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December 2022

## **A Review of The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection**

Rawen Boulden

*West Virginia University*, [rawn.boulden@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:rawn.boulden@mail.wvu.edu)

Brett Zyromski

*Ohio State University*, [zyromski.1@osu.edu](mailto:zyromski.1@osu.edu)

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### **Recommended Citation**


Boulden, R., & Zyromski, B. (2022). A Review of The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, 4(2), 49-53. <https://doi.org/10.25774/zxjc-hb35>

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# A Review of The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection

Rawn Boulden 

West Virginia University

Brett Zyromski 

The Ohio State University

## Abstract

This review critiques Sandra Logan-McKibben and Jenna Marie Alvarez's book: *The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection*, New York, NY: Springer, 168 pages, \$45 (Softcover), ISBN: 9780826185532. We highlight the book's potential for graduate student, counselor educator, and school counselor utility, and discuss potential limitations. Overall, this book helps fill a longstanding gap in the school counseling literature, providing readers clear and tangible tools and resources to augment one's assessment and data collection efforts.

**Keywords:** data, school counseling, assessment, education

Data-informed decision making is a hallmark of the contemporary school counseling program. As conceptualized by Zyromski and colleagues (2021), "data-based decision making in a school counseling context [can be] defined as a multistep process of (a) examining data to discover the unique needs of students; (b) matching interventions to the identified student needs; (c) evaluating the impact of those interventions on immediate, proximal, and distal outcomes; and (d) applying continuous improvement cycles in support of increases in student wellness and life success (p. 2)." Numerous professional associations corroborate the importance of data-based decision making. For example, the American School Counselor Association's ([ASCA], 2019a) national model incorporates this cornerstone, along with the profession's ethical standards (ASCA, 2016) and school counselor competencies (ASCA, 2019b). Moreover, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' ([CACREP], 2015) 2016 standards (i.e., Standards 5.G.3.n-o) also prioritize pre-service training centered on school counselors' use of data in school settings. Despite these proclamations, research suggests that school counselors may not feel confident in their abilities to analyze and interpret data (Astramovich, 2016). Moreover, additional research (Young & Kaffenberger, 2015) questions the adequacy of school counselors' training related to data-informed decision making. Lastly, secondary school counselors, specifically, have expressed concern regarding collecting data to develop cohesive student needs assessments (College Board, 2012). The paucity of valid and reliable instruments that align with appropriate school counseling roles and duties often compounds school counselors' challenges (Scarborough, 2005). In sum, there is a clear disconnect between theory (i.e., ASCA and CACREP

standards) and practice. This dichotomy can impede school counselors' efforts to implement this critical element of contemporary school counseling practice, if unaddressed. Several testing and assessment-related textbooks exist that are geared toward the counseling profession (e.g., Drummond et al., 2016; Hays, 2017; Neukrug & Fawcett, 2020). While these textbooks are a pivotal component in ensuring that counselors-in-training obtain up-to-date requisite knowledge, the current body of textbooks is largely skewed toward assessment practices common employed in clinical settings and often do not extensively discuss assessment within the context of contemporary school counseling practice. Hence, school counselors, school counselor educators, and pre-service school counselors may question the texts' transferability to the school counseling profession. There is a clear need in the educational literature for additional texts geared toward the multifaceted forms in which school counselors engage in data collection and assessment-related efforts.

Mercifully, the book *The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* (Logan-McKibben & Alvarez, 2022) addresses this critical gap, responding to school counselors' request for more tangible guidance, resources, and best practices to support their data-informed efforts. Using a conversational tone, the authors offer an historical backdrop regarding data-informed school counseling, naturally progressing into discussing strategies, best practices, and resources school counselors can immediately use. This review will begin with brief overviews of the book's contents, followed by a critical assessment of the content.

## Book Structure

The *Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* contains six chapters, followed by three appendices. The first chapter logically provides foundational underpinnings regarding the school counseling profession, data usage, and comprehensive school counseling programs, providing a sound framework for subsequent application-oriented chapters. Each chapter concludes with additional readings, key points from the chapter, questions for reflection, and the chapter's reference list.

Chapter one of the book offers an overview of the state of the school counseling profession, along with a description of the importance of assessment in the school counseling profession. The authors provide a brief literature review, making the case for the book's relevance pertaining to school counselors and counselor education programs. The chapter highlights

contemporary school counseling profession topics, including virtual school counseling, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and evidence-based practices. The chapter concludes with a discussion centered on obstacles practicing school counselors commonly face that impede access to contemporary valid and reliable instruments, followed by an explanation of how the text's contents (e.g., low-cost or free psychometrically-sound instruments) can help school counselors circumvent these structural barriers. Lastly, the authors succinctly summarize the book's potential usefulness by a broad range of readers, including school counselors, school counselor educators, and pre-service school counselors. This was a shrewd decision as readers may initially question the book's transferability into their respective professions.

Chapter two begins with an overview of formal assessments and informal assessments, which may be a refresher to most readers. Aligned with the book's relaxed style, the authors personalize this content by incorporating their experiences as practicing school counselors related to using these assessments. Moreover, the authors provide examples of formal and informal assessments, along with strengths and limitations. Several assessments featured in this section, such as the *My Classroom Inventory – Short Form Revised* (Mariani et al., 2015) and the *Teacher My Class Inventory* (Villares et al., 2016), were developed within the past 10 years, and published in counseling related journals. The chapter then synthesizes formal and informal assessments within the context of the ASCA (2019a) national model and the three ASCA domains (i.e., academic development, career development, social-emotional development). While discussing each domain, the authors offer examples of related assessments school counselors could use. Lastly, the chapter offers best practices school counselors are encouraged to employ when engaging in data collection efforts, followed by a brief discussion of data collection legal and ethical considerations. Readers may find the figures interspersed throughout the chapter helpful as they concisely summarize key points. The occasional inclusion of vignettes in this chapter may also help readers better contextualize concepts and practices.

Chapter three discusses assessment within the context of a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP). The chapter begins with a brief review of approaches to CSCP (e.g., state models), followed by a cursory exploration of the ASCA National Model's history. The authors appropriately cite seminal authors and texts that made substantial contributions in the development and progression of CSCPs. The chapter's centerpiece consists of a detailed exploration of valid and reliable assessments, sorted by each ASCA National Model quadrant (i.e., define, manage, deliver, and assess). Accordingly, the authors describe each quadrant, and then offer examples of valid, reliable, and low/no-cost instruments they can use to support their CSCP efforts. While some readers may find some of the language to be technical (e.g., internal consistency reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis), the instrument descriptions offered provide school counselors much-needed context that will greatly inform which instruments they may use to develop their CSCP. Moreover, readers will appreciate the authors' clear guidance regarding

how they may request access to various instruments highlighted throughout the chapter.

Chapter four provides a deeper description and analysis of valid and reliable instruments school counselors can use to support their efforts to provide data-driven services, subdivided by the three ASCA domains. Most instrument descriptions provide readers a brief overview of (a) the instrument's purpose and intended audience (e.g., K-12, elementary students); (b) the instrument's layout; and (c) practical implications for school counselors. Readers will appreciate the authors' inclusion of graphics (e.g., images of discussed instruments) and tables throughout the chapter. Not only does this enhance readability, but it also helps school counselors decide if various instruments would be appropriate for their specific school populations. All noted instruments in this chapter are appropriately cited, thereby mitigating instrument accessibility hurdles. As is common throughout the text, readers will also appreciate the incorporation of vignettes illustrating how school counselors could use several instruments to support data-driven decision making.

Chapter five covers program evaluation considerations, along with informal assessments school counselors may use to collect meaningful data. The authors provide tangible resources for school counselors who may be searching for a needs assessment to administer to students, staff, and even parents, aligning with the book's practical, practitioner-friendly style. Additionally, the authors discuss participation, *Mindsets & Behaviors*, and outcome data, three data types that are consistent with the ASCA National Model. The authors define these terms and provide clear and convincing arguments regarding why school counselors should devote time collecting them. Like previous chapters, the authors provide helpful tables to succinctly synthesize key points. Additionally, practical scenarios are interspersed to help readers better conceptualize participation, *Mindsets & Behaviors*, and outcome data. The end of the chapter offers advice regarding developing effective pre-posttests, often a source of frustration for school counselors and even school counseling graduate students. The authors' advice is clear and practitioner-friendly, and readers will appreciate the authors' decision to offer useful examples for elementary, middle, and high school settings.

Chapter six highlights ways school counselors can use technology to support their CSCP. Given the increased use of technology in school counseling and K-12 education, many school counselors will find these tips and tools useful. The authors overview several tools school counselors can quickly use to support data collection, many of which are free, and provide an appropriate level of depth connecting these technological tools with CSCP implementation and data collection. Throughout the chapter, the authors provide figures and exhibits, offering clear illustrations of the strategies, tools, and techniques covered. Additionally, the chapter offers concrete frameworks school counselors can consider utilizing to contextualize their impact on students and broader school-wide priorities. To conclude the chapter, the authors discuss methods school counselors can use to promote their efforts and contributions to various stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and school district-level leadership. Readers

will appreciate the bevy of exemplars and exhibits incorporated throughout the chapter, perhaps offering practical ideas they could use or modify to showcase their CSCP.

### Critical Analysis

*The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* is another in a strong list of data-driven school counseling books, (see Dimmitt et al., 2007; Hatch & Hartline, 2021; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Young & Kaffenberger, 2022; Zyromski & Mariani, 2016) to provide a framework and resources for school counselors to use to evolve their school counseling programs. However, this valuable text contributes a practical and easy to use guide with practical resources that practicing school counselors can apply immediately in their work to identify opportunity gaps and support student success. Given the text's abundance of information and resources, school counselors can consider taking an incremental approach to content implementation. For example, they can read the textbook, identify the strategies and ideas that are most salient for their school communities, and develop realistic implementation timelines, perhaps using the "SMART goal" acronym to guide their goal setting. School counselor educators will find this text a valuable resource or supplement in their school counseling courses, whether an introductory course or a field experience course such as practicum or internship. For instance, in internship, students can be required to utilize the resources outlined in chapter 6 to illustrate their interventions' effectiveness. In *Introduction to School Counseling*, this text could be utilized in concert with foundational school counseling texts (e.g., ASCA, 2019a; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022), perhaps requiring students to articulate, through in-class discussions or reflections, how their future CSCP would utilize data and which instruments and resources they might use. This text is also a fitting adjunct for a Testing and Assessment course, given the dearth of school-counseling resources geared toward assessment. However, its current version may not be suitable as a standalone text for Testing and Assessment it does not explore several fundamental assessment-related topics applicable to both school and clinical settings. District leadership could use this text as a source for continuing education for their school counselors and as a resource for obtaining valuable valid-and-reliable instruments to assess the strengths and needs of their student population. Indeed, *The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* offers many strengths to serve a wide audience.

It is clear the authors of *The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* were practicing school counselors prior to their work in counselor education. The structure of the book is efficient and well organized. The authors focus on moving beyond describing the strategies for using data in school counseling by showing the reader how to do the work, and then provide the instruments and other resources required for that work. Other authors have done this in the past, but perhaps not to the extent that Logan-McKibben and Alvarez provide visual aids and/or practical resources throughout each chapter in this text. The authors also align their work with the ASCA National Model (2019a)

and provide some context for the ethical and legal considerations for school counselors applying this work. A suggestion for the next edition is to consider clarifying the ethical and legal considerations by dedicating an entire chapter to the issue. Important legal ramifications, such as issues related to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment ([PPRA]; 1978), would be worth dedicating space and time to for school counselors interested in using instruments to gather information from students. Foundational ethical and legal issues would be worth considering as a foundation from which to build subsequent chapters.

*The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* is easy to read and easy to use. The figures, tables, and exhibits add to the readability to the text and the online resource bank of valid-and-reliable instruments is a strength of the text. The accessibility of that online resource bank could be improved by the publisher, however, as it took this reader some time to navigate the publisher's book resource website to find the instrument folder. However, overall, school counselors may not otherwise have access to these valuable resources, and the authors are applauded for gathering them and housing them in an accessible way for practicing school counselors to use. The example exhibits, such as those contained in Chapter 6, are from actual schools and illustrate ways school counselors can show evidence of the way students are different due to school counseling programming. This is helpful for systemic change and other outcomes of program advocacy efforts. One suggestion for the next edition is for Logan-McKibben and Alvarez to offer templates of accountability reports that school counselors can use to share their results. Currently, it may be overwhelming for a non-technology fluent school counselor to see the examples offered and imagine creating their own without extensive assistance.

One foundational lens through which future editions or similar works must adopt is viewing all data collection through a social justice lens. Holcomb-McCoy (2007, 2022) has made evident that all school counseling work is social justice work. It is impossible for school counselors to use data to drive school counseling programs without considering implications related to how who chooses which data to examine impacts how data is used. It is important school counselors are equipped with approaches for using data to illustrate foundational inequities and injustices in educational settings. A stronger introduction around ways that instrumentation has historically been used as a racist and oppressive construct could help the reader make informed decisions about how to use instrumentation to support student success rather than perpetuate historical and racist trends of oppression. Clearly articulating ways that data can be used to identify opportunity gaps and deconstruct a system that was originally not created for the majority (i.e., over 50% of all students in our schools are students of color; National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.) of those which it serves, would be useful for the school counselor struggling to create system or policy changes to create equity change. Thus, an emphasis on how school counselors can use data to change systems, in a move beyond student level data, would be a powerful addition as well.

The attention the authors give to resourcing school counselors with instruments and other exhibits with which they can transform their school counseling programs is laudable and, as previously mentioned, a central strength of the text. Future versions or similar texts could also spend time on unpacking the rationale for choosing particular instruments. The authors could detail their own rationale for choosing some instruments (e.g., the Student Risk Screening Scale – Internalizing and Externalizing; Drummond, 1994; Lane & Menzies, 2009) and not including other instruments (i.e., hope scales) within the academic, career, and social/emotional domains. Modeling ways to use instruments to complement root cause analysis of systemic issues and student issues could be a useful addition. Creating a visual of that connection (e.g., ways that motivation impacts achievement) could create useful moments of awareness for readers and increase their motivation to apply data-driven practices in their own work.

One common thread often lacking in school counseling literature is the theoretical foundation for the work. Often, school counseling is practice oriented without a theoretical foundation from which to inform the work (Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). School counselors may find the *Advocating Student-within-Environment* approach to school counseling (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019) or the *Ecological Social Justice School Counseling* theory (Johnson & Brookover, 2021) useful for driving their data-driven work. In future editions, the authors could create a case study that they use to apply either of these theories to the work as it could create a foundational lens through which school counselors can drive their efforts. The use of a foundational theory to drive the work would also provide clarity to the objectives of the book and inform the decisions around which instruments and other approaches school counselors should use in which situations.

*The Ultimate School Counselor's Guide to Assessment & Data Collection* is a valuable resource for school counselors seeking practical tools to apply in their own work and for school counselor educators hoping to educate their students using practical examples of the work. The structure of the book and the ease of reading add to the usefulness as a guide for school counselors to apply immediately in their work. School counselors are provided clear examples and extensive resources through which they can both inform and evaluate their data-driven school counseling work.

#### Author Note

Rawn Boulden, School of Counseling and Well-Being, West Virginia University. Brett Zyromski, Department of Educational Studies, The Ohio State University. Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Rawn Boulden, School of Counseling and Well-Being, West Virginia University, 355 Oakland Street, Morgantown, WV 26506 (email: rawn.boulden@mail.wvu.edu).


#### Disclosure Statement


No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

#### Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

#### ORCID

Rawn Boulden  0000-0002-7875-9725

Brett Zyromski  0000-0001-5405-749X

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