In an era of fiscal constraint and increased accountability, consistent perceptions of the expectations, means of funding, and reporting of outcomes between administrators and school social workers is vital. School social workers and school administrators in four school districts in Minnesota were surveyed regarding outcomes expected as a result of school social work services as well as the sources of funding for these services. Both administrators and school social workers reported that increasing school attendance and decreasing discipline problems were the most important outcomes. Data on rate of discipline problems and attendance were most commonly used by school social workers to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services. Almost one-third of the school social workers surveyed reported that they did not present these data to others.

**KEY WORDS:** outcomes; perceptions; school administrators; school social work services; school social workers

School social workers assist students by addressing problems that interfere with students' ability to function and make academic progress in school. The national trend toward increased accountability in education resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act, tight school budgets, and the demand for evidence-based interventions in schools make it critical for school social workers to be able to clearly identify and communicate how their outcomes affect student learning (Dibble, 1999; Garrett, 2005). It is especially important that school principals understand how school social workers contribute to academic achievement, because principals are generally responsible for deciding which, if any, mental health professionals will work in their schools (Franklin, 2001).

Ideally, school social workers and school administrators would have a common vision of what role school social workers should play as well as their associated contributions to student success. Several studies have identified school social work roles and responsibilities (Allen-Meares, 1994; Au, 2005; Dibble, 2007; Staudt, 1991). However, little research exists that measures whether school administrators and school social workers have the same beliefs on what constitutes a core set of fundamental school social work outcomes. This article fills a gap in the literature by reporting the results of a study that identified similarities and differences in perceptions between school social workers and school administrators in regard to the outcomes and benefits of school social work services.

**OVERVIEW**

As noted earlier, there is a void in the school social work literature of research examining the similarities and differences in school social workers' and school administrators' perceptions of what constitute fundamental school social work services and their associated outcomes. In making the case for school social work services, it is important to have an awareness of the potential disconnect in outcomes valued by these two groups.

Typically, school social work literature focuses on studies that assess the effectiveness of specific interventions and services (for example, interventions to improve student attendance) (NASW, 1997; Volkmann & Bye, 2006). However, the UCLA School Mental Health Project...
(1997) suggested that it may be better to evaluate programs rather than specific interventions. Bagley and Pritchard (1998) took that approach. Their study was unique because, rather than simply assessing one type of school social work intervention or service—such as home visits, cognitive skills training, or social skills training—they examined the overall cost-effectiveness of school social work services. However, their otherwise very comprehensive study neglected administrators’ perceptions. Staudt’s (1991) study showed that “principals were not satisfied with the quantity of available school social work time” and “student groups and parent counseling were wanted more frequently” (p. 497). However, neither identification nor assessment of outcomes was addressed.

With a record national deficit and increasingly tight state and local school district budgets, the potential lack of funding for school social work services was identified in a nationwide survey as “the most important danger” faced by the profession (Raines, 2006). A shift from state and local funding occurred in 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), which required all school districts in the nation to educate children with disabilities (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 2000). The legislation provided partial funding for special education services, including school social work (Clark & Theide, 2007), and increased the number of school social workers (Goren, 2002). In 2002, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, legislation created additional sources of funding (for example, grants from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center Program) (Quinn, 2007). For additional information on funding sources, see Poirier and Osher (2006).

School social workers can generate funds for their school districts by obtaining grants and community partners to contribute funds for specific programs. They can also bill private insurance companies, State Children’s Health Insurance Programs, and Medicaid for mental health services for eligible students (Garrett, 2006). Unfortunately, “data on financing for [mental health] are difficult to amass” (UCLA School Mental Health Project, as cited in Poirier & Osher, 2006, p. 1085). National data on income generated for school districts by school social workers is even more difficult to obtain and is typically not available.

Given the importance of school administrators’ perceptions of school social work services, there has been surprisingly little research on them. A thorough literature search on “school social work” and “principals” from 1970 to 2008 yielded 42 articles, only seven of which included a focus on principals’ perceptions of school social work services. The majority of these articles examined services desired by principals rather than outcomes expected as a result of the services.

In contrast to the lack of literature on the school social work outcomes expected by principals, the school social work literature has identified specific, measurable service outcomes. Most literature on the topic of presenting school social work outcome data to administrators stresses the importance of this activity and gives suggestions on how to accomplish the task (Franklin, 2001; Garrett, 2005; Johnson-Reid, 2007). Unfortunately, the research on reporting outcome data to administrators is scarce.

Finally, a number of studies have reported the benefits of school social work services. For example, administrators could free up their time to tend to other administrative responsibilities (Hofkins, 1994; Jenkins, 1994), and teachers could be assisted in developing awareness of students’ mental health conditions, identifying potential triggers for symptoms, and modifying teaching strategies accordingly (Cuglietto, 2007).

To fill the gap in the literature, we surveyed school social workers and administrators in four school districts to examine their perceptions of the benefits of school social work services, expected outcomes, and sources of incomes for these services. This study provides a foundation for future cost-benefit analyses of school social work services.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The four key research questions in this study were the following: (1) Do social workers and
administrators have similar expectations regarding the outcomes and benefits of school social work services? (2) What outcomes do social workers actually report? (3) Do social workers and administrators report use of the same methods for communicating outcomes? (4) Do social workers and administrators have a similar understanding of both funding sources and income generation for school social work services?

METHOD

Sample
Selection criteria for school districts to survey were based on the need to obtain geographic (within-state) diversity as well as socioeconomic diversity, with the sample including school social workers and administrators from four geographically and socioeconomically divergent school districts in the state of Minnesota. Minnesota was chosen for two main reasons. First, several of the coauthors currently teach in Minnesota and, thus, have connections with school social work educators in the state, who were able to help facilitate the survey research. Second, Minnesota, with its strong history of progressivism in terms of kindergarten through 12th-grade education, could be a point of reference for other states, which could potentially glean valuable lessons from Minnesota’s survey results.

Four urban districts and two rural districts were formally invited to participate in the school social worker—school administrator surveys. In the spring of 2005, permission was obtained from three of the four urban districts (two large and one mid-sized) and one of the two rural districts to administer the survey. The student demographics for the school districts included in the study are reported in Table 1. The student populations in the two largest urban districts were more ethnically diverse and had a higher percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch than those of the smaller districts.

The lead school social worker coordinates school social work services in each of the four school districts in the sample and served as a point person for his or her school district for this study by providing access to districtwide data, such as the number of school social workers in the district. All four lead school social workers completed the survey and provided accurate district-level information.

Completed surveys were also obtained from an additional 136 school social workers who were employed in one of the four school districts, representing 48 percent of those surveyed. Eighty-seven percent of these social workers had an MSW degree. Most of the social workers (90 percent) provided services to students in special education programs, while more than half (61 percent) provided services to the general population of students, and a smaller percentage (6 percent) provided services to students in alternative education programs. School social workers in the sample provided school social

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>District A: Rural</th>
<th>District B: Mid-Sized Urban</th>
<th>District C: Large Urban</th>
<th>District D: Large Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>1,912</td>
<td>10,210</td>
<td>40,034</td>
<td>36,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian (%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (%)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/reduced-price lunch (%)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate (%)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in special education (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

work services to students in their respective school districts, ranging from prekindergarten (pre-K) through grade 12. The school social workers reported that they provided services to the following grade levels: pre-K (25 percent), K through 6 (53 percent to 60 percent), 7 and 8 (36 percent), and 9 through 12 (30 percent). Thus, the sample of school social workers was more heavily skewed to school social workers assigned to schools with elementary-age children.

The sample of school administrators was drawn from three of the four participating school districts. This resulted in responses from 22 principals and two superintendents, representing 45 percent of the administrators surveyed. One of the large urban school districts permitted only half of its administrators to participate in the study. The other large urban school district permitted only the school social workers to participate in the study. Despite the loss of administrative participation in one district, the responses from school social workers in that district appeared to be similar to responses from the other districts. To determine this, social worker responses from the fourth district with no administrators were compared with those from the other districts, and no significant differences were found, except in one instance (noted later). Although the pool of administrators was more limited than that of school social workers, the administrative sample was still fairly representative because it maintained most of the geographical and socioeconomic diversity of the school districts surveyed. Administrators in the sample oversaw school social workers providing school social work services to students in their respective school districts, ranging from pre-K through grade 12. The administrators who completed the surveys came from schools that served various grade levels: pre-K (25 percent), K through 6 (54 percent to 67 percent), 7 and 8 (36 percent), and 9 through 12 (25 percent to 38 percent). The administrator sample was also more heavily skewed to those assigned to elementary schools.

To clarify the types of services being studied, school social workers were asked to estimate the percentage of time they spent providing several broad categories of services (up to 100 percent). Overall, the service most often reported was working directly with students. School social workers also spent much of their time in case management activities, such as participating in meetings to address individual students’ needs, making referrals, and completing paperwork. Consulting with school staff and developing and implementing schoolwide programs (such as prevention programs) engaged a lesser amount of social workers’ time. Case management and consultation are categories of service that have consistently been identified in previous studies as services commonly provided by school social workers (Dibble, 2007). “Other” activities included administrative duties, attending court hearings, travel time between schools, training staff, and fulfilling school obligations (for example, bus duty, supervising classrooms). On average, the school social workers estimated that they worked with 38 percent of the students in the schools they served. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

**Survey Design and Data Collection**

Two questionnaires were developed for this study: one for school social workers and one for school administrators. The questionnaires were designed to identify the services provided by school social workers, outcomes sought by school social workers, outcomes expected by school administrators for school social work services, and funding obtained as a result of school social work services provided.

A team of researchers, two of whom had many years’ previous experience working as school

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**Table 2: Estimated Percentages of Time Spent Providing Specific School Social Work Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>M (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct services</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with staff</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide interventions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages represent the authors' calculations on the basis of survey results.
social workers, developed the initial survey instrument, which was a self-administered questionnaire. Items were developed in consultation with school social workers and administrators. The survey questionnaire was pilot tested in another midwestern state (Indiana) and modified on the basis of the feedback received. A second version of the instrument was piloted in several other states electronically to reevaluate the instrument and make final changes. The revised questionnaire that was used in this study included a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The researchers worked closely with the lead school social worker in each school district to determine the best method of collecting the data. In two of the school districts, the survey questionnaire was distributed and collected at a school social worker meeting, with a follow-up mailing to those not in attendance. In one school district, the survey instrument was sent as an e-mail attachment to school social workers and followed up by a hard copy mailing. In the final district, the survey was mailed only to school social workers. School administrator data were collected in all participating school districts through a hard copy, mailed questionnaire. Although these different methods of distributing the survey instrument may have affected the overall reliability of the data collection procedures, adapting the data collection procedures to each school district was necessary to increase the response rate. After receiving permission from the University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Internal Review Board, all surveys were fielded between January and June 2006.

Analysis

Data collected from the administrator and school social worker surveys were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. When sample size warranted (that is, when both the administrator and school social worker sample sizes approached a large enough $n$), the difference between the two groups' responses was tested. For instance, a series of two independent-sample tests for differences in population proportions using the $Z$-test for large samples was conducted. In addition, content analysis of open-ended responses was completed. The resulting data were placed in tables for the purpose of reporting findings.

In comparing the two population proportions (administrators and school social workers), the null hypothesis that the difference between the population proportions of the two groups is 0 can be tested. The alternative hypothesis is that the difference between the population proportions of the two groups is either greater than or less than 0. The null and alternative hypotheses are as follows:

$$H_0: p_1 - p_2 = 0,$$
and

$$H_1: p_1 - p_2 \neq 0,$$

where $p_1$ is the population proportion of administrators who select a certain outcome, and $p_2$ is the population proportion of school social workers who also select that outcome (for example, school social work services lead to increased attendance). Thus, the $z$ values of the test statistic are reported to determine whether or not $H_0$ can be rejected (by comparing the test statistic to a $z$ value of $\pm 1.96$ [$1.65$] using a two-tailed test and a $0.05$ [$0.10$] significance level). Thus, if the absolute value of the test statistic $z$ value is greater than 1.96 ($1.65$), $H_0$ can be rejected, indicating that the two groups' responses are statistically significantly different.

RESULTS

Expected Outcomes of School Social Work Services

The percentages of administrators and school social workers who reported each type of expected outcome as a result of school social work service are presented in Table 3. It should be noted that the sample size of 24 school administrators remained smaller than the sample size of 40 observations for each sample that is recommended in testing for the difference between two population proportions (Newbold, 1988). The results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

The most frequently cited items by both groups were increased attendance and decreased
Table 3: Expected Outcomes for School Social Work Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Outcome</th>
<th>Administrators (n = 264) (%)</th>
<th>School Social Workers (n = 186) (%)</th>
<th>Absolute Value Test Statistic (z value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased attendance</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased discipline problems</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved school climate</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1.68*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved achievement</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.83*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in school violence</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased parent involvement</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased dropout rate</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in teen pregnancy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values represent the authors’ calculations on the basis of survey results.

*This category comprised the following: increased self-advocacy, increased self-image, decreased delinquency, increase in overall school success, improved staff communication, improved chemical health, improved mental health, improved service coordination, and improved family relationships.

*p < .10. *p < .05.

discipline problems. It is interesting to note the disparity in the percentages of administrators (50 percent) and school social workers (83 percent) choosing increased parental involvement. This is the only expected school social work service outcome that was statistically significantly different between the two groups at the .05 level, where the absolute value of the computed z value is 3.60, which is greater than 1.96. Outside of the differences in the two groups’ perceptions of the importance of parental involvement as an expected outcome for social work services, the two groups were fairly consistent in their assessment of what they viewed as significant expected outcomes. However, a higher percentage of school social workers perceived their services as contributing to each outcome, and in the cases of improved school climate and improved achievement, these differences were statistically significantly different at the .10 level.

The good news in terms of these results is that school social workers and administrators are typically in agreement about expected outcomes of school social work services. This is important because it indicates that both groups are aiming toward the same goals. As noted earlier, the only area where the groups greatly differed was in their expectations of increased parental involvement. Perhaps school social workers need to make a better case to administrators as to why they believe increased parental involvement is an important outcome of their services. If so, the same should also hold true for improved school climate and improved achievement, as suggested earlier.

Benefits of School Social Work Services

Respondents were asked the following question: “Overall how do you see school social work services benefiting your school district?” The qualitative responses were categorized according to main themes. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Both school administrators and school social workers viewed provision of frontline mental health services as the major benefit of employing school social workers. For example, one school administrator wrote that the school social worker “assists in student emotional health so that more effective learning can take place.” The next most frequently cited benefit mentioned by school social workers and administrators was the provision of training and consultation services. In written comments, school social workers seemed more likely to identify advocating for students and families and behavior evaluation and intervention as benefits of school social work services, whereas administrators appeared to place more emphasis on contributing to students’ academic success and the positive impact on school climate. One administrator summarized by responding that a major benefit of school social work services is that “problems [are] solved at building level rather than district level.” However, there
were no statistically significant differences between the two groups reporting of school social work benefits at the .05 level.

Nonetheless, there were two categories of benefits for which administrators’ and school social workers’ perceptions of what constituted a school social work service benefit were statistically significantly different at the .10 level (that is, the absolute value of their computed z values were close to 1.65). These categories were school social workers serving as an advocate for students and families (absolute value of the computed z value = 1.85) and school social work services leading to behavior evaluation and intervention (absolute value of the computed z value = 1.77). This is consistent with the observation in the previous paragraph that school social workers seemed more likely than administrators to identify advocating for students and families and behavior evaluation and intervention as benefits of school social work services. If these are truly important benefits of school social work services, perhaps the school social workers themselves need to do a better job of presenting these as benefits of their services to school administrators.

**Actual Outcomes of School Social Work Services**

This study sought to find out whether the expected outcomes of increased attendance and decreased discipline problems were related to the actual outcomes reported by school social workers as demonstration of their effectiveness.

A priori, it was expected that there would be a high correlation between expected outcomes and the actual outcomes reported to demonstrate effectiveness. Thus, in the survey, school social workers were asked what data (or actual outcomes) they report to administrators to demonstrate their effectiveness. The percentages of school social workers reporting each type of actual outcome, in order of frequency, are listed in Table 5.

Rate of discipline problems was cited most frequently by school social workers as an actual outcome reported. Unfortunately, attendance was inadvertently omitted from the list of options, although it was the most frequently cited item under “other.” Despite this oversight, the results still demonstrate that there is a strong
relationship between expected outcomes and the actual outcomes that are reported to demonstrate school social work effectiveness. For instance, the top two expected outcomes (by both school social workers and administrators) were increased attendance and decreased discipline problems, which is consistent with the top two actual outcomes reported by school social workers. These results illustrate consistency between what school social workers and administrators believe are key outcomes of school social work services and the actual outcomes that are reported by school social workers. However, a major concern emerging from these results is that almost one-third of the social workers reported that they do not report any type of data on actual outcomes to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Methods Used for Communicating Outcomes

In addition to asking school social workers what data (or actual outcomes) they report to administrators to demonstrate their effectiveness, we also asked how they report these data. For comparison purposes, administrators were also asked how school social workers report outcomes to demonstrate their effectiveness. The results are summarized in Table 6.

The most frequently cited methods by which school social workers disseminated outcomes were via written reports, in meetings with the principal, and at faculty meetings. Both administrators and school social workers viewed these methods as the top three channels of communication, with no statistically significant differences between groups in terms of the percentage who selected each of these methods. However, comparing only school social workers from the same three districts as the administrators (whereas the overall results compare school social workers from four districts and administrators from only three districts), there is a statistically significant difference between the groups’ responses for faculty meetings. For instance, in the sample of three districts, only 19 percent of school social workers reported school social work outcomes at faculty meetings (whereas in all four districts, this percentage was 29 percent of school social workers), compared with 42 percent of school administrators ($z = 2.30$). This was the only instance in which omitting the fourth district from the school social worker sample affected the results. This indicates that school administrators view faculty meetings as a more important venue for reporting school social work outcomes than do school social workers. School social workers should be cognizant of this difference when determining the best methods for reporting their outcomes.

A statistically significant difference exists between school social workers and administrators in their perceptions of informal conversation being used by school social workers to report school social work outcomes (with the absolute value of the computed $z$ value being 4.94, which is greater than 1.96). To illustrate,

| Table 6: Methods Used by School Social Workers to Communicate Outcomes, as Reported by Administrators and by School Social Workers |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Method          | Administrators  | School Social Workers | Absolute Value Test Statistic (z value) |
| Written report  | 67              | 51               | 1.45            |
| Meeting with principal | 62  | 55               | 0.64            |
| Faculty meeting | 42              | 29               | 1.27            |
| Other*          | 17              | 0                | 4.87*           |
| Informal conversation | 12  | 66               | 4.94*           |
| Do not know     | 4               | 0                | 2.34*           |
| Board presentation | 0            | 5                | 1.12            |
| Do not share information | 4   | 0                | 2.34*           |

Note: Values represent the authors’ calculations on the basis of survey results.

*This category comprised the following: weekly log, team meetings, and consultation.

*p < .05.
66 percent of school social workers viewed informal conversations as a way to convey school social work outcomes, whereas only 12 percent of administrators held this view. This may indicate that school social workers think they are conveying outcomes by informally talking to their school principal or other administrators but that the administrators themselves do not view this as a suitable way of conveying school social work outcomes. This appears to suggest that administrators put more weight on formal channels of communication in terms of feedback on school social work outcomes. Therefore, school social workers may want to focus more on such formal channels of communication when reporting their outcomes, because these channels appear to be the ones that administrators weigh more highly.

**Funding Sources and Income Generated**

Another set of survey questions was designed to identify funding sources for school social workers and income generated by school social workers, as reported by both lead school social workers and school administrators (mainly school principals). The lead school social workers (but not the school administrators) were asked to estimate the average cost (including salary and benefits) of employing a school social worker in their school district. They reported a wide range of estimated costs (pay), depending on the location of the school district: from $40,000 (rural) to $76,000 (urban). Given that this information was self-reported by the lead school social workers themselves and the sample size was only four, not much weight should be given to these results. However, given the large pay differential between rural and urban districts, rural districts may find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified school social workers.

Because of their familiarity with funding, the lead school social workers and administrators were asked to identify the sources of funding to employ school social workers and to estimate the percentages of funding from each source for the 2003–04 school year. The funding sources (and percentages of funding attributed to each source) for school social workers, as reported by administrators and lead school social workers, are presented in Table 7.

It is encouraging that both the lead school social workers and administrators agreed that special education and school district funding were the two largest sources of funds for school social work positions. However, there appears to be a disconnect between school social workers’ and administrators’ perceptions of the percentage of funding for school social workers that is derived from special education and school districts funds. For example, lead school social workers estimated that special education and school districts respectively funded 64 percent and 34 percent of their pay, and administrators estimated that special education and school districts respectively funded 75 percent and 18 percent of school social worker pay. The result is that lead school social workers perceived that more of the funding for school social workers comes from school districts and less of their funding comes from special education than did administrators. This may lead school social workers or administrators to become overreliant on a particular funding source that may not have enough resources. Given the small sample size of lead school social workers, a statistical analysis of differences in perception could not be conducted with confidence.
School administrators and lead school social workers were also asked to identify the types of income (money and in-kind funds) generated by school social workers for their school districts. They were given several sources to select from and were also given the option of adding other sources of income. The percentages of administrators and lead school social workers who reported each type of income generated by school social workers are presented in Table 8.

School administrators and lead school social workers differed substantially (except on insurance billing) in their perceptions of what types of income are generated by school social workers. For instance, all of the lead school social workers cited special education and grant writing as income generated by school social workers, while only 54 percent and 4 percent of administrators cited special education and grant writing, respectively, as key income generators. The same trend held true for Medicaid, with 50 percent of lead school social workers choosing Medicaid as a key income generator, while only 17 percent of administrators chose it. Finally, it is interesting to note that 25 percent of the school administrators (most of whom were school principals) did not know what types of income school social workers generated.

Taken together, the results in Table 8 seem to indicate that school administrators are not as knowledgeable as lead school social workers regarding what types of income school social workers generate. This may affect administrative decisions to hire additional school social workers in terms of administrators' being able to accurately assess the costs of such a hire. For instance, administrators may only consider the salary and benefits of school social workers in their decisions to hire without the full knowledge to take into account the potential income generated by school social workers. Given the small sample size of lead school social workers, a statistical analysis of differences in perception could not be conducted with confidence. However, as in the case of funding sources, future research in this area should be carried out (using larger sample sizes) to determine whether or not these potential differences in perception are statistically significant.

### Table 8: Types of Income Generated by School Social Workers, as Reported by Administrators and by Lead School Social Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Administrators (n = 24) (%)</th>
<th>Lead School Social Workers (n = 4) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance billing</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values represent the authors' calculations on the basis of survey results.

**DISCUSSION**

This article fills a gap in the literature by reporting on the results of a study that identified similarities and differences in perception between school social workers and school administrators in terms of what constitutes a core set of fundamental school social work outcomes. Although school social workers very likely use research-based programs and interventions, the literature review revealed a scarcity of research examining the outcomes of school social work services and the cost-effectiveness of service provision. This was found despite the social work profession's ethical responsibility to evaluate the effect of service provision and the legislative mandates from the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, which emphasizes research-based interventions. In addition, understanding of expected services outcomes and other benefits and understanding of funding sources are key factors in setting the stage for conducting a cost-effectiveness study of school social work.

Both school administrators and school social workers indicated that increasing school attendance and decreasing discipline problems were the most expected outcomes of school social work services. These are important outcomes, because school attendance has been linked to academic achievement (Moore, 2005), and decreasing discipline problems allows students to perform better academically (Portner, 1998).
Improved school climate, improved school achievement, decreased school violence, and increased parent involvement were also commonly expected outcomes of school social work services for both groups surveyed. However, there was a marked (and statistically significant) difference between school social workers and school administrators in the percentage of each group's reporting increased parent involvement as an expected outcome of school social work services. Several outcomes—such as reductions in self-reported theft, hard-drug use, and net exclusions from school—identified in the Bagley and Pritchard (1998) study were not mentioned by administrators or school social workers in this study. Bagley and Pritchard reported that the cost savings from the reduction in school exclusions was an outcome that generated considerable money for the schools in their study.

Administrators often did not know how school social work outcomes were being reported and, apparently, did not recall many of the informal conversations that school social workers reported as occurring. School social work outcomes must be formally shared with school administrators and school board members to keep these officials informed regarding school social work services, funding, income generated, and other outcomes related to students' academic achievement. Almost one-third of the school social workers in this study reported that they do not present data to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services. Of those who do present such data, the majority use written reports and meetings with principals. Administrators viewed school social workers as reporting outcomes at faculty meetings more than the school social workers did. Only 5 percent of the school social workers in this study reported presenting outcomes to their local school board, a fact that could be problematic depending on how much influence the board has in staffing decisions in this area.

School administrators and lead school social workers both noted that most of the funding for school social work positions comes from special education funds, with a smaller portion paid for through the school district's general funds. Of particular concern is the finding that administrators are often unaware that social workers are generating income in certain ways. All of the lead school social workers, but only a small percentage of the administrators, indicated that grants were a source of funding for school social work services. Regarding money generated by school social workers, both lead school social workers and administrators reported billing insurance, including Medicaid. However, a quarter of school administrators did not know what income school social workers generated. Other potential income resulting from school social work services, such as state reimbursement for improved school attendance, was not noted by lead school social workers or administrators.

Limitations
There were a number of challenges in conducting this study. For example, permission was required at several levels of administration, which required modification of the questionnaire. Also, a number of school districts that were contacted did not allow their entire staff to be surveyed or only allowed a small subset of their staff to be surveyed, which resulted in a lower response rate. In addition, different methods of distributing the survey questionnaire had to be used, with some sent via e-mail in some districts and others sent in hard copy form in other districts. Despite these limitations, the findings illustrate that although there are a number of similarities in perception between school social workers and school administrators regarding what constitutes a core set of fundamental school social work outcomes, there are also important differences.

CONCLUSION
For school social work to be sustained, the school organization must value and understand the service outcomes and benefits of school social work. Differences in expectations between administrators and school social workers may lead schools to underinvest in school social work services. The present findings highlight the continuing need for school social workers to evaluate and effectively report service outcomes. The findings also have implications regarding further work in the area of cost-effectiveness.
and cost–benefit analysis of school social work. The study suggests that any such efforts must include thorough study of income and funding sources, as administrators may be unaware of how social workers are generating income. Another challenge will be tying funding to school social work outcomes. This is a challenge that is well worth undertaking if school social work is to be sustained at a level where it can effectively address the needs of students and families.

REFERENCES


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