



RAMP Stories: Closing the Gap

How 2023 RAMP schools addressed equity issues

The Recognized ASCA Model Program recognizes schools committed to delivering exemplary school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model framework. While the program is delivered to all students systematically and includes a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success, a critical component of equity in the RAMP application is the closing-the-gap action plan and results report, which addresses equity issues including achievement, attendance or disciplinary discrepancies that exist between student groups.

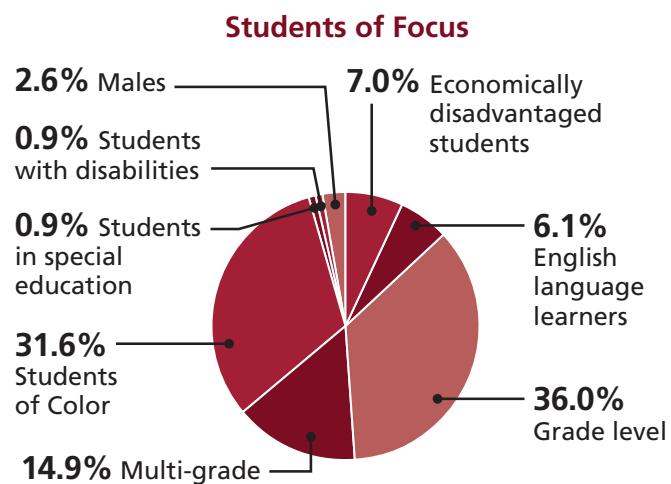
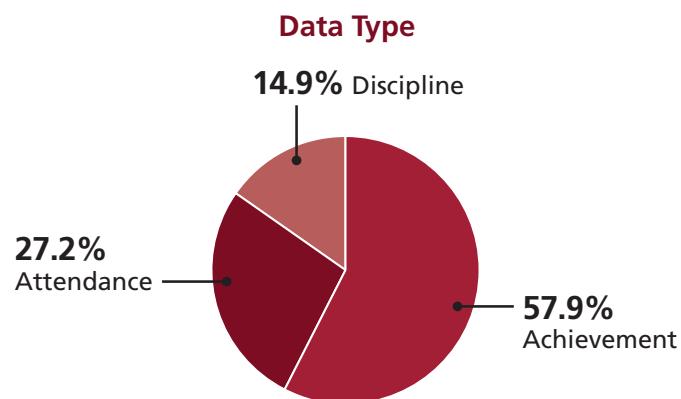
School counselors must demonstrate how they identified a gap in student achievement, attendance or discipline in their school's data — for example, students off-track for graduation or disproportionate rates of suspension. Not only do school counselors address gaps by implementing direct student services, they also develop strategies to address systemic issues such as advocating to change policies and procedures that impede student success. As a result, achieving RAMP provides schools with powerful support for addressing issues of equity.

Much like the 2022 RAMP class, the 2023 RAMP schools faced the unprecedented challenge of students returning to school following a global pandemic. Many of the closing-the-gap action plans submitted in RAMP applications pointed to students' lack of motivation and stamina for full-time in-person school, as well as increased anxiety, especially as many students were re-learning social skills, recovering from loss, and more.

School counselors at 2023 RAMP schools were innovative in their approaches to help students succeed, while also working to influence significant systemic changes in their schools by collaborating with teachers, administrators and students' families. In many cases, school counselors found inequities when considering students of color, such as when students didn't feel connected to their schools or lacked necessary supports.

Addressing Gaps

Interventions and activities to address inequities included student-specific interventions as well as school and



systemic issues. Student-specific interventions included delivering direct student services, such as individual counseling, small group counseling and peer support. School and systemic approaches included collaborating on and/or delivering systemic-focused professional development for teachers in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and cultural competence. School counselors also worked with parents/guardians to create a school/family collaboration for student success. Some examples are shared here.

ACHIEVEMENT

Post-COVID-19 challenges prompted many of the interventions to support academic success, according to the 2023 RAMP cohort. School counselors addressed

issues including students failing multiple classes, seniors in danger of not graduating, and more. Supporting students academically in many cases required significant outreach to parents and families to ensure they had opportunities for engagement and felt comfortable supporting students in completing homework. Several RAMP schools also pointed to social media distractions, anxiety and lack of motivation affecting student success.

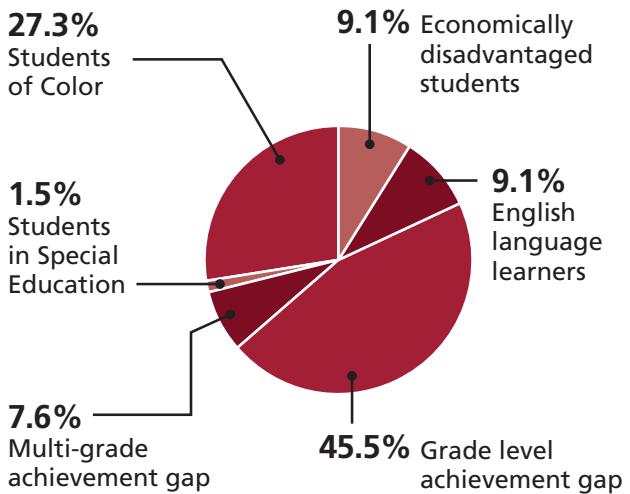
Consider the following examples for how RAMP schools closed gaps in academic achievement:

- Data from a RAMP elementary school indicated Black second-grade students consistently scored below the benchmark measure on the math Measures of Academic Progress test and when compared to White students. School counselors learned that the students felt anxiety about math, and teachers didn't have enough time for remedial lessons. The students also didn't feel connected to math concepts. School counselors held classroom lessons with a small group of students to focus on growth mindset, coping and resiliency. They also held a parent presentation on how to deal with anxiety. Teachers participated in professional development on cultural humility vs. cultural competence. Another benefit of the annual student outcome goal plan was that the school counselor was seen as more integral to the overall school mission.
- At another RAMP school, school counselors identified a group of 5th grade students who had scored below range on their ACT Aspire reading assessment. School counselors were concerned that shifting learning environments due to school construction had negatively impacted student learning. Further, students were finding it difficult to concentrate on their work upon returning to school after COVID-19 and were unfamiliar with how to find and track their grades. Students with learning disabilities or Tier 3 mental health needs were particularly vulnerable. School counselors helped students learn positive study skills to improve test scores and grades, demonstrated how tracking grades can help with their final grades, and discussed how setting goals helps achieve positive outcomes. School counselors also helped students learn about the best way to ask for help and provided information about additional services, such as tutoring services, with parents.
- The school counseling team at a California middle school focused on 6th grade students who were English learners earning a D or F in language arts. Advocating for students required working with the state association to address legislation that placed special education students who are English learners in English language development classes. Among

supports school counselors advocated for were training on [Elevation](#) to access and analyze English learner data, [Pear Deck](#) (which translates lessons into any language), and for posters with the English learner reclassification process to be distributed and posted across campuses districtwide. Students also wrote SMART goals about the grade they wanted to earn in the class.

- At a RAMP middle school, school counselors focused on 7th and 8th grade students identified as failing two or more classes after the first marking period. According to the school's RAMP application, "Students appear to be struggling to readjust to being around their peers and are exhibiting heightened emotional reactions and outbursts related to peer interaction. Students are struggling with endurance for a full, in-person school day and are not organized in their schoolwork and assignments. Teacher expectations and assignments are more challenging in-person than they were during virtual school." School counselors helped students develop a system to keep track of their assignments, described how their attendance impacts academic achievement, and provided instruction on effective organizational, study and time-management skills. School counselors delivered both classroom lessons and small group lessons to address academic improvement, achievement and regular attendance. Additionally, one-on-one counseling meetings between student and grade-level counselors were held to discuss grades, attendance, setting goals and formulating plans for improvement. School counselors consulted with parents to ensure strategies being implemented on campus were consistent at home. The school saw a 67% decrease in the number of students failing two or more classes.

Students of Focus — Achievement



- When data showed a significant number of 6th graders were failing core classes, school counselors at another RAMP school instructed students to identify personal barriers to learning and then develop strategies to overcome those barriers. Small group and individual counseling were used, including the Mending Minds small group to address anxiety, plus quarterly planning and grade tracking with individual students. School counselors held collaborative team meetings with teachers to address student concerns and academic progress, as well as response to intervention meetings with all stakeholders to provide support and enhance learning. The result was a 71% reduction in the number of students failing courses.
- School counselors at a RAMP middle school found that 44 percent of F grades were among Hispanic students, who comprise less than 25 percent of the entire student population. The students indicated they felt their culture wasn't represented and language barriers made it harder to ask for help and comprehend the material. School counselors implemented a Mariachi ensemble to highlight Hispanic culture and created leadership opportunities for Hispanic students. They also created a peer group for Hispanic students to encourage opportunities to support and encourage each other, and to generate a peer-driven sense of accountability.
- At one RAMP high school, as a result of digital learning, a number of seniors were off-track for graduation. The school needed a new method for class make-ups to ensure students didn't fall further behind. School counselors helped students identify post-secondary options or colleges, conducted individual counseling and small group lessons, collaborated with teachers and held parent/guardian conferences to help students meet their credit requirements for graduation. They also launched a study skills small group to help students improve their SAT scores. School counselors participated in CollegeBoard's professional development to hone their own skills and encouraged students to use the College Board's resources on time management and testing. The school's mean SAT improved by 6.9%.
- At an under-resourced school that earned RAMP, students had been challenged by lack of or inconsistent access to technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in 17% of juniors having credit deficits. "The last year and a half, the school/district has had a lack of devices and Internet connection hotspots to provide to students/families," according to the RAMP application. "We were not a one-to-one district. There was poor, vague, and inconsistent communication from

school to home." School counselors worked with the assistant principal to ensure students would have multiple credit recovery opportunities available to them, including some specifically for English learners and special education students. School counselors helped students write a SMART goal related to their academic achievement, held grade-level conferences, developed individual learning plans that included opportunities for credit recovery, small group counseling and more.

ATTENDANCE

Similar to achievement student data, attendance data reported by 2023 RAMP schools also reflected COVID-19-related challenges. For example, at one RAMP high school, school counselors addressed seniors who had been absent for 70 or more periods. "Our district and state do not have clear attendance policies with systems of rewards and consequences that are consistently enforced," the school counseling team reported. "Students were not engaged in learning in 2021. They did not take ownership of their education. It was difficult to meet with students. Many continued in distance learning for the entire school year." Many of the school counselors addressing attendance also uncovered systemic issues, such as English-only communications with parents.

Consider these examples of RAMP schools that closed gaps in student attendance:

- School counselors at a RAMP elementary school discovered that first-grade students of color had more unexcused absences than students in any other grade level, so they set a goal to decrease the number of identified first grade students of color with four or more unexcused absences from quarter 1 to 3. Through meetings with administrators, teachers and families, the school counseling team learned that students' families may not feel connected to the school community and or know who to contact for absences. Further, students reported "oversleeping and missing the bus, feeling sick, or they just do not want to come to school." School counselors worked with students to create a sense of belonging and culture of safety and respect. They also held classroom lessons and small group counseling, and biweekly attendance meetings with teachers to ensure interventions were in place. Other efforts included collaborating with administration to modify conferences with families and identify additional methods of communication. The number of students with unexcused absences had decreased by 36% by the third quarter.
- School counselors at a RAMP middle school sought to reduce the number of students receiving free/reduced lunch who were considered truant (18

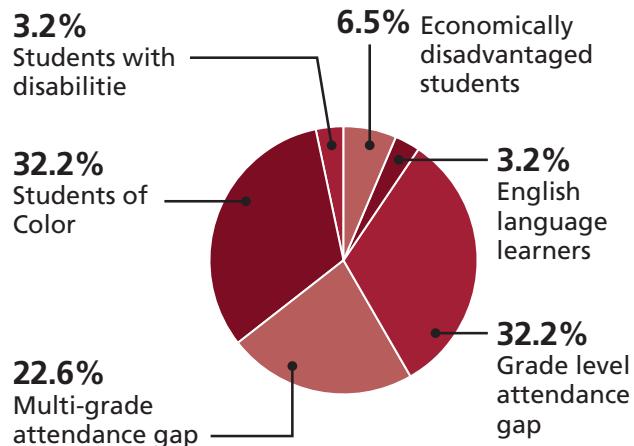
periods or 3 days of unexcused absences) during first trimester reports. The data showed that seven students classified as low socioeconomic status had a higher percentage of absences compared with students not classified as low socioeconomic status. One particular systemic issue needed to be addressed: Absences were reported by the school via voice mail and in letters were only in English. To address the issues, resources were provided for non-English speaking families to report absences ([Google Voice](#) text) with the attendance clerk. School counselors also worked with students to identify barriers to attendance, such as lack of connection to the school. Interventions included group counseling, individual counseling, and recognition for improved attendance with postcards and school-related rewards. School counselors also developed educational material for parents, collaborated with teachers and connected families to community resources where needed.

- At another middle school, school counselors found that lack of updates for student emergency contacts (which had to be done electronically) and issues with registration for transportation services contributed to poor attendance among 8th grade Black students (less than 90% attendance in the prior year). Students reported feeling stress about getting to school on time every day, indicated they stayed up too late distracted by social media, and said they were tired in the morning and didn't feel like coming to school. Some students also said that once they miss their bus, they have no other way to get to school. School counselors advocated for the removal of district-level barriers that prevented families from being connected to and welcomed to the school, such as lack of online access to forms and messages. School counselors also developed an "attendance reboot" group and held individual meetings with students. They also connected with families via letters, phone calls and emails, and consulted with social workers and county services to address student needs.
- School counselors at a RAMP middle school found that 7th and 8th grade Hispanic students were absent at greater rates than the general school population. Family meetings and workshops (including PTSA meetings) were delivered primarily in English only, resulting in caregivers not fully understanding school programming and expectations, including attendance. School counselors advocated to schedule interpreters for each parent meeting, workshop and PTSA meeting to ensure increased access to important school information for families, including attendance. They also provided group counseling, using the [Sources of Strength](#) series, held truancy intervention panels with

school social workers and attendance liaisons, and provided weekly parent communications through the online school portal for students with more than three unexcused absences.

- To address a gap in attendance, school counselors identified 12 7th-grade students with an attendance rate of 87% or less during the first three weeks of the school year. Data also indicated that the school's attendance rates were much lower than similar schools in the same school network. "When addressing socioeconomic inequalities in school attendance, schools usually only look at one measure of socioeconomic background (e.g., eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch in school)," according to the school's RAMP application. "There are multiple different components of socioeconomic background that are likely to influence school absenteeism, for example, parent level of education, language, parental involvement in child education and peer group in the school environment." All of this data informed school counselors' interventions, which included classroom instruction using the On-Track Unit from the [Success Bound](#) curriculum and small group counseling. They also collaborated with teachers and analyzed student data using [Aspen](#). "The school counseling outcome data and interventions provided a better understanding of what counseling interventions were successfully mitigating [attendance]," according to the application. In fact, the students' attendance increased by 16%.
- At a RAMP high school, school counselors identified students with 16 or more unexcused absences during the previous school year. The data showed that many of these students were English learners, which pointed to a systemic need to improve the program for English learners and increase the number of certified EL staff and services. School counselors also learned that when students were working from home during COVID-19, many weren't logging in to classes and they felt stress and anxiety upon their return to school. School counselors helped students identify short-term goals to increase motivation to return to school and to understand how their attendance is connected to their academic success. Individual counseling with students, SARC meetings (student, parent, social worker, counselor, admin), consultation with teachers and LSAC meetings (counseling team, social worker, and administrator) were among the strategies they employed.
- At a RAMP high school, school counselors discovered inconsistency in when and how attendance was prioritized, with administrators not always following through on consequences when students reach the maximum number of absences allowed. They

Students of Focus — Attendance



also found that teachers weren't taking attendance consistently. School counselors set a goal to reduce absences among students who are Hispanic/Latino or two or more races who had nine or more absences in the first trimester. To address systemic issues, they also worked with the attendance clerk and administration to establish a rubric of which absences are excused and to create a system to ensure consistency in attendance monitoring. They held classroom lessons for grades 9-12 covering school success, discussing how to achieve academic, social-emotional, and postsecondary planning success, and anxiety management small groups with the target group of students where needed. School counselors also employed the [Bring Out the Brilliance](#) intervention in small group counseling. Individual check-ins with students and families were used as well.

- Following a remote-learning school year, one RAMP high school was increasingly concerned about students' attendance, specifically for sophomore students who did not attend in the building as freshmen. When the school counseling team reviewed data from their EWS (early warning system) report, a bi-weekly report that includes attendance data for all students, they found that sophomore students were attending at a significantly lower rate than other grade levels during the first semester. By the end of first semester, 16% of the sophomore class was on track toward chronic absenteeism. The school counseling team chose to focus on 25 of those sophomore students with the fewest number of absences (11 days absent, or 88% attendance) with the goal to keep those students out of the chronic absenteeism criteria. Systemic issues included inequity for those students whose parents/guardians are not capable of compelling their child to attend school or when some teachers accept missing work for full credit regardless of whether an absence is excused. School counselors suggested implementing increased

parent communication and programming around school attendance, including early notification of attendance concerns, specific strategies for parents/families, and clear expectations regarding parental involvement. They also suggested implementation of a common, school-wide practice regarding the acceptance and grading of late/missing work due to unexcused absences. With students, school counselors embedded mindsets and behaviors into the delivery of core curriculum lessons and workshops that correlate academic achievement with future options. They also met individually with students to better understand their attendance barriers and challenges, as well as current mindsets toward attendance, and held a six-week attendance small group (*Every Day Matters*). Student support team meetings with other staff were also part of the effort. In a particularly innovative approach, social workers offered a morning check-in/breakfast group to students with concerns and anxiety about returning to in-person learning. "The morning check-in served to provide a safe environment among students facing the same concerns to start the day and make a plan for a successful day," according to school counselors.

DISCIPLINE

Returning to school after the pandemic had a significant impact on behavior referrals, according to information from many of the 2023 RAMP schools. Students struggled socially as they resumed in-person school, while also dealing with anxiety, stamina and loss. "Students need help relearning rituals and routines," reported school counselors at one of the 2023 RAMP schools.

At one RAMP high school, school counselors reported that school staff had "observed decreased patience with parent and student interactions. They stated that they have seen an increased severity in financial disparity. Our students have also had an increased number of deaths of parents, guardians and close family members."

Disproportionate rates of discipline among black and Hispanic males is another issue school counselors worked to address at their schools. At one RAMP school, school counselors addressed "policy changes around the referral process, including how staff members handle BIPOC students and their level of understanding around these students' needs."

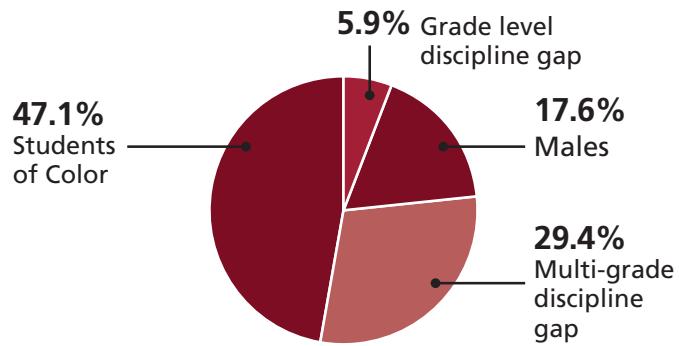
Consider these sample solutions from 2023 RAMP schools:

- At an elementary school, school counselors focused on decreasing the number of office discipline referrals for a group of male students. Socialization outside of classes had been limited due to COVID-19 mandates during the 2020-21 school year. Because students were required to stay within

their own class circles in all locations, including lunch and recess, and didn't have the opportunity to play and socialize with students from other classes/grades, frustration and outbursts became frequent. Students reported they felt disrespected by each other. School counselors worked with students in small groups to help them practice making good self-control choices and to manage strong feelings. They also practiced ways to calm down and when to recognize when their feelings were too intense. Capturing Kids Hearts was one of the tools they used. School counselors also communicated with parents about what students were learning in the small group.

- Schools that earn RAMP are particularly focused on disproportionate rates of discipline. Consider a 2023 RAMP school where just nine K-5 students had accrued 49 percent of school-wide discipline referrals. "School policies indicate that aggressive behaviors have a series of escalating consequences; this creates a policy of greater punishment rather than opportunities to practice/learn new skills and break old habits," according to the school's RAMP application. School counselors began holding weekly check-ins with students to teach and practice coping strategies and rehearse reactions. Students participated in the solution-focused activity of examining their day for areas of conflict. School counselors also worked with teachers on using positive reinforcement of behaviors, which also gave teachers a better understanding of the school counselor role. School counselors discussed with administrators and faculty strategies to address aggressive behaviors in a way that teaches new skills rather than simply escalating consequences.
- School counselors at another elementary school reported that students don't want "to be in trouble" but often lacked the coping skills to use when they're in the midst of a conflict. "As a result, bad choices are made at the moment about what they need to do. Many are afraid to look weak in front of their peers. The students need to connect with a trusted adult so they have the support they need to overcome obstacles to achieve their goals." School counselors worked with 10 Black males who were experiencing a disproportionate number of suspensions to practice positive self-talk, coping skills and conflict resolution in small group counseling. They also worked with administration to advocate for policies that allow for social interaction among students. Suspensions among the cohort dropped from 10 to 2.
- Elementary school counselors at another RAMP school found that some of their youngest students were engaging in rough-housing, resulting in discipline referrals. School counselors set a goal to reduce Hispanic male kindergarten grade students with office discipline referrals for safety-related rough house by 50% from 12 to 6. School counselors focused on helping students learn how and when to ask for help. They also worked on friendship skills and collaborated with teachers to support students' behavior intervention plans. Systemic issues required addressing as well, including providing teachers with support in setting up classrooms and teaching behavior expectations and self-regulation strategies.
- School counselors directed efforts on 7th and 8th grade students with at least one discipline/office referral at another RAMP school. Loss of interpersonal contact due to virtual learning had impacted student knowledge about how to behave in the classroom. Lack of boundaries and discipline while learning at home made students unprepared to function in a classroom. Staff reported they felt they lacked options to manage behavior issues in the classroom, yet school counselors also saw a need to increase professional development in cultural awareness and restorative practices. School counselors partnered with administrators to determine positive and supportive practices related to discipline, and helped students recognize the impact of self-control in social situations and understand school-appropriate ways to demonstrate social maturity. Classroom lessons on conflict resolution and small group lessons on social skills were impactful. At the same time, school counselors created a parent newsletter about conflict resolution to encourage further skill development at home.
- School counselors at another RAMP school discovered that Hispanic students accounted for seven out of the total 13 referrals for fighting. The Hispanic population is 43% of the student body but accounted for 54% of fighting referrals. While the school equity team and school policy had historically focused on Black student inequity, it may have limited the school's focus and missed other demographic groups that also experience inequities, according to the RAMP application. School counselors reframed data to ensure the equity team would include a focus on inequities among Hispanic students. In terms of student interventions, school counselors focused on specific skills development, including problem-solving, communication and conflict resolution, aligning the program with the most important needs of the school. They then expanded on those lessons with tier 2 intervention groups for students who showed

Students of Focus — Discipline



a need for more instruction after the lessons. Upon sharing the outcome goal plan, “we heard teachers, administrators and parents report that they were happy with the work we were doing and it would be beneficial to have an additional school counselor to help us serve our students even better,” according to school counselors.

- School counselors at one RAMP high school found that Black students made up 23.4% of behavior referrals but only 16.5% of the school population. School counselors made staff aware of inequities and provided anti-racist professional development regarding classroom management. They also worked with students to help them learn to balance their mental, social/emotional and physical wellbeing, while becoming the students’ trusted adult in the school. To avoid suspensions, school counselors worked with administration to create a Saturday school. “We want our stakeholders to know that we do not stand for racism in our school and in our counseling program,” according to school counselors. “This helps us ensure that our stakeholders perceive us as being anti-racist but also hold us accountable for those beliefs.”

- Another RAMP high school reported similar disproportionality among Black students, specifically for referrals for fighting. School counselors advocated for students to be provided an opportunity to reduce the number of days for a disciplinary referral if they agreed to an intervention with a school counselor/social worker, such as participation in a group, conflict mediation or referral to a community agency. School counselors held both group and one-on-one meetings with students to practice handling disagreements and how to communicate better on social media, where fights tended to begin and to escalate. School counselors engaged in weekly communication with teachers/administrators and regular meetings with parents.

Clearly, student success is improving at 2023 RAMP schools. As these school counselors identify and eliminate gaps in opportunity and achievement, students are feeling a stronger sense of belonging in their school and experiencing the equitable services that are essential to student success. Further, school counselors’ work is better recognized as essential to school goals. As school counselors noted in one RAMP application, “Although our stakeholders are aware the school counseling program is student-centered, they were unaware of the impact the program has on students’ achievement. They thought the school counseling program focused only on student behaviors and only provided reactive services to students. After sharing the goal and the process planned to address the goal, our stakeholders shared they had a better understanding of the preventive role of the school counseling program.”

Examples drawn from school counseling programs that earned RAMP in 2023. Learn about the winners [here](#).