EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN TITLE 1 PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT STATUS PUBLIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Julianne F. Williams
California State University, Long Beach
School of Social Work
May 2014

Thesis Advisor: Kristina Lopez, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Nancy Meyer-Adams, Ph.D. & Steve Wilson, Ph.D.
INTRODUCTION

• What is the problem?
  • Lowest rates of academic achievement are among the largest (51%) student group (Hispanic or Latino) in California (USDE, 2011a). Low educational attainment has been linked to poor health and limited employment opportunities (Belfield & Levin, 2007).
  • Hispanic or Latino students are the largest student group among the lowest performing schools (Title 1 Program Improvement [PI] schools) (USDE, 2011a)
  • The majority of students at Title 1 PI schools are socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and are in need more support to academically succeed (NCLB, 2002).
    • School social workers posses the skills to address barriers to learning
    • School social workers are linked to academic achievement through increased test scores and GPA (Castro-Olivo, Preciado, Sanford, & Perry, 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Kutash et al., 2011)
    • Very little understanding of the impact school social workers have on levels of academic achievement (Stone, Shields, Hilinski, & Sanford 2012)

• Research Questions:
  • 1. How does the presence of PSWs per school site relate to the end of year API score at each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school?
  • 2. How does the presence of PSWs per school site relate to whether or not the Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high schools met adequate graduation rate criteria?
  • 3. What is the relationship between the number of days per week the PSWs spent at each school site and the end of year API score at each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school?
  • 4. What is the relationship between the number of days per week the PSWs spent at each school site and whether or not each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school met adequate graduation rate criteria?
SOCIAL WORK RELEVANCE

• In 2012-2013, 3.7 million socioeconomically disadvantaged students in CA
  • 27.6% (n=1,023,371) lived in L.A. County (CDE, 2013I)
  • 12.6% (n=467,433) attended LAUSD

• Through the multitude of duties, school social workers are able to address barriers to learning and promote resiliency, which supports social and academic achievement (Castro et al., 2011)

• Lack of understanding of school social work duties → Undervalued, underutilized, credibility of profession is questioned (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013)

• More research studies exploring their impact on student health and achievement → Increase public awareness and utilization of school social workers (Stone et al., 2012)
CROSS-CULTURAL RELEVANCE

• Hispanic and Latino, Black and African American, and American Indian and Alaska Native students typically perform worse on academic measures and have below average graduation rates (NCES, 2013b)

• Largest and fastest growing minority group are Hispanic and Latino students, and represent 24% of 50 million U.S. students (USDE, 2011a)
  - High poverty rates ➞ 25.3% Hispanic/Latino vs. 14.3% U.S. ➞ Risk factors (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2012)
    - At-risk for depression and suicidal ideation (Allen-Meares, et al., 2013)

• 70% of California’s Hispanic or Latino students have below average graduation rates (USDE, 2011a)

• Among sample of LAUSD Title 1 PI status public senior high schools ➞ Majority (77%) of sample identified as Hispanic or Latino ➞ 20% drop out rate

• Limited proficiency in English/Language Arts (44.6%) and math (49.3%) (CDE, 2013f)
METHOD

- **Sampling Method**: 2012-2013 LAUSD Title 1 PI status public senior high schools (9th – 12th grade)
  - Sample: 68 schools met criteria
  - Available data was collected from 61 schools
  - School enrollment size ranged from 279 to 3,730 students

- Schools were most frequently located:
  - **San Fernando Valley** (n=20), **South Los Angeles** (n=13), **Harbor/Gateway Region** (n=10)
    - Central Los Angeles (n=5), Northeast Los Angeles (n=4), East Los Angeles (n=3), Hollywood (n=3), West Los Angeles (n=3)

- Majority of students are **socioeconomically disadvantaged Hispanic or Latino** students who are proficient in English
METHOD

- **Data Collection**: Quantitative analysis using secondary data that did not include any personally identifying information.

- **Independent variables**:  
  - The presence of PSWs at the school site.  
  - The number of days per week the PSW spent at each school site.

- **Dependent variables**:  
  - School end of year API scores.  
  - School graduation rates.

- **Control variable**: School enrollment.

- **Data Analysis**:  
  - Descriptive statistics.  
  - Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).  
  - Regression Analysis.  
  - Logistic Regressions.  

  Graduation rates were categorically analyzed as to whether or not the school site met established graduation rate criteria (90%).
RESULTS

1) How does the presence of PSWs per school site relate to the end of year API score at each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school?

Though the utilization of PSWs was not statistically significant, school enrollment was significant, $F(1, 58) = 10.79, p = .002$. The control variable, school enrollment, was found to drive the effect in the analysis.

- Findings indicated that larger school enrollment size predicted lower end of year API scores.

2) How does the presence of PSWs per school site relate to whether or not the Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high schools met adequate graduation rate criteria?

- The results of the logistic regression were not significant at the .05 level ($p = .40$).
3) What is the relationship between the number of days per week the PSWs spent at each school site and the end of year API score at each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school?

- The results of the linear regression was significant, $F(2, 58) = 7.48$, $p = .001$, and 17.8% of the variance was explained by the full model. The amount of days PSW spent at school site was statistically significant, recording a beta value of -.257, ($p < .05$).

- Results from the present study showed that for every unit increase in days the PSW spent at the school site resulted in a decrease in end of year API score.
  - Unlike API scores in research question 1, school enrollment has a different effect on graduation rates

4) What is the relationship between the number of days per week the PSWs spent at each school site and whether or not each Title 1 PI LAUSD public senior high school met adequate graduation rate criteria?

- Insignificant findings; the overall percentage of schools that met adequate graduation rate criteria was 62.5%.

- **Overall**, after controlling for enrollment size, the level of PSW utilization was not related to academic achievement. Results indicated that reduced PSW utilization predicted higher API scores. Lower enrollment size predicted greater API scores. Findings point to the value of multiple school characteristics in explaining and intervening in the risk of academic failure.
**DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK**

- **The presence of PSW and academic achievement:**
  - School characteristics are important, such as *school enrollment size*, because of the influence on public education funds and school budgetary spending decisions (whether or not to employ PSWs) (Daun-Barnett & St. John, 2012; LAUSD, 2013b).
  - Findings were in support of previous literature, that *smaller schools*, who were allocated more School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding, had significantly *better end of year API scores*.
    - Insignificant findings may pertain to the unavailable data pertaining to all LAUSD school social worker positions (both PSWs and PSAs)

- **Days PSW worked per week and academic achievement:**
  - Results suggested that schools with *little to no PSW utilization predicted higher end of year API score*. Similarly, previous studies that focused on the effectiveness of school social workers have found limited academic gains measured by educational outcomes (Stone et al., 2012).
    - Insignificant findings may pertain to the limitations of logistic regression analysis. There is more variability for the measure outcome of whether or not schools met adequate graduation rate criteria.

- **Implications for Social Work**
  - For continued improvement of school social work education, more research is needed to examine the impact PSWs have on school-wide academic achievement.
    - More research will promote school-based social work and evaluation, and enhance the credibility of the profession (Stone et al., 2012).
      - Collect appropriate data, perhaps more immediate measures of academic achievement (grades or attendance)
      - School characteristics should be carefully accounted for (enrollment size, mobility rates, funding)
REFERENCES


Agg=S&Topic=Graduates&TheYear=2011-12&cds=19647331995489&RC=School&Subgroup=Racial


