



RAMP Stories: Closing the Gap

How 2026 RAMP schools ensure success for each and every student

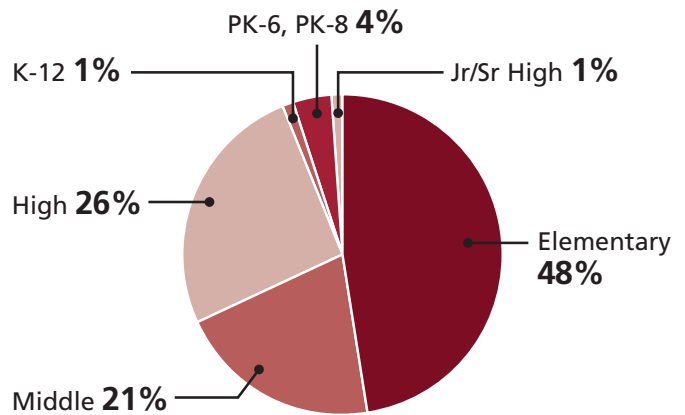
The Recognized ASCA Model Program® (RAMP®) continues to highlight schools demonstrating a sustained commitment to delivering school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model®. These programs center on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for life-readiness and academic success. A key element of this work is the closing-the-gap action plan and results report, which details how school counselors meet the needs of students who are not reaching achievement goals/benchmarks or need support with contributing factors to achievement such as attendance or discipline.

School counselors in the 2026 RAMP cohort detailed how they identified gaps in student achievement as well as attendance and discipline. They examined trends in student data, such as concentrations of students earning failing grades in core courses or the disproportionate number of office referrals among certain student groups, then implemented focused strategies to address those challenges.

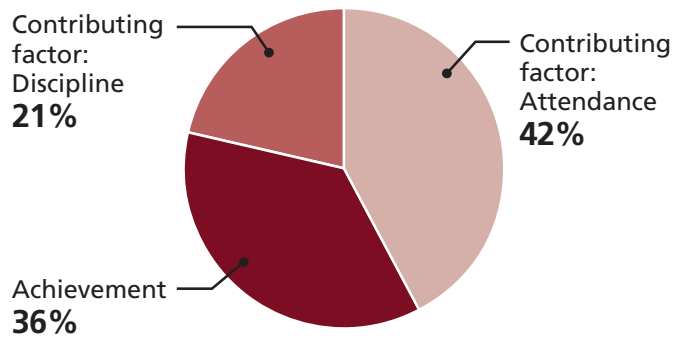
While delivering direct student services such as classroom instruction, small-group counseling and individual student support, school counselors also served as data-informed leaders. They reviewed data and used their professional insight to identify barriers to student success and developed strategies to address or remove them. School counselors in the 2026 RAMP cohort also collaborated with education partners including families, school staff, administrators and community organizations to support student achievement, guiding students to improve learning strategies, self-management and social skills, and helping each and every student included in the plans achieve success.

Guided by the ASCA National Model, these school counselors aligned their work with school improvement priorities, used data analysis to identify needs and designed interventions to achieve measurable results. Their efforts reflect a comprehensive, student-centered approach that integrated academic, attendance and behavioral support.

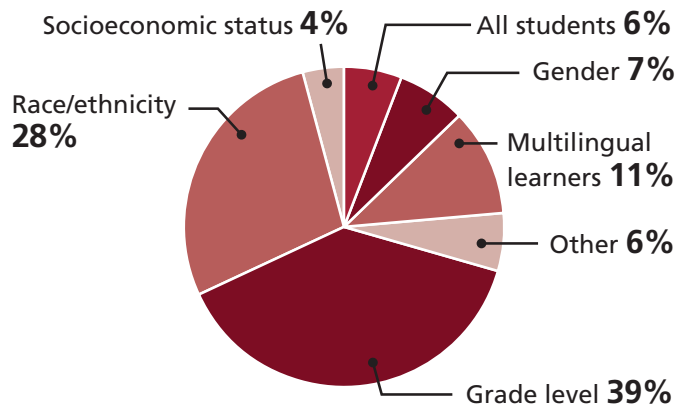
RAMP School Grade Level



Type of Data Collected



Population Targets



Other includes students with disabilities and students with 504 or IEP plans

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The 2026 RAMP class exemplifies the impact of a school counseling program that is strategic and data-informed. By aligning their work with both student needs and broader school goals, school counselors not only promoted individual student growth but also contributed to meaningful progress toward the school goals. Their work underscores the vital role school counselors play as leaders, advocates and catalysts for success for each and every student.

ELEMENTARY

Achievement

At a RAMP elementary school, staff identified a group of fourth- and fifth-grade Hispanic and Black students (11% of all students in this demographic group) who were struggling academically, earning a total of 14 D's and F's early in the school year. Data revealed that many of these students faced challenges with learning strategies, including working independently on task management – specifically with starting assignments, staying focused and navigating multiple learning options without direct support.

In response, the school counseling team collaborated with administration and the personalized learning coordinator to help students build skills that are part of the ASCA Student Standards. Students participated in small groups and individual goal-setting conferences where they learned how to set goals, take responsibility to initiate tasks more effectively and use strategies to maintain focus during independent work time. School counselors also collaborated with teachers and families to reinforce these skills and improve classroom practices within the personalized learning environment.

As a result, the number of D's and F's decreased from 14 to five, a 64% reduction and an improvement over the goal of 50%. Students demonstrated improved ability to manage their work independently, set goals and apply strategies to stay focused.

Similarly, staff at another elementary school identified a group of students who were performing significantly below grade level in math, including 12 students who were not receiving focused academic interventions despite being one or more grade levels behind. Data showed that challenges with focus, problem-solving and test-taking behaviors, rather than just content knowledge, were contributing to lower performance.

School counselors implemented small groups and classroom lessons focused on building skills in critical-thinking, problem-solving, self-discipline and self-control. Students practiced learning strategies of how to approach challenging questions when they did not know an answer and cope with test-related anxiety. School counselors also collaborated closely with teachers and the MTSS team to reinforce these skills in the classroom and strengthen intervention supports.

As a result, the number of students performing significantly below grade level decreased from 11 to seven, a 36% reduction.

Contributing Factor: Attendance

Chronic absenteeism was a significant issue at another elementary school where school counselors identified a group of second- through fourth-grade students, primarily Black or African American girls, who had missed a total of 163 days in the previous school year. Data revealed that absenteeism was influenced by a range of factors, including the way absences are tracked (e.g., counting against students even if they're sick), inconsistent morning routines, transportation challenges, family work schedules and a lack of self-motivation for getting to school. In some cases, students also avoided school due to academic frustration or feeling behind.

“Many students and families do not believe missing a day of school is a big deal,” according to the school counseling team. “However, students are building foundational skills and necessary habits early on. By normalizing missing school, students are less likely to want to come to school and will begin fighting their families about coming to school.”

The school counselors focused on interventions addressing time management and self-advocacy skills. Through small-group counseling, students developed practical learning strategies such as organizing materials, establishing consistent morning routines and preparing ahead for school. Lessons also emphasized how to advocate for themselves by expressing their needs and seeking help from adults when barriers arise.

School counselors collaborated with families through meetings and home visits, helping families understand the importance of attendance and establishing routines at home. Teachers were also engaged to reinforce consistent expectations and provide additional encouragement to students. Total absences among the targeted group decreased from 163 to 140, a 14% reduction, significantly exceeding their goal.

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Kindergarten student attendance was the focus of school counselors at another RAMP school. Students had accumulated more than 430 missed days during the 2023–2024 school year. Many students struggled with challenging coursework, while families often lacked clarity about attendance expectations or faced language barriers. Other students were experiencing medical concerns. “There is a lack of communication to kindergarten parents about the expectations of kindergarten, its coursework and how to better support their students,” school counselors noted.

Small groups helped students build self-management skills such as confidence and independence and understand the importance of regular attendance. Individual meetings addressed personal barriers and connected families to support.

Staff also strengthened communication with families, especially multilingual families, and encouraged teachers to reach out early when concerns arise. As a result, cumulative absences among these students dropped to 236 days in first grade the following year, a 45% reduction. Students also reported improved ability to start work independently and ask for help.

At another school, school counselors identified a group of 17 students who collectively missed 604 days during the 2023–2024 school year. Absences were tied to mental health needs, inconsistent routines, limited family engagement and a lack of strong connections to school.

School counselors implemented a comprehensive, student-centered approach focused on strengthening daily routines and social skills such as building relationships. Students participated in small-group counseling where they identified trusted adults at school, practiced help-seeking skills and developed personalized morning routines to support consistent attendance. Biweekly check-ins provided ongoing encouragement, accountability and opportunities to address barriers in real time, while incentives reinforced positive attendance behaviors.

Overall, total absences decreased by 30%. Students also demonstrated stronger connections to supportive adults and improved time management skills.

School counselors at another elementary school identified disproportionately high chronic absenteeism among Black students, who missed school at rates exceeding their share of the student population. They also observed declines in engagement and sense of belonging, along with systemic transportation barriers and limited family connection to the school.

To address these issues, the school counseling team focused on social skills, particularly strengthening relationships between students and trusted adults. Through individual meetings and a consistent check-in/check-out process, students identified supportive adults in the building, practiced asking for help and regularly reflected on their attendance. The school also collaborated with families and teachers, launching a family resource fair to build stronger home-school connections and provide access to support. School counselors have suggested optional Saturday school to help students make up missed instructional time.

Students’ cumulative absences decreased from 379 to 190 days, a nearly 50% reduction. Students reported stronger connections to adults at school and greater self-confidence in seeking help.

When school counselors at another RAMP school identified chronic absences among a group of male students, they found that lingering confusion from COVID-era attendance expectations, along with ongoing concerns about illness, contributed to families keeping students home unnecessarily. Additional factors included peer conflicts and anxiety.

The school counseling team implemented a comprehensive approach focused on helping students develop self-management skills to balance school, home and personal responsibilities. Students participated in small attendance groups and classroom lessons that emphasized the importance of daily attendance and learning strategies of goal setting and decision-making.

The school also strengthened family outreach through workshops, take-home materials in multiple languages and ongoing communication to clarify when students should attend school. Schoolwide efforts, including attendance campaigns, incentives and regular collaboration helped reinforce consistent messaging and support. As a result, total absences among the targeted group decreased from 408 days to 228 days, a 44% reduction.



The 2026 RAMP class exemplifies the impact of a school counseling program that is strategic and data-informed.

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At a different elementary school, school counselors identified a group of kindergarten students whose chronic absenteeism resulted in significant lost instructional time. These students also had lower reading scores and less academic growth. A key barrier was that families were often unaware of the importance of attendance in early childhood, and traditional communication methods were not effectively engaging families. “Parents of chronically absent students are unaware of the impact of chronic absenteeism, especially in our early grades, when students are learning foundational skills,” school counselors said.

The school counseling team implemented a comprehensive strategy focused on social skills, particularly building relationships and increasing students’ sense of belonging. They delivered schoolwide lessons and morning mindfulness meetings to help students understand the importance of attending school, while small groups and individual check-ins provided additional support. These efforts helped students identify trusted adults at school, share their experiences and feel more connected to peers and staff.

The school also strengthened family engagement by expanding communication methods beyond email and phone, using in-person meetings, community events and platforms like ClassDojo to build stronger connections. Missed instructional time for the targeted group decreased by 50%.

Contributing Factor: Discipline

At a lower elementary school, school counselors identified a group of students with recurring behavioral concerns on school buses, with six students accumulating 24 office discipline referrals related to bus incidents. Data showed that inconsistent expectations across bus drivers, long ride times and limited adult support contributed to conflict and inappropriate behavior. Students also reported difficulty understanding expectations and managing emotions during challenging interactions on the bus.

School counselors focused on helping students build self-management skills of self-control and emotional regulation and helped them understand bus safety expectations. Students participated in small-group sessions where they reviewed bus rules and role-played responses. Sessions emphasized de-escalation techniques, such as seeking adult support, ignoring negative peer behavior and using calming strategies. The school counseling team also collaborated with administrators and families to provide consistent expectations, reinforce positive behavior and address ongoing concerns.

As a result, bus-related discipline referrals decreased nearly 38%. Students demonstrated improved understanding of bus expectations, increased use of self-regulation strategies and more constructive responses to challenging social situations.

School counselors at a RAMP elementary school identified a group of Black male students who had received three or more office discipline referrals, averaging nearly 12 referrals during the 2023–2024 school year. Data revealed that many behavior incidents stemmed from peer conflict, inconsistent adult responses and limited opportunities for students to practice healthy regulation and relationship skills.

To address the issue, school counselors developed small groups where students practiced social skills like getting to know one another, building trust and engaging in respectful dialogue. Restorative circles provided opportunities for students to listen, share experiences and work through conflicts constructively. Classroom lessons and individual counseling reinforced these skills, helping students develop coping strategies and more positive ways to respond. The team also collaborated closely with teachers, administrators and families to create consistent behavior plans and improve follow-through after incidents.

These efforts produced a decrease in the average number of office discipline referrals of 14%. Students also demonstrated stronger peer relationships and improved ability to resolve conflicts.

Second-grade students with significantly high levels of behavior incidents were the focus of school counselors at another elementary school. School counselors found that many of these behaviors stemmed from difficulties with self-management skills, peer conflict and limited social skills for building positive relationships. Frequent removal from class due to disciplinary actions also reduced students’ access to instruction and opportunities to practice these skills in a supportive environment.

The school counseling team implemented small groups and classroom lessons where students could practice conflict resolution, learn calming strategies and build relationship skills. Individual coaching and check-in/check-out support offered daily opportunities for students to set goals, reflect on behavior and receive consistent encouragement.

The school also strengthened classroom environments by supporting teachers with tools such as calming corners, visual schedules and restorative practices, while

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collaborating with families to address underlying needs and reinforce expectations. Discipline referrals decreased 32% as students learned coping and communication strategies and began to build more positive relationships.

School counselors at another elementary school identified a concerning number of behaviors related to safety, with 51 incidents recorded during the last school year. Early data the following year showed similar patterns among a group of students who struggled with self-management and social skills including emotional regulation, peer relationships and behavioral expectations.

The school counseling team implemented a comprehensive, skill-building approach focused on self-regulation and positive social interactions. Through small-group counseling, students learned to recognize emotional triggers, use calming techniques and communicate their needs without harming others. Lessons were reinforced through collaboration with teachers, who integrated consistent language, calming tools and clear behavioral expectations across classrooms.

Thanks to their efforts, safety-related behavior incidents decreased 47%. Students demonstrated improved ability to regulate emotions, build healthier peer relationships and meet school expectations.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Achievement

School counselors at a RAMP middle school identified a group of eighth-grade students who were consistently earning more failing or incomplete grades. Data pointed to several challenges with learning strategies, including low motivation, limited study and organizational skills and a belief that middle school grades did not have a significant impact on their future.

The school counseling team implemented a comprehensive approach focused on improving goal setting, study skills and student responsibility for learning. In classroom lessons, students explored high school expectations, future planning and effective study strategies, while small groups focused on targeted support in time management and academic habits. Individual advising sessions helped students set goals, monitor progress and connect their current performance to future success.

Students made a significant improvement in goal-setting skills, use of study strategies and awareness of how their current effort affects future opportunities, supporting stronger academic outcomes as they prepare for high school.

At a sixth-grade academy school, school counselors identified a significant achievement gap among multilingual learners, with 94% scoring at the beginning learner level on their end-of-grade assessment. Data revealed that many students possessed strong literacy skills in their native language but struggled to demonstrate their knowledge due to the test being administered only in English. Students also reported experiencing high levels of test anxiety and difficulty understanding complex reading passages.

The school counseling team added interventions aimed to reduce test anxiety and build confidence in using English. Through small-group counseling sessions and individual meetings, students learned coping skills to help them identify signs of anxiety, practice calming strategies and reframe negative thoughts using positive affirmations.

While the average assessment score decreased slightly, students demonstrated growth in key self-management skills, including improved ability to recognize anxiety and apply coping strategies during testing situations.

At another middle school, staff identified a group of eighth-grade students who had accumulated a total of 120 D and F grades during the previous year. Data revealed these students faced challenges adjusting to increased workload demands across multiple classes. Many students reported feeling overwhelmed, falling behind on assignments and lacking motivation to stay engaged in their coursework.

The school counseling team focused on strengthening students' academic behaviors and motivation. Through classroom lessons, students developed learning strategies to manage their time effectively, prioritize assignments and understand how motivation influences academic success. In small groups, students learned about organizational systems and study routines.

Weekly check-in/check-out systems and access to credit recovery programs were offered to students with the highest needs. School counselors also collaborated closely with teachers and families to monitor progress and reinforce expectations. As a result, the total number of D and F grades decreased 43%.

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Contributing Factor: Attendance

Eighth-grade students were the focus of school counselors at another middle school. The team identified a group of eight African American male students who were showing patterns of absenteeism early in the school year, missing a combined 46 days in the first seven weeks. Students were experiencing low motivation and self-confidence in academic success. They also pointed to a lack of engagement or culturally relevant incentives.

To address the issue, students developed learning strategies by participating in goal-setting lessons and small groups that connected attendance to future success. Individual check-in/check-out meetings helped students set weekly attendance goals, reflect on progress and stay accountable. These efforts resulted in a 35% improvement. Students also showed improved self-confidence and stronger self-management skills.

School counselors at another RAMP school identified a group of economically disadvantaged female students in grades seven and eight who accounted for a disproportionate number of tardies. This cohort represented 32% of all tardies despite making up only 10% of the population. Barriers included long walking distances to school, lack of morning supervision due to parent/guardian work schedules and inconsistent routines at home.

Through individual counseling and small groups, students developed learning strategies of evening and morning routines, preparing for school the night before and practicing using alarms and checklists to stay on schedule. A before-school mentoring program further supported students by creating structured routines, providing encouragement and helping them build positive habits around arriving early.

Total tardies for this group decreased 27% as a result of interventions. Students also demonstrated stronger time management habits and increased ownership over their attendance.

At another school, a group of sixth-grade multilingual learners with chronic absenteeism were failing math assessments. Among the contributing factors were language barriers, transportation challenges, family responsibilities and difficulty adjusting to a new school

system and culture. Many students also reported feeling disconnected from school and unsure of expectations.

The school counseling team used individual counseling sessions and small groups to help students reflect on their attendance patterns. They also helped students develop learning strategies and self-management skills to identify personal barriers and create practical strategies for morning routines and other issues. The

school strengthened family engagement by collaborating with the multilingual learner department and family liaison to improve communication in families' home languages to increase understanding of attendance policies. Additionally, school counselors advocated for cultural awareness training for staff and increased family engagement activities to bridge the gap between school and home.

While total absences decreased by a modest 4%, students demonstrated significant growth in their ability to identify barriers and apply strategies to improve attendance.

Contributing Factor: Discipline

At a RAMP intermediate school, staff identified a significant increase in disruptive and disrespectful behaviors, with referrals rising from 108 to 239 in

one year. Data revealed that fifth-grade male students accounted for a disproportionate share of these referrals, totaling 62 incidents and representing a key group in need of targeted support. School counselors noted a systemic barrier of inconsistent behavior expectations across classrooms and limited self-management skills, including student coping skills and emotional regulation. "Current staff feedback indicates that expectations regarding when to complete a discipline referral versus managing behavior within the classroom are not consistently clear," school counselors said. "This lack of clarity has contributed to varying interpretations of what constitutes disruptive/disrespectful behavior, with some functional definitions not fully understood by all staff members."

A comprehensive, schoolwide approach developed by school counselors focused on building students' emotional awareness, coping strategies and decision-making skills. Through classroom lessons such as "Getting to Know Your Brain" and "Understanding Big Emotions," students learned how to recognize emotional



At a RAMP middle school, inconsistent behavior expectations and limited self-management skills contributed to discipline issues. School counselors developed a schoolwide approach.

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triggers and apply strategies to manage strong feelings. Small groups provided additional support for students with higher levels of behavioral need.

The school strengthened staff capacity by providing professional development on trauma-informed practices, implementing a discipline flowchart for consistency and equipping teachers with tools like calming spaces and real-time strategies for de-escalation. Collaboration with families and student voice initiatives further informed interventions and reinforced expectations. As a result, discipline referrals among the targeted group decreased nearly 31%.

School counselors at another RAMP school identified a need to reduce discipline disparities among a group of seventh-grade African American students who had accumulated 36 office referrals in the previous school year. Data pointed to a systemic barrier of inconsistent classroom expectations, limited responsibility for self and actions, and gaps in effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Although students reported valuing education and feeling supported, they expressed lower confidence in managing challenges and communicating their needs.

The school counseling team implemented a multitiered approach to strengthen social skills including communication, self-advocacy and conflict resolution. Tier 2 small groups (e.g., “Be Good People”) focused on respectful communication and peer conflict resolution, while Tier 1 lessons reinforced self-management, growth mindset and goal setting. Tier 3 supports provided individualized accountability and progress monitoring, alongside ongoing collaboration with teachers, administrators and families to ensure consistent expectations and support.

Office discipline referrals for the targeted group decreased significantly – 58%, exceeding the goal. Students demonstrated stronger communication, increased accountability and improved conflict resolution.

HIGH SCHOOL

Achievement

At a RAMP high school, staff identified a group of 10th-grade male students who had been retained after earning 10 or fewer credits, putting them significantly off track for graduation. Data showed these students were earning

an average of just 3.65 credits per year, with key barriers including learning strategies of low motivation, limited engagement and a lack of clarity about their progress toward graduation.

School counselors met individually with students to review credits and develop personalized graduation plans, ensuring each student understood what was needed to graduate. Small-group sessions focused on goal setting, study skills and overcoming barriers, while also helping students build self-awareness and communication skills.

The school counseling team also collaborated closely with teachers, families, administrators and mentors to provide consistent support and monitor progress. They also advocated for solutions, such as alternatives to in-school consequences, that allowed students to remain engaged in academic instruction rather than missing class time.

As a result of these combined efforts, students increased their average credits earned from 3.65 to six in the following school year, a 64% improvement.

School counselors at another high school identified ninth-grade students as having the highest rate of failing grades in mathematics, with nine students failing in the first quarter. Among the barriers identified were lack of learning strategies including organization and low motivation, inconsistent attendance and limited use of available academic supports such as advisory periods and teacher office hours. Many students also reported feeling disconnected from math and unsure of its relevance to their future.

The school counseling team used individual advising sessions to support students, who reviewed their grades, identified missing assignments and developed personalized plans to improve performance. Small-group and classroom lessons focused on learning strategies of time management, organization and goal setting.

The number of students failing math decreased by one. However, students demonstrated improved ability to track their progress, use organizational strategies and take greater ownership of their learning.

At another high school, the school counselors identified a group of 21 African American 11th-grade male students who were struggling academically. Students were experiencing low motivation, challenges with time management, inconsistent attendance and limited access to strong mentorship and support systems.

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A comprehensive support plan focused on building students' learning strategies, including organizational skills and self-motivation. School counselors facilitated small groups and classroom lessons and conducted weekly check-ins to monitor progress and help students stay on track. Peer study groups were established to strengthen social skills including collaboration among students and academic support.

According to school counselors, the school district “has a mismatch of student demographics and teacher/staff diversity. African American boys often lack role models and may face cultural misunderstandings or bias in instruction.” The school partnered with the Becoming a Man program to provide mentorship and reinforce social/emotional development. These efforts resulted in a nearly 23% reduction in failing grades.

A group of seniors who had not met state graduation competency requirements, with 65 students at risk at the start of the year, were the focus of school counselors at another high school. Data showed key barriers included low motivation, inconsistent attendance, limited understanding of requirements and difficulty completing the capstone project, especially outside the school day.

School counselors focused their approach on goal setting as a learning strategy to complete graduation competencies. Small groups guided students through their capstone projects by breaking them into manageable steps and connecting projects to future goals, while weekly individual check-ins reinforced accountability and monitored progress. School counselors also collaborated with teachers to help students meet requirements. Further, starting in the 2025–2026 school year, “the team began communicating district/state graduation requirements to families more effectively and efficiently as well as in other languages.”


Student progress improved, with members of the group moving from zero to five students successfully completing the capstone requirement.

School counselors at another school identified a group of 10th-grade students in a study skills course who were struggling academically, accumulating 200 D and F grades by the end of the fall semester. Data pointed to challenges with learning strategies of time management and organization, along with limited access

to individualized support and inconsistent use of data to guide instruction.

The team saw a need to “establish structured, ongoing collaboration between academic departments and the school counseling team to identify and support students with academic, social/emotional and attendance-related needs. This integrated approach ensures that interventions are timely, coordinated and responsive ... benefiting students who may be historically underserved or at-promise,” according to school counselors.

School counselors also implemented a learning strategies skill-building approach to improve student performance. Classroom lessons focused on goal setting, study habits and addressing procrastination, while individual sessions provided personalized guidance to address barriers such as accountability and academic gaps. Small groups reinforced these skills and helped students connect their academic progress to future plans. School counselors also partnered with teachers and families to strengthen awareness of student progress and expand access to academic resources. D and F grades decreased from 200 to 172, a 14% reduction.



At a RAMP high school, school counselors improved college readiness with ACT preparation and study skills sessions.

Using data to identify disparities in college readiness, school counselors at another RAMP school found that their Black and Hispanic students were more likely to score below the college-ready benchmark on the ACT. Specifically, 15 students in the target group had composite scores of 18 or below, reflecting limited access to test preparation, gaps in study skills and lower exposure to ACT-aligned instruction in academic-level courses.

School counselors provided structured ACT preparation sessions during lunch, making support available to all students regardless of schedule or course level. These sessions focused on learning strategies including test-taking strategies, practice with ACT-style questions and helping students build self-confidence in navigating the exam. School counselors met individually with students to develop personalized study plans, set goals and connect ACT performance to future college and career opportunities.

To expand support, the school collaborated with student groups to provide peer tutoring and worked with teachers to begin integrating ACT-style questions

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across courses, helping ensure more consistent exposure to tested skills. The number of students scoring below college-ready decreased from 15 to seven, a 53% reduction.

At another school, staff identified a significant equity gap in advanced course participation, with Hispanic students making up 41% of the student population but only 13% of AP exam participation. Within the school's AVID program – where 95% of students identify as Hispanic – there was an opportunity to strengthen academic outcomes and better prepare students for rigorous coursework. Data revealed that 14 10th-grade AVID students had GPAs below 2.5, limiting their readiness for honors and AP classes.

“Administrators acknowledged the achievement gap and are exploring initiatives to increase enrollment of Hispanic students in advanced classes,” school counselors said. “They mentioned the importance of creating a more inclusive school environment that encourages all students to pursue higher-level courses.” The school counseling team implemented classroom lessons within AVID focused on building self-confidence, strengthening relationships with school staff and increasing understanding of advanced academic pathways. Students engaged in lessons on GPA awareness, four-year planning and postsecondary options while interacting directly with honors, AP, dual enrollment, and career and technical education teachers. The team also expanded access to information through family engagement efforts such as AP/AVID information nights and partnerships.

As a result, the number of students with GPAs below 2.5 decreased from 14 to 10, a 29% reduction. Students demonstrated increased self-confidence in their academic abilities and greater interest in taking advanced courses.

Contributing Factor: Attendance

At a RAMP International Baccalaureate school, staff identified a group of seventh-grade students with concerning attendance patterns; 23 students accumulated nearly 120 total absences within the first quarter. Data showed that absenteeism was influenced by several factors, including low student motivation, a belief that attendance does not affect academic success and feelings of disconnection due to inconsistent school systems and unresolved peer conflicts. Reports of bullying and lack of consistent adult response also contributed to some students choosing to stay home.

The school counseling team implemented a relationship-centered, multitiered approach focused on increasing learning strategies including student motivation and

social skills of strengthening connections with trusted adults. Weekly talking circles created a safe space for students and staff to build trust, reflect on attendance and behavior, and reinforce shared expectations. Small-group lessons emphasized the importance of attendance and how it connects to future opportunities, while individual conferences allowed students to analyze their attendance data, identify barriers and develop personalized goals and strategies for improvement.

These efforts resulted in absences decreasing 21% among the group. While the goal was not fully met, students demonstrated increased self-awareness, stronger connections with adults and improved motivation to attend school.

Contributing Factor: Discipline

At another high school, school counselors identified a concerning pattern among a cohort of 10th-grade male Hispanic multilingual learner students: 17 discipline incidents related to nicotine or THC possession over the course of a single school year. A deeper review of the data revealed that many of these incidents were occurring not during the school day but before and after school at bus stops or during long, unsupervised transit times. These findings prompted school counselors to look beyond individual behavior and examine the broader systems and barriers shaping student experiences.

Through conversations with students, teachers, administrators and families, school counselors uncovered a complex set of contributing factors. Many students described using substances as a way to cope with stress, family challenges or trauma, while others pointed to peer influence and curiosity. Teachers noted that the students were often quiet and respectful in class, making the behavior unexpected, while administrators highlighted limited supervision and access to substances during unstructured times. Families, when engaged, expressed concern but often felt uncertain about how to intervene.

In response, school counselors implemented data-informed support grounded in the ASCA Student Standards, focusing on responsibility and coping skills. Through small-group counseling and check-in/check-out supports, students practiced managing stress, identifying trusted adults and developing refusal and self-advocacy skills. At the same time, school counselors began advocating for systemic changes, including increased supervision at bus stops, expanded transportation options and stronger family engagement efforts. The impact of this comprehensive approach was significant. Discipline incidents within the identified group dropped from 17 to six, a 65% decrease.