & Ferris, 2013). CTE equips middle school and high school students with academic knowledge and real-world skills that position them for success in any future endeavor. Recruiting and retaining skilled employees will be critical in determining industry leaders' ability to compete in the future economy. Failure to build a skilled workforce will hurt the future success of the U.S. economy (DiMattina & Ferris, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to add to an increased understanding of the literature examining school counselors' lived experiences and beliefs in CTE to influence their recommendations for CTE. School counselors play a critical role in developing the next generation of skilled workers, and they must be proactive in meeting future workforce demands (Kollman & Beck, 2013). The rising demand for technical skills will be a driving force in developing future educational plans for students. Despite this, no recent research has been conducted on the essential function of school counselors in placing students into CTE programs.

According to Romano and Dellow (2009), labor studies indicate a greater scarcity of skilled workers than a shortage of employment opportunities for the future economy. Enrollment in CTE in the United States currently lags in meeting the future demand for skilled workers (Wachen et al., 2011). Dubina et al. (2020) estimated that the United

States should acquire 6.0 million new jobs in 2020, increasing to 168.8 million in 2029. However, most of these positions will be necessary to compensate for labor losses during the recent economic crisis. Across the United States, businesses and industries face difficulties in locating workers with the requisite skillsets.

Counselors' lack of recommending CTE may be motivated by a misconception that CTE is only for low-achieving students (Belz, 2010; Brown, 2009; McGarrah, 2015). School counselors are critical participants in disseminating career information to pupils given the nature of their positions. This researcher felt that it was crucial to examine the influence of school counselors' beliefs in the CTE exploration process for students. Counselors' involvement in this process has a direct impact on the students' participation in CTE. The potential of CTE to contribute to the development of a skilled workforce will affect the problem of a skilled workforce shortage.

Using the theoretical framework of transformative learning theory, the findings revealed four major themes, including (a) uncomfortable challenges, (b) what was I thinking, (c) creating a master plan, and (d) a new perspective. School counselors are the primary resource for CTE program recruitment and enrollment, and much can be learned from their lived experiences (Mobley et al., 2017).

The increased recommendation and enrollment of students into CTE is key to reducing the anticipated shortage of skilled workers and increasing equity in CTE. The results could change the CTE program recommendation culture. The findings of the study were derived from the guiding research questions:

1. How do the lived experiences of school counselors influence their beliefs in CTE?

2. How do school counselors' beliefs influence their recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12?

In general, the examination of the descriptive data revealed that five of the study's research participants had begun to experience stages of Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning. Additionally, one research participant encountered Mezirow's transformative learning Phases 1 through 3 but held on to his belief that CTE is for students who will not be going to college and for other marginalized groups of students.

Transformative learning can be defined as the process of critically examining one's beliefs, values, and assumptions to gain insight and to develop new knowledge (Mezirow, 2000). By altering one's viewpoint on present and past events, one can begin personal and social growth, which ultimately develops into transformation.

The data analysis revealed that the transformative learning experience was created by utilizing the essential aspects of transformative learning (a disorienting dilemma, critical thinking skills, and personal self-reflection). However, some of the findings indicated that personal reflection abilities were lacking in the participants. This lack of personal reflection skills may impair an individual's ability to reflect on, grow, and change professionally.

Creating an environment for school counselors to understand themselves and CTE in new ways can open the door to new beliefs and recommendations of CTE to students in Grades 7–12. The transformative learning process facilitates shifts in knowledge (King, 2005). The participants in this research study were able to critically examine their preexisting views, beliefs, and values to develop the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for CTE recommendation with their diverse student population.

Limitations of the study were related to (a) recruitment, (b) participation, (c) COVID, and (e) researcher status. The recommendations are based on expanding the scope of this current study to include a broader range of participants and adding information about the schools' locations (rural, urban, or suburban), the student bodies' overall sizes, and the size of the individual counselors' caseloads.

The demand for skilled workers will continue to grow, notably in technology, health care, and other industries that require trade skills. The U.S. infrastructure demands will continue to expand, as will the necessity for skilled employees to maintain the electrical, HVAC, and other systems that power our nation's hospitals, offices, and industries. To satisfy these criteria, counselor, student, and family awareness of CTE must be improved. Students deserve access to high-quality CTE that prepares them for essential, in-demand careers that do not require a 4-year college degree and that enrich their education with practical, hands-on experience.

Over the years, the CTE system has experienced several challenges. While providing a high-quality classroom and hands-on learning experience is extremely difficult, if not impossible, amid a pandemic like COVID-19, students are returning to the classroom and work-based experiences. This study may serve as a reference for overcoming obstacles and increasing awareness of the value of CTE. This effort is critical for preparing students for the skilled industries that the economy will require in the aftermath of the pandemic and well into the future.

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## Appendix A

### Institutional Review Board Approval



June 1, 2021

File No: 4186-061721-02

Colleen Jackson  
St. John Fisher College

Dear Ms. Jackson:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Exempt Review project, "Reimagining Career and Technical Education: Examining the Factors that Influence Grade 7-12 School Counselors' Perceptions of CTE and Program Enrollment".

*Please note, to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to help mitigate community transmission, St. John Fisher College has temporarily suspended all in-person activities (recruitment and data collection) among researchers and study participants for all IRB-approved human subjects research until further notice. Studies that do not involve any direct subject contact, e.g., pre-existing records, electronic surveys, tele-research, and remote interaction via device/app/software are still permissible, along with data analysis from previously collected in-person sessions.*

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at [irb@sjfc.edu](mailto:irb@sjfc.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eileen Lynd-Balta".

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

jdr

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear School Counselor:

Greetings! I would like to invite you to participate in a study that I, Colleen Jackson, am conducting as a doctoral candidate in the St. John Fisher College Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. The study will focus on the lived experiences of NYS public-school counselors of students in Grades 7–12; addressing how their beliefs were influenced by their lived experiences and how those beliefs are reflected in their scheduling practices.

By exploring the experiences of school counselors engaged in this work, the results will be used to inform the existing literature of strategies that may be implemented in order to create and lead socially just scheduling of students in CTE programs.

The purpose of the study is to fill the gap of research in how school counselors schedule students into CTE programs based on their lived experiences. Participation benefits include contributing to the understanding of addressing implicit bias as a scheduling factor.

**If you can answer yes to the following question, please consider participating in this study:**

1. Are you a tenured school counselor of Grade 7–12 students in a NYS Public school (excluding SCSD, Charter, Exclusive CTE High Schools, and BOCES)?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be scheduled for a virtual interview for school counselors of students in Grades 7–12. The interview will take no more than 60-90 minutes. A one-page informational form will be provided to you that summarizes details of the study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will have the option of terminating your participation at any time without any penalty or repercussions. Additionally, your participation will be confidential. During all aspects of the study, your identity will be protected with the use of a pseudonym. School districts will also be assigned a pseudonym as an additional measure to protect privacy.

For further information about the study, please contact me, Colleen Jackson, via email at [\\_\\_\\_\\_@sjfc.edu](mailto:____@sjfc.edu), or my Committee Chair and Faculty Supervisor, Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership, Dr. Loretta Quigley can be reached at \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ and [\\_\\_\\_\\_@sjfc.edu](mailto:____@sjfc.edu). The research study has been reviewed and approved by Ms. Jill Rathbun, IRB Administrator of St. John Fisher College's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I appreciate your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Colleen M. Jackson Doctoral Candidate  
St. John Fisher College  
Ralph C. Wilson School of Education  
Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership  
3690 East Avenue  
Rochester, New York 14618

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time:

Duration:

Place:

Number code assigned to participant (1, 2, 3.):

#### **Prior to the interview, the researcher will say to each participant:**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how school counselors' beliefs were influenced by their lived experiences and how these beliefs influence the recommendation of CTE programs to students.

The results of the study could potentially provide data that can be used to improve enrollment strategies for CTE. It can potentially affect social change by compelling improvements to better inform school counselors on CTE opportunities and program requirements.

I will be recording this interview. This is a voluntary process, and you do not have to answer any question you do not want to. I will maintain your confidentiality by not using your name or any identifying information in the dissertation. If at any time, you would like to stop the interview, let me know. Any questions or concerns?

OK, thank you, let's begin:

Below is a list of questions for semi-structured interviews. During the interview, the researcher may ask additional questions for clarification purposes. Additional prompts may include: tell me more, talk about, what you did next, what you learned from that, how do you know that.

Remote interviews will gather data from each participant, using the following guideline for individual interview sessions. Follow-up questions and additional probes such as "Tell me more," "Describe what you mean," or "Give me an example of what you mean" will be utilized depending on conversations. The questions are intended to allow the participant to tell the story of their role in recommending CTE to students.

1. Tell me in your own words about your experiences in scheduling students into classes geared toward preparing them for post-secondary college attendance.

2. Tell me in your own words about your experiences in scheduling students into classes geared toward preparing them to enter the workforce.
3. How do you decide which track they should follow?
4. What lived experiences influence the beliefs you have regarding CTE?
5. What significant beliefs influence the pathway you recommend?
6. In what ways do you believe you endorse student choices related to CTE?
7. Tell me about any personal or professional changes in your beliefs experienced since the introduction of “College and Career” ready.
8. Describe for me how your beliefs may have changed since the introduction of Perkins V.
9. How would you characterize your role in scheduling guidance?
10. What else would you like to share about your learning experience or you?

Closure: Is there anything you feel we need to add to the discussion?

Demographic Details

Years in the profession:

Title of current role:

Previous roles:

Highest degree attained:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent

St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board Approval

Date: June 1, 2021

Approved: June 1, 2021 / Expired: June 1, 2022

#### Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

**Dissertation Title:** Reimagining Career and Technical Education: Examining the Factors that Influence Grade 7–12 School Counselors' Perceptions of CTE and Program Enrollment

**Researcher:** Colleen M. Jackson, St. John Fisher College Educational Leadership Doctoral Program [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@sjfc.edu](mailto:_____@sjfc.edu)

#### **INFORMED CONSENT**

This informed consent form explains participation in a research study. It is important that you read this information thoroughly before deciding if you wish to **voluntarily** participate.

- A. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how school counselors' beliefs were influenced by their lived experiences and how these beliefs are reflected in the scheduling of students into CTE programs. Interviews will be conducted to explore participants' beliefs.
- B. **Duration:** The duration of the interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes virtually through Zoom, a remote platform, because of COVID-19 restrictions. The interview will occur one time for you. If the interview recording is not clear or becomes damaged, it may be necessary to conduct a second interview to receive clarity on the questions asked during the first interview.
- C. **Procedure:** The procedures will include a total of 10 questions pertaining to your role as a school counselor in the scheduling of students into CTE programs vs. classes geared toward two- and four-year universities. The researcher will interview a total of five to ten individual counselors that have at least four years of school counseling experience. The interview will be recorded by an audio recorder to ensure complete recall of the interview for transcription.

purposes. The researcher will take field notes during the interview. The researcher will ask you questions about your lived experiences, activities and processes of your daily work perceived to encourage students to enroll in CTE programs. The interview questions are not intended to judge, influence or bring about coercion in the enrollment of students in CTE programs in your district. The purpose of this study is to gather data from your lived experience and beliefs as a school counselor in your role in the scheduling of students into CTE programs. Data will be collected from you to be used to contribute to the body of literature that promotes and aids uncovering factors that influence the perception of CTE and program enrollment. The transcribed interview (referred to as a transcription) will be emailed to you for your review to confirm that no collected data was misstated and to check for accuracy. You will have five days to notify the researcher of any concerns. The results of this research are intended to bring about findings that do or do not exist in school counselors' roles in the encouragement of enrollment in CTE programs.

- D. Possible Discomforts: No questions will be asked that could impair the relationship between you and your employer. The researcher will avoid asking you about any dissatisfactions with your school's administrators. The possible discomforts from your participation in this research study may include:
- i. Sensitivity to interview questions that are a reminder of bad memories related to the school's CTE vs. College going culture
  - ii. Loss of time from participating in the interview
  - iii. Recalling negative feelings of an event associated with the school's vs. College going culture
  - iv. Boredom, mental fatigue, frustration, or embarrassment in the school's CTE vs. College going culture
- E. Possible Benefits: The possible benefits of your participation in this research study are exploring additional methods or processes used by school counselors to encourage a CTE program enrollment culture. You will be contributing to increase understanding of the experiences, activities, events, and methods counselors use to promote and sustain a CTE program enrollment culture. There may be benefits gained by public high schools in Central New York region because of the research results or review. There are no known risks to participating in this study. There is a possibility that no direct benefit will be received by you as a participant from this study; however, we hope that your participation will add to the literature of how school counselors address enrolling students into CTE programs providing equitable outcomes for students.
- F. Compensation: There is no compensation provided for participation in this research study.

- G. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is completely **voluntary**. You may choose not to participate. Further, if you decide to participate you can change your mind and quit at any time.
- H. Permission to quote anonymously: Your identity will remain confidential. Your responses may be used to clarify elements of the theoretical framework within the final report. The researcher will not identify the source of the quote. Every measure will be taken to ensure that there are no personal identifiers in the final research report.

Confidentiality: Every attempt will be made to ensure your identity remains confidential. A copy of the records of this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's private residence. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant.

**CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:**

The researcher conducting this study: Colleen M. Jackson. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher(s) at [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@sjfc.edu](mailto:_____@sjfc.edu) or via cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_. Committee Chair and Faculty Supervisor, Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership, Dr. Loretta Quigley can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ and [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_@sjfc.edu](mailto:_____@sjfc.edu)

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), the SJFC IRB administrator, by phone during normal business hours at (585) 385-8012 or [irb@sjfc.edu](mailto:irb@sjfc.edu)

By signing this consent, I confirm that I have read and understand the Informed Consent Document. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered. By signing below, I confirm that I am at least 18-years of age or older. I freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio-recorded/transcribed \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No. If no, I understand that I will not be able to participate in the study.

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

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Please keep a copy of this informed consent for  
your records.***

**Appendix E**

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Colleges Attended, Major/Minor, Degrees Awarded:

\_\_\_\_\_

Work Experience:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as a school counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade level(s) of assigned students: \_\_\_\_\_

Familiarity with ASCA National Model their position on CTE:

\_\_\_ Unfamiliar \_\_\_ Somewhat \_\_\_ Very Familiar

Counselor Time Usage (total must equal 100%) Note: Based on ASCA

National Model, presented as a reference.

Guidance Curriculum \_\_\_\_\_%

Individual Student Planning \_\_\_\_\_%

Program Scheduling \_\_\_\_\_%

Other \_\_\_\_\_%

Briefly describe your experiences that influence scheduling of students into secondary programs: \_\_\_\_\_

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