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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

School counseling prevention programming to address social determinants of mental health

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Abstract

Social determinants of mental health (SDOMH) are conditions in which students live that significantly contribute to their mental health challenges. School counselors can utilize the Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE) theoretical lens as a liberation approach to strengthening students' capacity to overcome persistent adversity while addressing root causes of systemic oppression through policy change and advocacy at the school, community, and national levels. School counselors can use increased personal awareness of the oppressive nature of SDOMH and the bidirectional approach offered by ASE to influence systems and students through preventative programming and proactive advocacy to affect institutional change. This study provides school counselors with an overview of ASE as a theoretical foundation for addressing SDOMH in schools.

KEYWORDS

Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE), mental health promotion, prevention, professional school counseling (PSC), social determinants of mental health (SDOMH)

INTRODUCTION

School is the primary catchment area for addressing social determinants of mental health (SDOMH), which are generally defined as conditions in which people are born, live, and age that are shaped by policy decisions and the unequal distribution of power, privilege, and resources. The SDOMH are recognized as a significant contributor to youth mental health challenges (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). In line with the developmental, wellness, and preventive approaches of the counseling profession (Myers, 1992), school counselors should address SDOMH through holistic and collaborative approaches that promote equity and support the prevention of mental health problems in schools (Johnson & Brookover, 2021; Lopez-Perry & Whitson, 2022; O'Reilly et al., 2018). Through their roles as leaders, advocates, consultants, and collaborators, school counselors should focus on bolstering individual and community capacity, strengths, and resources to prevent adverse mental health outcomes and enhance the quality of life for all students (Friedli et al., 2009; O'Mara & Lind, 2013). Despite the exceptional roles that school counselors can play in addressing the SDOMH with students, families, and in communities, there has been limited discussion on school counselors' roles in addressing the SDOMH in the counseling literature or curriculum (Johnson & Brookover, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023).

The Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE) theory provides a conceptual lens intended to inform how school counselors address SDOMH in school environments. ASE focuses on the interrelatedness between individual students and influences found in their school and societal environments (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). Focusing solely on students' individual psychological functioning can be dehumanizing and further exasperate harm (Viner et al., 2012), whereas an ASE-informed school counselor can utilize SDOMH to identify how certain ecological influences have affected students, pursue more facilitative conditions in these systems, and nurture specific developing capacities in students in response to these challenging influences (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, in press 2019). The intent

of ASE is liberatory in that school counselors work with students and all the people who influence students (peers, educators, parents, etc.) to minimize restrictive determinants (impediments) and maximize contributory determinants (assets) (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014). With this in mind, the authors of the current article will demonstrate ASE as a theoretical foundation for youth mental health promotion and prevention programming to address the SDOMH.

Schools addressing mental health promotion and prevention

Schools are ideal locations to address youth mental health promotion and prevention because the onset of mental health challenges often occurs during childhood and the majority of children's time during the school year is spent in schools (i.e., minimally 30 h a week). School counselors are an integral part of mental health promotion and prevention in schools in their roles as leaders, advocates, and mentors/support for students and teachers (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Lopez-Perry & Whitson, 2022). In addition, schools have multidisciplinary teams of providers that can support youth, families, and communities through a shared agenda (Weist et al., 2014). School-based approaches to addressing mental health typically include early intervention and preventative programming to address current concerns as well as mitigate future adverse outcomes because of unaddressed mental health challenges (Das et al., 2016; Lyon et al., 2016; O'Mara & Lind, 2013). In a systematic review of school-based mental health promotion programs, it was found that programs targeting illness prevention alone were not as effective as those promoting overall mental health wellness in students (O'Mara & Lind, 2013). Further, O'Mara and Lind (2013) found the most significant model for effective programming to be utilizing a school-wide approach involving multiple stakeholders with continuous evaluation methods. Similar results for prevention programs, with the addition of the importance of mental health training for school staff, multi-tier support systems, data-based decisions, universal screenings for early detection of mental health challenges, and communication/collaboration (Bruns et al., 2016). However, an important caveat to these programs is that the root cause of mental health disruptions must be acknowledged (i.e., social determinants of mental health) and should inform programming for significant and sustainable gains to persist.

Informing practice through the social determinants of mental health

A growing body of literature on SDOMH has increased our understanding of how the economic and social conditions shape an individual's mental health outcomes (Alegria et al., 2018). Broadly, the SDOMH include five primary place-based domains in which adversity can occur due to the lack of power, privilege, and resources (Allen et al., 2014; WHO, 2018): (a) economic stability, (b) healthcare access and quality, (c) education access and quality, (d) neighborhood and built environment, and (e) social and community context. Inequality within the SDOMH domains significantly increases the risk for poor mental health for youth and across the lifespan (Sederer, 2016); however, SDOMH should be understood as the result of systematic inequalities rather than individual students' vulnerabilities (Adler et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2018). School counselors should address social determinants either directly through policies focused on eliminating poverty, inequality and discrimination or indirectly through strategies designed to disrupt the pathways between social risks and poor health outcomes (Halfon et al., 2010). For example, although adverse childhood experiences have been linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes (Johnson et al., 2022), growing research has provided evidence that trauma-informed practice can disrupt the cycle of the detrimental influence of ACEs on students' outcomes (Koplan & Chard, 2014; Zyromski et al., 2018).

Additionally, SDOMH are social factors; thus, they are modifiable and can be attenuated by preventative programming (Carod-Artol, 2017). Specifically for children and adolescents, scholars have documented a shift toward more universal prevention, targeting all youth instead of only at-risk populations (Conley & Durlak, 2017). A universal prevention approach is important when addressing SDOMH because it reduces stigma for students who are directly impacted by an SDOMH need and it provides comprehensive data on the SDOMH needs of the entire student body (Johnson & Brookover, 2021). Having a complete appraisal of the entire school's SDOMH needs allows for school-wide programming as well as targeted support for specific students and families (Johnson et al., 2023). The practice of mental health promotion and prevention, informed by SDOMH, is a necessary inclusion for school counselor-led programming. This is a topic that has gained recent traction by researchers either facilitating targeted interventions or collecting additional data on the pervasiveness of these concerns within the school setting. Upon review, recent practices addressing SDOMH are often consistent with the epistemology of the ASE approach for practicing school counselors (Table 1). The table below identifies specific SDOMH that impact students and other crucial stakeholders—such as childhood experiences, educational quality, school climate, and other environmental factors—and each domain outlines relevant counseling interventions and their outcomes consistent with ASE.

Theoretical foundation for mental health promotion and prevention programs informed by SDOMH in schools

The ASE approach (Lemberger-Truelove, 2010; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014; Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019) is a humanistic and social justice theory designed specifically for school counseling practice. The ASE

TABLE 1 Summary of relevant social determinants of mental health (SDOMH) practices and Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE)-related literature.

SDOMH factors within the school environment	Empirically supported intervention	Recommended practice/actions implemented and anticipated outcomes
SDOMH-Awareness, school environment	Johnson and Brookover (2021)	Used semi-structured interviews to ascertain expectations and perceptions about SDOMH by school counselors; identified that school counselors are qualified to address SDOMH but need support; encouraged a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) program
SDOMH-Awareness	Johnson et al. (2023)	Fostered a conceptualization of the SDOMH-informed framework for counselors working with children and adolescents
School Composition, discrimination, exclusion, and isolation	Betters-Bubon et al. (2022)	Provides an anti-racist framework for school counselors utilizing an MTSS approach; provided experiential activities for school counselors to use to increase awareness, introspection, and reflection; detailed tangible steps of how to leverage reflection into action
Income and wealth inequality, individual and concentrated neighborhood poverty	Bryan et al. (2011)	Studied college application behaviors based on gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), student–counselor contact; SES had a negative effect for students applying to two or more schools; percentage of students on free and reduced lunch was a negative predictor for students applying to two or more schools; concluded that student–counselor contact by 10th grade is crucial for students in the lower two SES ranges
Environmental insecurity, food and housing	Havlik et al. (2017)	Conducted qualitative interviews with school counselors and summarized major themes related to student homelessness; identified that school counselors attend to students' basic needs before their emotional and educational needs; School counselors rely on Title I funding to support disadvantaged students; school counselors need additional support identifying at-risk students as well as their own personal feelings of helpless and/or frustration
Built environment	Griffin and Ferris (2010)	Described the importance of community asset mapping for school counselors as a response to adverse aspects of the surrounding environment; provided a four-step approach for designing a community asset map to unite major stakeholders and strengthen resources
Educational quality	Bryan et al. (2022)	Studied student–counselor factors related to college decisions in high school students; found that counselor caseload was negatively related to students' college decisions; increased student–counselor contact and access to information about college and financial aid positively impacted high school students' college decisions
Educational quality	Mariani et al. (2022)	Administered an adaptation to Student Success Skills (SSS), the SSS for social-emotional learning (SEL) Success Program (SSS-SEL) via hybrid format (i.e., in-person and online) during the COVID-19 pandemic; students demonstrated increases in reading standardized test scores, improved grades, and increases in SEL skill use
Educational access	Ohrt et al. (2009)	Studied the role of school counselors in supporting marginalized groups of students' access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses; all students benefited from advanced coursework and some attained college credit; adult stakeholders developed an increased awareness of access barriers for diverse student
Educational quality, academic achievement	Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2021)	Studied the effects of ASE-informed practices on standardized academic achievement and executive functioning; facilitated classroom-wide SEL and mindfulness-based intervention with teacher consultation practices; found positive effects on both academic achievement and executive functioning
Improving educational quality through intervention	Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2015)	Facilitated a two-level randomized design of the SSS program to observe its effects on executive functioning, feelings of connectedness, and academic achievement; found positive treatment effects in each domain
Adverse childhood experiences, practitioner knowledge	Wells (2022)	Surveyed school counselors to examine their perceptions and knowledge of trauma-informed practices from training received in their school counseling preparation program; found that many school counselors felt generally familiar with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) but lacked confidence in identifying and implementing interventions
Adverse childhood experiences, research	Zyromski et al. (2020)	Conducted a content analysis of trends related to ACEs within 22 journals between 1998 and 2018; found only 0.03% of articles used the term "adverse childhood experiences" and only 1% of articles mentioned terms related to the 10 original ACEs categories.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

SDOMH factors within the school environment	Empirically supported intervention	Recommended practice/actions implemented and anticipated outcomes
Positive childhood experiences, protective factors	Breedlove et al. (2021)	Reviewed the literature on positive childhood experiences (PCEs) and protective factors (PFs) as buffers to ACEs; introduced restorative practices as a necessary component of individual, interpersonal, and school-wide levels
Social and community context, school engagement	Moses and Villodas (2017)	Studied the association of positive peer relationships (i.e., companionship, satisfaction, intimacy, and conflict), ACES, and school engagement (i.e., grade completion, drop-out contemplation, perception of school importance, and prosocial activity); ACEs were associated with poorer outcomes across all domains; peer relationship, especially companionship and intimacy, served as a protective factor for students; peer conflict exacerbated the effects of ACEs
Improving educational quality through best practices	Zyromski et al. (2022)	Reviewed the literature on PCEs and PFs as buffers to ACEs; provided an MTSS approach informed by ASE for school counselors to utilize when creating programming
School climate, adults	Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2023)	Studied co-regulated change between teachers and students after exposure to ASE-based consultation practices; found changes in student perception to be significantly predicted by changes in teacher perception; provided preliminary support for the co-regulated process
Improving educational quality through interventions	Molina et al. (2022)	Integrated a mindfulness and SEL approach for consultations; implemented school counselor-led teacher consultation; found statistically significant changes in teachers' mindfulness (i.e., awareness) and practically significant decreases in stress and conflict
School connectedness, Students	Ceballos et al. (2021)	Conducted a longitudinal qualitative study utilizing ASE with culturally diverse students; themes included changes in students' emotional expression, increased self-control of cognitive and behavioral reactions, greater levels of connectedness and engagement in mindfulness dispositions.
Improve educational quality through intervention	Webb at al. (2019)	Trained teachers and school counselors in the SSS program; school counselors implemented SSS as a classroom-wide intervention and provided teacher coaching; Found effects for behavioral engagement, disruption, assertion, cooperation, and test anxiety.
Social justice and advocacy	Leibowitz-Nelson et al. (2020)	Operationalized seven institution-level interventions based on the *Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC)* for school counselors to implement into practice; Encouraged school counselors to (a) explore privilege and marginalization, (b) connect students to supportive individuals, (c) collaborate with social institutions, (d) engage in social advocacy, (e) remove systemic barriers, (f) address inequities, and (g) collect and share data on inequities

theory highlights the interrelatedness between individuals and their environments, as opposed to traditional counseling approaches that primarily focus on either the individual level or the system level (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). Instead, a primary focus of ASE is on the interconnectedness of social systems and further elucidates how an individual (e.g., student, teacher, school counselor, administrator, parent) interacts with their system (i.e., the school environment) and how that system, simultaneously, interacts with each stakeholder. This is because the reciprocal interaction between an individual and their social circumstance is the primary drive that leads to positive development both in the individuals and the systems (Lemberger-Truelove, 2010).

It is important to highlight the synchronicity of these interactions as one factor does not influence another factor in a successive or sequential chain of reactions, but rather, all factors are collectively and continuously interacting with one another in a bidirectional relationship. To further highlight the malleable trait of these social influences (Compton & Shim, 2015), authors of ASE use the term *governors*, which is defined as any social condition or quality experienced by an individual that positively or negatively affects functioning (Lemberger-Truelove, 2010; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchinson, 2014). While not previously stated as such, governors are by definition forms of SDOMH but with an intentionally neutral connotation; the alternative term is used in ASE to emphasize that the outcomes of these factors are not definitive in nature. Instead, the influence of specific governors varies depending on how they are perceived and thus responded to by each factor within the entire system (Lemberger-Truelove, 2010). Although each factor has the potential to influence the system, some factors may possess more power, and therefore privilege, within the environment itself. Lemberger-Truelove and Hutchinson (2014) stated:

> The school therapist will inherently be perceived as part of the community system of power and privilege, [and] it is this very power and privilege that allows the therapist to make a choice; perpetuate the unjust system of oppression or

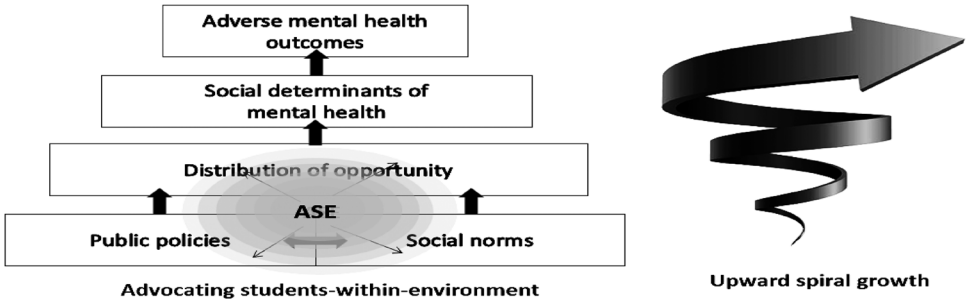

FIGURE 1 Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE) in the context of social determinants of mental health (SDOMH).

> work with the oppressed toward a more socially just school environment as a proxy agent (p. 34).

While the SDOMH framework explains how an unfair and unwell society influences students' mental health problems (Figure 1), ASE provides a theory-driven approach for how school counselors can facilitate students' mental health well-being and contribute to creating a fair and well society (Compton & Shim, 2015; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014; Zyromski et al., 2022).

School counselors can apply ASE tenets to disrupt the potentially detrimental path of SDOMH by addressing the root cause of societal dysfunction (i.e., social norms and public policies). School counselors applying ASE identify structural barriers that may limit students' capacities and opportunities (i.e., distribution of opportunity) and empower students, teachers, parents, and community leaders to increase their commitment to make sustainable changes for their communities (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). Although ASE-inspired school counselors aim for fundamental changes at a policy level, they are also actively engaged at the individual level providing opportunities for students' growth, with the resources that are available (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). School counselors' actions should first start with the most immediate barrier that limits students' growth and ultimately aim for transforming entire school environments to benefit all students. Thus, through the utilization of ASE practices, the SDOMH-informed school counselor will mitigate adverse mental health outcomes for students by (a) examining self and cultivating sapience; (b) implementing preventative programming with students, classrooms, school–family–community partnerships, and institutional approaches; and (c) maintaining active political engagement to improve societal conditions for all youth.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR LEVEL: EXAMINING SELF AND CULTIVATING SAPIENCE

To address SDOMH using ASE, school counselors should examine their own experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs about SDOMH as a first step (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Johnson & Brookover, 2021). School counselors should reflect on how their belief system would affect their work with students, educators, and stakeholders as they seek to address and develop prevention programming to disrupt the pathway between SDOMH and adverse mental health outcomes (Johnson et al., 2023). School counselors must have a thorough understanding of their own worldview and manage their intentions in order to prevent any further oppression, even unintentionally. A way for school counselors to avoid value impositions is by allowing students to self-identify contributory governors and detracting governors (i.e., SDOMH) in their collective environment (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014), rather than attempting to identify barriers alone. For students, identifying these various factors is also intended to increase overall self-awareness, which is integral to the development of sapience—an internal wisdom or discernment guided by critical thinking (Hiba, 2022; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchinson, 2014).

As leaders, school counselors must also cultivate and use their sapience to identify and differentiate *causes of cases* (the causal influences that lead to individual's mental health problems) from *causes of incidence* (the causal influences that act on the overall population) (Valles, 2021). For example, school counselors should investigate the cause of an incident by asking questions like "Why are Black students in our school identified as having more mental health problems than White students?" instead of asking "Why did this particular Black student have mental health problems?" Sapience provides school counselors with a wider perspective to zoom out and interrogate the environment as the cause of an adverse outcome instead of placing blame on an individual student. A key skill used to refine one's sapience is critical curiosity, the desire to learn and understand the nuances of social inequity and willingness to question unjust systems, which is different from the type of curiosity (i.e., spontaneous curiosity) that most individuals innately exhibit (Clark & Seider, 2017).

By using the ASE framework, counselors expand their work to be bidirectional, influencing students and adults to work collaboratively to create preventative programming to buffer social determinants of mental health. This may require a shift in mindset of their role as leaders and advocates to improve conditions and build resilience (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018). This "shifting of minds" does not mean attempting to reframe instances of systemic oppression or rationalize racist policies, nor does it imply engaging in

toxic positivity or setting unachievable goals. Instead, it is an intentional focus on setting attainable outcomes to improve the social and working conditions students and staff face in schools by creating an environment in which all school stakeholders participate in advocacy from a strengths-based lens rather than through a deficit approach.

To illustrate this, the following is an example of how school environments may be currently encouraging school counselors to participate in student intervention: Imagine there are four classmates who live in the same neighborhood, and both frequently witness violence. One child begins to exhibit externalizing behaviors (e.g., yelling, hitting, stubbornness) in the classroom and is referred by the teacher to the school counselor for individual intervention. The second child begins to exhibit internalizing behaviors (e.g., worrying, frequent stomach aches, and isolating) in the classroom but is never referred by the teacher to the school counselor. The third child begins to demonstrate the same changes in their classroom behavior as the second child but asks the teacher for a meeting with the school counselor, and the fourth child does not exhibit any changes in their behavior, nor do they exhibit any markers of distress. In this example, all four children experienced the same SDOMH (i.e., violence as an adverse feature of the built environment) and responded in unique ways, based upon personality, temperament, and other prior determinants. The teacher then experienced each child's response and based upon previous training, experience, or classroom needs, reacted accordingly. In turn, the first student may learn important skills with the school counselor that can attenuate the psychological effects of the adverse experience, shifting the student's overall perception of the situation, whereas the second student may be more vulnerable to future negative outcomes because of not receiving early intervention. The third student had already developed specific skills, such as help-seeking behaviors, which led to self-advocacy to receive early intervention, and the fourth student had already developed internal capacities, such as self-regulation, or experienced outside factors that buffered their experience (e.g., familial support, external mental health intervention).

This is an example of a reactive approach to SDOMH, which resulted in one student (i.e., the second student) being overlooked by the entire system. Through ASE-inspired preventative programming, however, the school counselor could have proactively implemented interventions with the entire class and teacher, as well as leveraged support and advocacy on the school-wide and community levels, to have changed student outcomes prior to them experiencing adversity. In the subsequent sections, we continue to demonstrate how school counselors can shift the system from this reactive approach to a preventative model.

PREVENTION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS SDOMH INFLUENCE

Prevention work creates effective mental health care pathways, by taking action before mental health problems worsen or by preventing their onset. The ASE theory provides a foundation for the school counselors' disposition (i.e., self-awareness, sapience, asset-based lens), and specific areas for engagement and prevention efforts (Figure 2).

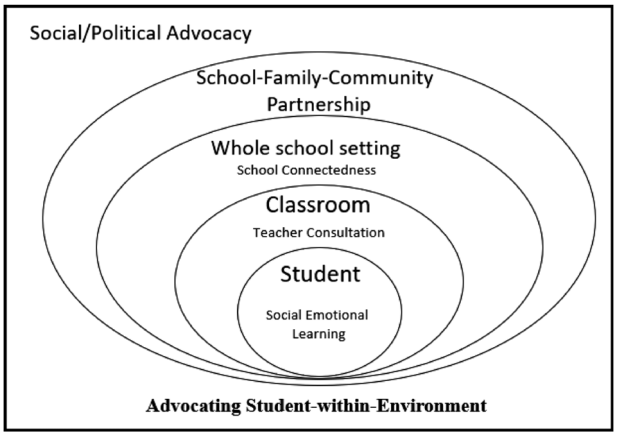

FIGURE 2 School counseling programs to address social determinants of mental health (SDOMH).

Student level: Social-emotional learning

School counselors are afforded the invaluable opportunity of creating lasting systemic change, but these interventions do not always provide an immediate resolution. To rectify the reality of this sometimes languid process, Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2018) argued that while school counselors are responsible for making every possible attempt at improving social conditions, "it is equally important that young children's internal capacities be strengthened either to accommodate improved social conditions or to maximize resilience in the face of persistent adversity" (p. 289).

School counselors are tasked with fostering student resilience as well as increasing other internal capacities (Lenz et al., 2021; Roche et al., 2020; Zyromski et al., 2022). A growing number of studies have evaluated the effectiveness of ASE-informed social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions aimed at improving the internal capacities of students to overcome adversities and improve their success in schools (Bowers et al., 2022; Ceballos et al., 2021; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2019). This is often achieved through reflexive interventions such as connectedness, self-regulation, and social engagement which all magnify individual agency (i.e., the student) in order to benefit the collective agency (i.e., the school system; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014); to do this work, those who apply ASE prioritize five practices: curiosity, connectedness, compassion, co-regulation, and ultimately contribution (5Cs; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). The purpose of fostering the 5Cs is to increase a student's experiential discernment and the inclination to suspend harmful identification or evaluation of these adverse experiences. Stated otherwise, school

counselors can empower students with these specific practices to increase the likelihood that they will not internalize "inadequate or deleterious social conditions; instead, using social-emotional and mindfulness strategies, they accept their cognitive and affective reactions and respond with clearer intentionality" (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018, p. 299). Through the first three practices—curiosity, connectedness, and compassion—the student can move toward cognitive and affective acceptance and thus develop the associated internal capacities, such as self-compassion, self-awareness, belonging, nonjudgement, and emotional regulation (Baer, 2010). In therapy, acceptance is considered a target mechanism of change and has been shown to moderate psychological well-being (Stockton et al., 2019); acceptance in this case does not represent a passive reaction to adverse situations, but rather is a proactive skill that school counselors can help foster as a protective factor in all students. On the student level, these skills may be facilitated by school counselors in classroom-wide interventions, small groups, and individual sessions. The method of instruction is dependent on several student factors, including developmental appropriateness and cultural considerations, as well as logistical factors, including school counselor time and resource availability.

Student agency and autonomy

For an SDOMH-informed school counselor, implementing preventative programming to develop their students' internal capacities is entirely within the clinical scope of practice (Johnson et al., 2023); from an ASE perspective, however, there is an added responsibility for school counselors to work with students in a way that dismantles oppressive forces rather than perpetuates them. When a school counselor advocates on a student's behalf without the student's assent or engagement, they may unintentionally undermine the agency of the student; Lemberger-Truelove and Hutchinson (2014) articulate this concern and remind school counselors that "in such cases, even if the advocacy behaviors translate into more equitable and just outcomes for the student, the individual human capacity of the student has not been activated" (p. 32).

School counselors can show students how to liberate themselves from deficit mindsets and then equip them with advocacy skills in order to change their own environments (e.g., student voices in school policy). However, school counselors must also play an active role in this process and refrain from putting all the onus on students and communities to make change (Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). The ASE approach is founded in socially just pedagogical principles (Freire, 2018) under the acknowledgement that placing additional responsibility on the student, who is the agent with the least amount of power, is an oppressive practice. This is reconciled by the belief that marginalized students are already disproportionately carrying the burden of responsibility within the school system, and while ASE-based practices may redefine some of those responsibilities, students will not be further disenfranchised within their existing learning environments (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchinson, 2014). Critical curiosity allows the student to discern what the threats to their personal agency are in the environment, provide assent for how they would like to respond, and sapience to identify what they can do independently versus what they can do with others. Further, community members' and students' voices are integral to successful interventions and are resources to support overall health (Castillo et al., 2019). To better understand a student within the environment, school counselors must engage with and empower stakeholders, such as teachers and other school-wide administrators, by enlisting support within other substantial environmental levels.

Teacher level: Consultation

To obtain the greatest outcome for students and increase the magnitude of change, school counselors prime both the student and the school climate (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). If school counselors work with key adults in the school building, for example, teachers, they can potentially help educators experience a shift in their perceptions of barriers in their schools in a manner that allows them to create a more supportive classroom environment that meets the mental health needs of students (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). The school counseling consultation model emphasizes the collaborative approach to teaming up to create change within a school. Teachers are asked to consider areas unique to their environment to explore self-advocacy and school environment advocacy, an area in which they might observe an injustice, be able to influence change to improve the school climate, and then be empowered to advocate on behalf of and with students (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). Through this engagement, the school counselor stimulates the teacher's self-actualizing tendencies, reflexively mirroring the process of activating a student's potential (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchinson, 2014).

In the same way that school counselors gently encourage students to utilize adaptive strategies, consultation meetings can be a safe place for teachers to learn and practice new skills to use intrapersonally (with self) and interpersonally (with students and colleagues). Teachers who participated in a school counselor-led 5-week SEL and mindfulness-based consultation model reported an increase in self-awareness, a decrease in perceived stress, and a decrease in perceived conflict with their students (Molina et al., 2022). Teachers also expressed a greater ability in identifying emotions within themselves and areas in their schools where they could create changes within their control (Molina et al., 2023). As a teacher increases self-awareness and is better able to identify their internal experiences, they are better able to manage stress and foster a more supportive learning environment for their students (Berkovich-Ohana et al., 2019). Researchers have also found that a teacher's perception of the student–teacher relationship strongly impacts the student's perception of the relationship (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). More specifically, a change in the teacher's perception significantly

predicted a change in the student's perception, demonstrating the powerful influence teachers have on their students.

Based on methods used by other ASE researchers (Molina et al., 2022; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023; Palacios & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019), school counselors are encouraged to consider the following components when facilitating teacher consultations: (a) wellness check-in with the teacher, (b) psychoeducation and skill enhancement (e.g., SEL skills, mindfulness and meditation strategies, social skills, and relationship-building strategies), and (c) action-planning (e.g., identifying areas of improvement inside and outside of the school environment, outlining specific advocacy commitments).

School-wide level: School connectedness

School connectedness refers to "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2009, p. 3). It is important to attend to the whole school ecology by fostering broader relationships beyond the traditional student–teacher relationship, as students often have meaningful experiences with their peers and other adults outside the classroom (e.g., lunch professionals, librarians, and mentors) (Kim et al., 2022). Together, a school counselor's critical curiosity paired with advocacy for creating a supportive and compassionate climate can lead to a shift in the way others perceive events; when another school personnel becomes open to shifting their perspective, they begin to act more intentionally and can influence other adults as well. Consequently, co-regulation begins to emerge and over time leads to the final stage of the 5Cs: contribution (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023).

By building authentic connections to students and adults within school environments, school counselors can help them cultivate interpersonal skills and promote sustained school-wide cultural change (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). Through critical curiosity, school counselors work to create a shift of openness to exploring beyond one event to interrogate the persons' internal experience, their beliefs about the environmental influences they face, and how these two interact and affect their ability to be successful in school and beyond (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). For example, in Johnson and Brookover's (2021) research study, a school counselor described a moment of frustration with a school policy set by an administrator who was worried about students taking advantage of the food pantry, which then prevented further movement in providing these much-needed resources. The school counselor worked with the administrator intentionally and collaboratively, using counseling skills to explore their point of view with radical curiosity, connecting in a meaningful manner, and working to create a solution together. An ASE-inspired response influenced by Rapaport's Rule (popularized by philosopher Daniel Dennet (2013)) would entail (a) rephrasing the administrators position to the degree they feel completely understood; (b) highlighting points of agreement; (c) listing anything you have learned from them; and (d) instead of providing a rebuttal, working to expand multiple alternatives and collaboratively coming up with solutions (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). When pivoting to the students whom the administrator believes might steal food, the administrator and school counselor may collaboratively identify that this potential student could be dysregulated and attempting to meet their own needs the best way they know how. A school counselor working from the ASE perspective will simultaneously work with adults to address systemic inequities and with students to help them explore their needs, increase self-regulation, and ultimately, engage in self-advocacy once they feel adequately supported and connected to their school environment.

Further, school counselors can address SDOMH by shifting the social norms (i.e., the cause of mental health problems), through their commitment to promote school connectedness. Feeling connected to school enables individuals to behave in ways that strengthen their social bonds and conform to their school norms (Chapman et al., 2013). In fact, substantial empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of school connectedness in preventing students' participation in risky behaviors (e.g., violence, suicidal thoughts, violence, and sexual health) and promoting their school success and psychological well-being (In et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2022). Thus, to address SDOMH, school counselors could promote school-wide messages for acceptance and inclusion (Shim et al., 2018). Enhanced level of connectedness to the school helps students and adults conform to the norms (e.g., acceptance and inclusion) that might require them to change their previous social norms (e.g., social exclusion and discrimination). Further, shifts in their social norms could empower individuals to advocate for school policy changes when they observe any inequities or discriminations in their school settings (Shim et al., 2018). This process could change the way opportunities are distributed, creating a fair and well school community over time (Compton & Shim, 2015).

One of the approaches that a school counselor could consider is providing team-oriented activities to promote school connectedness. Team-oriented activities could facilitate active social interactions by providing maximum opportunities for student involvement in multiple levels and types of activities that are beyond just academics (Carney et al., 2018). To promote connectedness, it is important to facilitate positive interactions on a fairly regular basis, over an extended period of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Kim et al., 2022). Working toward shared team goals allows students and adults to frequently interact with each other, which helps them feel part of a school community (Carney & Hazler, 2016). Thus, a team-oriented approach assists students and adults in the school feel connected and compassionate to each other, which allows them to work together to confront and transform any restrictive systems to benefit all students within school environments (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019).

School–family–community partnerships

An important concept in ASE is seeing all individuals in their school community as contributory governors or assets to their own success as well as the success of others (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). To support this, a growing number of studies have documented the importance of building partnerships with school personnel, family members, health professionals, and communities to promote desirable and sustainable change for students (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Henry et al., 2017; Robins et al., 2022). Although school counselors cannot control social determinants such as poverty or housing insecurity, they can initiate collaborative partnerships to maximize assets that promote students' resilience (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Bryan and Henry (2012) elaborate a school–family–community partnership process model for school counseling, which includes (a) preparing to partner, (b) assessing needs and strengths, (c) coming together, (d) creating shared vision and plan, (e) taking action, (f) evaluating and celebrating progress, and (g) maintaining momentum. For those applying the ASE approach, initiating partnerships with stakeholders starts with school counselors' critical curiosity that considers larger structural factors that impact student outcomes. School counselors are encouraged to identify the problem and reframe it in a way that holds all stakeholders accountable to the outcomes (Griffin et al., 2021; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2022). For example, school counselors should refuse to accept the achievement gap among minoritized students and be curious about the factors that lead to the gap. Instead, school counselors should be able to understand unequal educational opportunities and reframe the achievement gap as an opportunity gap (Flores, 2007). Through the assets-based lens, school counselors identify resources that can help students thrive regardless of the adversity they face.

Building partnerships should be vision driven (Bryan & Henry, 2012); the process of creating shared vision and plan can help the school counselor and partners feel connected and cultivate sapience as co-regulated and reflexive processes. One of the examples of co-regulation in the partnership process model might be cultural reciprocity, which is a process of examining "cultural assumptions underlying their practice with students and families, seek[ing] understanding of how families' values and assumptions differ from their own, respect[ing] families' cultural differences, and through counselor-family collaboration adapt[ing] and align[ing] their professional actions with those families" (Bryan & Henry, 2012, p. 411). This co-regulation process strengthens partnerships and creates culturally responsive environments that could amplify the inner capacities of individual students (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021). This progressive regulatory process is also observed in theories of motivation; Ito and Umemoto (2022) studied the intrinsic principles undergirding collaborative engagement and the relationship between three modes of regulation—self-regulation, co-regulation, and socially shared regulation—with the last mode being the most impactful and necessary for advocacy and societal change.

Actions of advocacy informed by SDOMH

Through these preventative programming strategies and facilitation of the 5Cs, all major change agents of the school environment can interact with each other and with their system in conscientious and equitable ways with a continued commitment toward advocacy outside of the community. School counselors must also engage in advocacy on institutional levels to dismantle oppressive systems that exacerbate SDOMH within other school systems and communities (McMahon et al., 2009). This implies a commitment to long-term change, and not just reactionary interventions, which can be done through incremental attainable goals that build upon one another (e.g., a free snack cabinet can lead to a food pantry at school). According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, one aspect of a school counselor's duty to the wellness of children is raising awareness of issues and engaging the public (Haskins & Singh, 2017; Ratts et al., 2007). Applying the ASE theory to the school counselor position requires nuanced leadership skills to advocate for change within communities and larger systems, therefore broadening the concept of the environment beyond the traditional school building (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019) to move beyond responding and beginning to prevent SDOMH. Changing the oppressive systems within society and various communities that cause SDOMH is part of the understanding of the relationship between students and the environment—requiring school counselors to advocate within communities and in wider political terrains. This can begin with acts of leadership in a school building and build upon engagement with professional advocacy groups.

Within communities

To begin to advocate and engage in school-building level advocacy, school counselors should be a part of school building level leadership. This is a formal act of leadership and can enhance the process of making intervention programming aimed at buffering and addressing SDOMH (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020; Roche et al., 2020). This can allow for school counselors to collaborate with administrators and school staff to expand preventative action plans within their school building. This can include working with district-level initiatives or policies, not limited to policy change that is anti-racist and social justice focused; an example can be seen in the policy statements from school districts regarding deportations by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2016. Additional school, district, and community policy and prevention can be affected by analyzing needs assessments for trends of SDOMH and possible buffering interventions to

assist students and their families. For example, collaboration with a community-based organization that provides free healthcare could be advantageous in increasing healthcare access to a specific school community (Johnson & Brookover, 2021). Additionally, school counselors are able to engage in advocacy at a local political level, which can include inviting key community stakeholders and policymakers to local community summits to discuss collective responses (Grimes et al., 2013) and attending community-wide meetings, like those hosted by the school board and county/district commissioners.

Engagement with policymakers

To engage in advocacy action, a school counselor should consider partnering with local, state, and or national professional groups aligned with the mission to eradicate systemic injustice in education. For example, a school counselor might consider partnering with ASCA to advocate for increased access to mental and social health services and resources in schools. The school counselor-professional organization collaboration can be beneficial in increasing direct services that students may need and supporting larger initiatives to remove barriers for all students (Johnson et al., 2023). Keeping the student and their needs at the center of the conversation is key to advocating efficiently and effectively at a systemic level (Lopez-Perry & Whitson, 2022).

Presently, school counselors are urged to engage in policy-level advocacy as current and future legislation continues to target socially aware educational practices (e.g., critical race theory, SEL, and feminist approaches). From September 2020 to March 2023, 44 states have initiated legal action that would drastically limit the cultural discussions school personnel could have with children, alter the diversity and inclusion training that employers would be allowed to mandate, and restrict specific aspects of existing curricula (Brunold-Conesa, 2022; Pollock et al., 2022; Schwartz, 2023). Of these 44 states, 18 have officially passed these restrictive policies, and many continue to try (Schwartz, 2023). School districts that have opposed these policies are at risk of legal retaliation, including loss of funding or accreditation, which unfortunately, has already happened for some (Brunold-Conesa, 2022; Schwartz, 2023). For school counselors living and practicing in states or areas impacted by this new wave of legislation, advocacy may need to look different. School counselors may also be at risk of retaliation and are encouraged to balance their advocacy efforts with their own personal circumstances (e.g., power, privilege, access to resources, and level of community support). For school counselors with higher levels of job insecurity or risk of harm (e.g., psychological, physical, and emotional), personal advocacy at the individual level may be too threatening; these practitioners are encouraged to lean on community and institutional advocacy by reaching out to ASCA, their local and regional branches of ACA, and other divisions or professional entities (e.g., Counselors for Social Justice and Chi Sigma Iota). An official position statement by ASCA (2021) states that these laws are in direct opposition of our ethical code, making advocacy in this case non-negotiable. These restrictions are a direct threat to youth populations and undermine the foundational tenets of an SDOMH and ASE perspective. It is unclear to what extent these policies will continue to impact the counseling profession specifically as these laws also begin to extend into higher education practices, warranting additional advocacy from educational leaders and accreditation boards (e.g., The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, National Certified School Counselor).

A possible entry point for school counselors to become more politically active is through voting, tracking local bills that influence student life, and increasing their personal knowledge regarding issues that may cause SDOMH. The larger political terrain may seem difficult to maneuver; however, with practice and professional organizations like National Board of Certified Counselors, ACA, and ASCA, this advocacy may be more comfortable as school counselors are advocating at a system level (Lopez-Perry & Whitson, 2022; Ratts et al., 2007). This could also include advocating at a legislative level for changes to address other issues affecting students and their communities, including the school-to-prison pipeline that impacts all areas of SDOMH (Welfare et al., 2021), equitable housing opportunities, and access to affordable nutritional resources.

DISCUSSION

School counselors have an opportunity to support students unjustly impacted by SDOMH. It is not enough for school counselors to respond to and react to the crisis endured by our students. To do so accepts the lack of power, privilege, and resources (Allen et al., 2014; WHO, 2018) evidenced through systematic inequalities across economic, healthcare, education, community environment and social resources faced by our students as an acceptable norm (Sederer, 2016), thus perpetuating institutional racism. Instead, preventative approaches to buffer the impact of SDOMH on the long-term mental and physical health of students can be an integrated, targeted approach school counselors undertake using the ASE lens. School counselors can strengthen the internal capacity of students to maximize resilience in the face of persistent adversity (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018) while at the same time taking steps to address the systems that create the oppressive and inequitable reality for marginalized students (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022; Lemberger, 2010).

To address SDOMH, school counselors need to actively strive to address the root cause of the systemic oppression through striving to make changes at the policy level, at the community level, and in individuals, whether inside the school (e.g. administrators, teachers, and students) or outside the school (family members and community members) (Bowers & Lemberger, 2022). The asset lens applied by practitioners of the ASE approach emphasizes the systems

of educational disenfranchisement and the historical roots of these oppressive systems as the core of the problem, not the students (Dollarhide &Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). As a result, a bidirectional approach to influencing systems and students to creative preventative programming may result in the buffering of some of the deleterious effects of SDOMH.

School counselors can take active steps to engage in impactful behavior that illuminates their own awareness of their role as leaders in the building and advocates in changing systems to increase opportunities for students while building resilience in individuals (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018). For example, school counselors have expressed encountering barriers to addressing SDOMH, such as negative biases leading to lack of support from other educators in the building, but noted the importance of advocacy in their work that led to equity-oriented education (Johnson & Brookover, 2021). Once school counselors understand how their belief systems affect their work with students, educational stakeholders, and the greater system, then they can identify the "cause of cases" and address the root causes of student issues instead of blaming the student (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Johnson & Brookover, 2021; Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014; Valles, 2021).

Implications for professional school counselors

A school counselor applying the ASE approach in practice will use an asset lens to imbue students with the social emotional strengths needed to enhance their awareness of and resilience needed to overcome the oppressive system in which they live. The school counselor will provide consultation to teachers and administrators in an effort to work together to identify root causes of student issues at school and to identify alternatives to existing school policies and procedures that perpetuate inequities (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022). Through these, and other approaches, school counselors can enhance feelings of school connectedness in students and staff, often resulting from enhanced school–family–community partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Finally, it is the responsibility of the school counselor to actively advocate for changes to the oppressive systems within the larger society and ecology that create SDOMH (Haskins & Singh, 2017; Ratts et al., 2007). Keeping students at the center of the daily purpose of school counselors requires us all to advocate efficiently and effectively to change our own practices of unintentionally perpetuating oppression (Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019; Lopez-Perry & Whitson, 2022).

Addressing SDOMH requires school counselors to be self-aware and cultivate sapience in order to support empowerment of people to build sustainable changes in the educational and political ecology that support all students' success (Lemberger-Truelove & Hutchison, 2014). Impacting SDOMH requires a systemic approach to impacting structural changes (Viner et al., 2012). Future research could examine the impact of the application of ASE to create structural changes that increase access to secondary education and other strategies for improving students' entry into the workforce in a way that supports their economic and holistic success (Viner et al., 2012).

School counselors need to increase their awareness of SDOMH and strategies available to them to combat the adverse impacts on students (Johnson & Brookover, 2021). It is vital that school counselor preparation programs name SDOMH and equip school counselors-in-training with a lens, such as ASE, to apply to address the negative impacts on multiple levels (Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2022; Gantt et al., 2021; Johnson & Brookover, 2021; Viner et al., 2012). School counselor training programs can equip school counselors-in-training with the attitudes and skills to apply ASE as an anti-racist approach to advocating within the current political environment for sustainable systemic change that benefits all students while equipping individual students with the assets required to both overcome and change oppressive systems.

CONCLUSION

Some argue that the ASE approach is disruptive but necessary for lasting, systemic change (Roche et al., 2020). SDOMH are significant contributors to youth mental health and heavily influence the student experience. To combat potential negative effects, the school system provides the ideal setting for preventative programming where counselors can target individual and collective change simultaneously.

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