



RAMP Stories: Closing the Gap

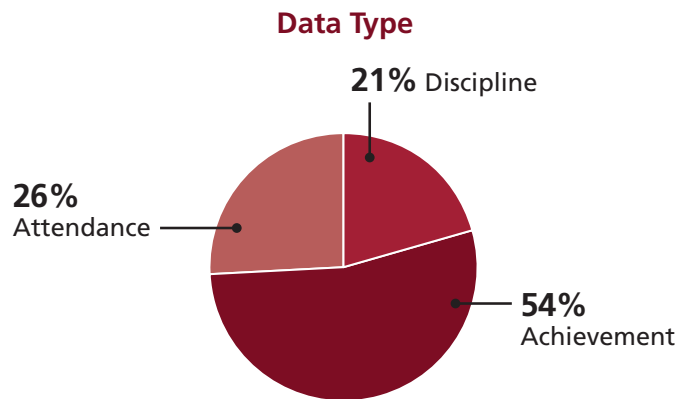
How 2024 RAMP® schools addressed equity issues

The Recognized ASCA Model Program® (RAMP®) recognizes schools committed to delivering exemplary school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model® framework. Although the school counseling 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.

In their RAMP application, 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 reports of misconduct for certain demographic groups. While school counselors engage in essential interventions like classroom lessons, small-group counseling sessions and individual counseling, they also use data and observation to identify systemic issues in their schools. School counselors in the current RAMP class advocated for policy changes around reporting of student misconduct, practices that promote better connections between teachers and students, and even improvements in grading practices. Clearly, engaging in school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model provides school counselors with valuable tools to advance positive change and address inequities in their schools.

As was the case in 2023, school counselors report that the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt in their student populations. Gaps in learning and poor social skills are among the most challenging issues. Many school counselors have focused classroom lessons on positive peer interactions, motivation, resiliency and self-control.

Engaging with students' families was a frequent area of focus for school counselors at RAMP schools in the 2024 class. Regular communication, coffee chats and meetings with students' families were used to ensure families were



aware of student progress and to provide opportunities to learn more about what supports families may need.

This report provides several examples of strategies RAMP schools employed to address gaps in student achievement, attendance and discipline. What's especially impressive is RAMP schools' holistic approach to improving school systems while also helping students attain valuable skills.

ACHIEVEMENT

For their submitted closing-the-gap reports, 57 schools focused on achievement gaps. This included 17 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 20 high schools, one K-12 school, one pre-K-12 school, four pre-K-8 schools, one K-8 school and one grade 7-12 school. Following are some examples:

At a RAMP elementary school, trends indicated that out of all subgroups and demographic breakdowns, English learners had consistently struggled to meet reading ability scores. The grade-level scores are assigned by the district and are used for a range of identifiers, including college and career readiness, honors courses placements at the secondary level and overall course placement, so it's important that all students earn at or above scores to meet grade-level reading ability. Identifying

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a 14% deficiency gap for English learners' Lexile scores, school counselors set a goal to reduce the total number from 19 to 16. "Although teachers are making their best efforts to support all of their students, it is difficult to manage varying academic levels and provide individualized support for each student. It takes a collaborative effort to support our students with setting academic goals to visualize their own personal success," according to the school's RAMP application. School counselors helped students articulate expectations for work and achievement and to create a measurable goal. They also learned to modify goal plans when encountering setbacks. At a systemic level, school counselors serve as a link between the literacy coach and the resource teacher who supports English learners to provide consultation and collaboration to meet students' needs.

School counselors at another elementary school also addressed students' reading abilities. Data indicated that 14 third-grade students earned "below basic" performance scores on the school's reading inventory assessment. School counselors set out to reduce that number to eight students by holding small-group instruction in time management, organizational and study skills, and teamwork skills; adding three more classroom guidance lessons on growth mindset principles and mindfulness; and providing individual student support and mentorship. They also shared information with parents in e-newsletters and webinars about helping their students use good study skills and develop habits to support academic achievement.

Sixth-grade boys who earned a D or F in reading, writing and/or social science were the focus of a closing-the-gap report for an elementary/middle school. Student surveys had shown that reading was their "hardest/least favorite" part of school and that being prepared for tests was difficult. School counselors set a goal to bring more than half of the students to passing. Interventions included a self-exploration unit on social/emotional skill building toward academic success for all sixth graders (Tier 1), celebrating strengths academic skill building for eight sixth graders with D's and F's as identified in the school counselor's annual student outcome goal (Tier 2), and individual conferences as needed (Tier 3). The school counselor also focused the quarterly parent workshop on how to keep students on track for high school, held individual conferences with families as needed and used the middle school grade band meeting to provide professional development around culturally responsive teaching.

At another elementary school where English learner students were the focus of the closing-the-gap report, data indicated fourth-grade students who were English learners were more likely to score at the beginner level on their ELA Milestones test than non-English learner students. The school counselor acknowledged that "we need to address cultural needs to help support these students. I have observed our English learner students not engaged during classroom lessons and often not actively participating in discussions during learning time." Parents noted that translation of documents was often needed and that helping children with homework could be challenging because they were learning English as well. Weekly individual check-ins with students to support positive school engagement and a resiliency small group were among the school counselor's interventions. Additionally, the school counselor advocated for all communication to be translated to Spanish and other languages and for greater cultural awareness among the school community.

Seventh- and eighth-grade Latinx students at one of this year's RAMP middle schools were earning 39% of D's and F's but comprised just 18% of the school's students. Students reported that they struggle with engagement and academic success because they are already far behind. Some also indicated they weren't using their student planner or were unaware about missing assignments. With a goal to reduce the number of students receiving D's and F's from 11 to seven, school counselors worked with students to set SMART goals, led a study skills small group and checked in with students individually. They also collaborated with parents through email, phone calls and parent meetings and held grade-level team meetings with other school staff to discuss student supports. Through the process, school counselors also identified a systemic issue with grading practices. When students complete missing work, the assignments are not immediately graded and updated in the school's electronic portal. Student work receives a reduction in points for every day it is late. The school's equity team is examining grading practices to identify any biases and encouraging teachers to reflect on their practices and align with grading policies.

When data from another middle school indicated a significant number of students within the school's socio-economically disadvantaged subgroup did not meet their projected growth goal on the NWEA Language Arts Assessment, school counselors set a goal to help students increase their average growth scores from -6.2 to -2.2. Student feedback indicated they perceived the test as long and arduous. In fact, eight of 12 students polled identified test difficulty as the reason for not achieving

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their growth goals. Interventions included classroom and small-group lessons on overcoming barriers and on test-taking strategies. Individual academic counseling was offered for struggling students. School counselors also collaborated with teachers and other staff to best serve students, and they advised parents about the importance of the NWEA assessment.

At another middle school, school counselors identified a cohort of eighth-grade students who received two or more F's on their first-quarter report card. The team set to reduce the number of students earning F's by 10% by the end of the fourth-quarter grading period. The school counseling team found that distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic had created learning gaps and lack of tutoring resources.

Student demographics have changed over time, and resources were not tailored to the needs of current students. School counselors offered academic classroom presentations with small breakout groups and individual academic counseling. They also collaborated with teachers, administrators and parents to address systemic issues.

Reducing the number of middle school students with D's and F's by 10% was also the focus at another school. Students were struggling with organization and would sometimes lose hope after missing too many assignments. Families pointed to their students' lack of focus and the challenge of helping with homework when they're already working long days.

To address the gap, school counselors held weekly small group check-ins with students and taught executive functioning skills such as motivation, SMART goals and avoiding procrastination. "We email and call parents; consult with administration, teachers and parents; personally invite students and parents to an evening Study Skills Workshop; and," when needed, refer students "to outside counseling services we offer on campus," the school's RAMP application states. School counselors also identified systemic issues, including lack of home internet, language barriers, grading policies and socioeconomic disparities that enabled some students to afford to hire tutors. After-school homework time and tutoring were added by school counselors, as well as a study skills workshop for both students and families.

Eighth-grade male students at or below a cumulative total 2.0 GPA at the end of the first grading period were the focus of school counselors at another middle school.

Reducing the number of students in the cohort from 64 to 51 (20%) was the goal. Identifying a concern that male students may be missing positive male role models, school counselors held a "guys with ties" small group to focus on leadership development. They also noted a lack of targeted communication with families about student status regarding promotion to high school, as well as a need for tutoring. Other interventions included large-group learning strategies and executive functioning workshops. In terms of indirect student services, school counselors launched a monthly parent communication regarding GPA and promotion status and collaborated with administrators, teachers and the school-site council to provide after-school tutoring opportunities.

At one RAMP high school, 193 students were retained at the end of the 2021-22 school year. School counselors focused on a small group of seven retained ninth-grade students with the goal to reduce that number to four. School counselors reported factors affecting retention were lack of motivation, potential lack of home support, negative labels, social stigma, mental health struggles, attendance, inability to visualize long-term goals, lack of school connectedness/involvement and issues with self-efficacy and executive functioning. Students indicated they felt disconnected from the school and lacked relationships with teachers. School counselors used an individual check-in system to connect with students and learn about their experiences that may contribute to the retention rate. They also used a punch-

card reward program to encourage student participation in learning and provided postsecondary enrichment activities to expand students' knowledge base regarding opportunities after high school, including workforce, military and college. They also provided professional development to teachers on topics including mental health and connecting with students.

When data indicated that 98% of Hispanic students graduated from the school but only 32% had completed four-year college criteria, school counselors at one RAMP high school were concerned. They decided to focus on 54 ninth-grade Hispanic students who received two or more D and F grades in core academic classes after their first six-week progress report. They set a goal to reduce that number by 20%. "School counselors know that future planning and career exploration are vital to increase student buy-in and excitement about school.



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Our enrollment data shows that Hispanic students are underrepresented in Career Advantage Courses, as well as in leadership opportunities available to students,” according to the school’s RAMP application. School counselors used several interventions including small groups on the science of hope and goal-setting, as well as career exploration and future-planning workshops. Students were also placed into math and English support elective courses as well as tutorial/support periods. To reach parents and families, school counselors led Spanish-language presentations on graduation requirements and college/career opportunities.

School counselors at another high school identified a gap in the graduation rates of unhoused students compared with other subgroups within the school and district. School counselors noticed that some of the students reported that they do not live near the district-designated bus stops and have to walk great lengths to get to school or need money for bus fare. Students’ families had shared that during the pandemic, they experienced multiple losses, including deaths, divorces and separations. In addition, some of these students were also relying on drugs and alcohol to cope with their problems. Students have experienced anxiety and depression and also struggled to complete homework due to living with others. To close the gap and address student needs, school counselors offered in-class instruction about the importance of grades and offered small group counseling where students could share their experiences. At the systemic level, school counselors are advocating for the district to provide students with public transportation bus passes and to add additional school bus stops to support student access to transportation. They are also connecting students to the district’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act resources and school mental health services to support vouchers for basic needs.

At another high school, school counselors set out to reduce the number of ninth-grade students retained by 20%. “Students are feeling overwhelmed after the COVID-19 lockdowns and many students report having feelings of anxiety returning to school. For

students who are coming to school regularly, school may not be their first priority as they would rather focus on spending time with friends and extracurricular activities,” according to the school’s RAMP application. Administrators reported students lacked motivation and were often tardy. To address students’ needs, school counselors offered small group counseling focused on study skills, mindfulness and stress management, and provided classroom instruction on effective coping skills. They also held meetings with families of the identified students and provided professional development for teachers on effective coping skills in the classroom. They also saw a need for an attendance policy with consistent enforcement to include positive behavior support. School counselors met with school administration to develop a plan of action to best support students. They are also considering the development of a ninth-grade academy or cohort to create a school within a school.



To close the gap and address student needs, school counselors offered in-class instruction about the importance of grades and offered small-group counseling where students could share their experiences.

Increasing students’ sense of belonging and school enjoyment was the closing-the-gap focus at another high school. “We believe and have seen through our interactions with students that they enjoy school when they are performing well academically. In recent years, our graduation rate has declined, and the number of students who have dropped out has increased,” according to the school’s RAMP application. The school counseling team set out to improve graduation rates by focusing on freshmen listed as off-track for graduation. Identifying a cohort of freshmen missing credits toward graduation, school counselors began offering individual sessions with students, created four-year graduation plans with them and helped them sign up for course remediation. Time-management, study skills and organizational skills were the focus of conversations with students. School counselors also identified important systemic issues, including limits on the number of credit recovery classes students can take per school year and the grade range required to qualify. In addition, the local community lacks supplemental classes for high school credit, and the school district does not offer community-based mentoring programs. Changing the policies around credit recovery hours and waiving the cost of summer school were viewed as possible solutions.

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ATTENDANCE

Twenty-seven RAMP schools provided closing-the-gap reports that addressed discrepancies in attendance. Among them are 18 elementary schools, seven middle or junior high schools and two high schools. Consider these examples:

At one RAMP elementary school, 20 out of 60 kindergarten students had already missed 10% or more school days by October of the school year. With the goal to reduce absences by 30%, school counselors first acknowledged that kindergarten represents a major transition for students as they move from half days to full days at school. Additionally, students and families need positive relationships with teachers and other adults at school to feel safe and connected, and they also need clear communication about the importance of school attendance. Illness had played a role as well; in the aftermath of the pandemic, still concerned about the spread of illness, the health department and school district guidelines required families to keep students with minor illness symptoms home or to wait to test for 5-10 days to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Young children who had not previously had out-of-home care or schooling were more often ill and had not developed immunity from minor colds/flu. More regular access to a nurse would be helpful; the nurse could assess students more regularly and provide information and resources to families to decrease the number of students missing school due to illness. To reverse the trend of poor attendance, school counselors held classroom lessons on the many benefits of coming to school, including academic learning, making friends, and playing and having fun. They also shared notes about these lessons with families. They also taught social/emotional lessons every other week to build positive relationships with students and met individually with students of concern to further strengthen a positive adult connection and assess any possible student perceptions of school attendance. A weekly reward system was used as well to encourage individual students with chronic absenteeism.

At another elementary school, the school improvement plan included the goal to decrease the percentage of students with 20-plus absences from 28% to 20%. School counselors observed data showing that students who qualify for free/reduced lunch were chronically absent more often (38%) than their peers who do not receive free/reduced lunch (21%). Noting that fifth-grade

students have a greater agency in their own attendance than younger students, school counselors chose to focus on fifth-grade students who qualify for free/reduced lunch and had missed two or more days in the first month of school. Because these students would soon transition to middle school, addressing their attendance was particularly important. Conversations with families revealed some reasons for absences, including difficulties getting to school, such as parents needing to leave for work before the school bus arrives, parents needing other family members to get the student ready for school in the morning, student oversleeping and missing the bus, difficulty with student emotions/behavior or lack of consistent pick-up and drop-off spots for district transportation due to a family's homelessness. In terms of direct student services, school counselors taught classroom lessons about the importance of attending school every day, worked to increase student belonging by forming positive relationships with students and meeting student social/emotional and mental wellness needs through individual meetings and small-group meetings, and held attendance-related small groups for selected students in grade five who were at risk for chronic absenteeism. They also communicated with students' families about attendance concerns; connected unhoused families with district transportation resources; and collaborated with other school staff who assist with supporting attendance, including the attendance team, classroom teachers and bilingual educational assistants.

School counselors at a RAMP middle school identified seventh-grade students with 10 or more absences and at least two discipline referrals as their closing-the-gap focus and set a goal to reduce the average number of absences by 22%. "School counselors have noted that many of our students have chronic attendance problems because our students might care for younger siblings, miss the bus and have no other form of transportation, have lingering pandemic habits and have a general lack of motivation and friendship issues," according to the school's RAMP application. They also identified systemic issues: The district has an inadequate number of bus drivers, causing several buses to arrive and depart late. Additionally, although most documents are translated into Spanish, many communications about policies and procedures may not be understood. In terms of student services, school counselors held small-group sessions of 11 students each and then individual sessions after the group sessions ended. They also held classroom lessons about attendance issues and met with students' families. A letter to families of students with five or more unexcused absences was added, as well as a virtual workshop on attendance for families.

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Micronesian students were the focus of attendance-improving efforts at another elementary school. School counselors set a goal to reduce absences by 20%. Their data showed that “students enjoy coming to school but have to wake themselves up and are responsible for getting themselves to school. Students know that coming to school is important, but parents don’t always make it a priority. Students have reported that it’s more difficult to walk to school because of the sealed entrances and exits to the housing community.” School counselors also learned that better communication between the school and students’ families was needed. During and post-pandemic, much of the communication with families had been through electronic systems, yet many families struggled with technology. School counselors planned to find alternate forms of communication, including hand-delivering letters and chatting with families at student pickup. For students, school counselors held check-ins; held small-group counseling on attendance, social skills and friendship groups; hosted lunch bunches with students; and met individually with students to identify schoolwide leadership positions of interest. They also sponsored a breakfast bar for students arriving late but still needing breakfast.

When data showed one middle school’s chronic absenteeism rate was 14% despite a school goal of 9%, school counselors identified a subgroup of economically disadvantaged eighth graders with 20 or more absences and sought to decrease those absences by 35%. Based on the school’s student needs assessment, students were struggling with organization, social situations and anxiety. School counselors noted that the district’s attendance policy required students’ families to provide an excuse to the school within five days of the absence. When an excuse is not received and the student accrues five days of absences, the student is referred to a school counselor for an initial conference. Parents then are required to provide a doctor’s excuse for the student. After 15 days, the student is referred for an “interagency team meeting.” After two more absences after that meeting, the student is referred to a truant officer. This has created a systemic issue because the policy fails to consider that some students lack parent support and may be unable to afford a doctor’s visit to receive an excuse. School counselors suggested that a monitoring system could be created for parents to ensure their student is coming to school. They also suggested that families


should be able to report their student’s symptoms without having to get a doctor’s note. For students, school counselors held a small attendance-improvement group as well as weekly check-ins and goal assessments. They also sent emails and/or held conferences with families of chronically absent students.

At a RAMP junior high school, school counselors found a gap in cumulative absences between boys and girls when combining seventh and eighth grades. Girls were more likely than boys to be chronically absent. School counselors set a goal to reduce the number of absences among seventh- and eighth-grade girls with 18-plus absences by 20%. In studying student behavior,

school counselors noticed that students lacked a sense of belonging to the school and to their peers, which affected their engagement in learning and connecting with others. Parents had reported experiencing difficulty getting their student to school. Girls were feeling unmotivated and overwhelmed and often wanted to skip any school day that included physical education class. To turn the tide, school counselors held small groups to discuss attendance and connectedness to school, offered individual counseling and held classroom lessons focused on attendance. They also collaborated with office staff for absence reporting, held grade-level meetings with staff and collaborated with other school team members on restorative practices.

School counselors at a RAMP high school homed in on juniors who were missing one or two classes to meet state university eligibility. Due to the

pandemic, students lost in-person academic growth and continued to struggle in core content areas. Grading policies provided inconsistent messages to students during the pandemic. Further, students don’t always understand what it means to be college eligible for a four-year university and how D/F grades affect their postsecondary options. Also, students do not have many options for credit recovery. According to the student needs assessment, 86% of students indicated that they need help with how to manage their time efficiently. With the goal to reduce the number of off-target juniors by 10%, school counselors launched several interventions, including a classroom lesson for all juniors about high school graduation and college eligibility, a workshop for the targeted students about how the state university requirements affect their postsecondary options and



Studying student behavior, school counselors noticed that students lacked a sense of belonging to the school and to their peers, which impacted their engagement in learning and connecting with others.

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individual academic planning meetings with the identified students to discuss how to improve their eligibility. They also collaborated with the school's family liaison to create messaging to send to parents/guardians for this group of students to inform them about their student's state university status and ways to support their academic achievement.

Another RAMP high school had a schoolwide goal to increase the number of students surpassing its career and college-ready benchmark of a cumulative GPA of 2.8. To help meet that goal in the future, school counselors decided to focus on ninth graders in jeopardy of not meeting the benchmark but who attend school regularly (attendance rate between 80%-90% and failing two or more core academic classes). School counselors indicated these students seemed to struggle with the increased expectations from middle school to high school. Students reported that prioritizing their work was a consistent struggle. School counselors decided to run a small group focused on goal setting, motivation and confidence to seek help when needed. They also held individual check-ins with the students of the target group to monitor progress toward their goals and address any continued struggles. Additionally, school counselors consulted with special education case managers for the students in the target group who were receiving those services. They also consulted with the MTSS team regarding additional interventions.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline was the closing-the-gap focus for 21 RAMP schools. These include 12 elementary schools, seven middle schools, one K-8 school and one high school. Read some of their stories here:

Reducing disciplinary incidents, in particular incidents of willful force among male students, was the focus of the school counselor at one RAMP elementary school. Willful force was defined as causing, attempting to cause or threatening to cause physical injury to another person or willfully using force or violence upon someone else except in self-defense. School counselors noted a loss of social skills and connection during the pandemic when students were isolated without as much social interaction with their peers. Aggressive behaviors, loss of social skills, lack of impulse control and lack of appropriate coping skills were all observed. The school counselor noted a systemic issue as well. Staff shortages had decreased the number of adults present to deescalate

moments of conflict between students. Further, staff had not completed incident referrals with fidelity, resulting in gaps in data where students may have been over-identified or under-identified for willful force incidents. The school counselor advocated for appropriate team training on completing incident referrals each semester. Additionally, the school counselor led schoolwide activities to create opportunities for students to engage in intentional activities that reduce the overwhelming need for staff support and at the same time provide opportunities for them to learn. In terms of direct student services, the school counselor held classroom lessons on impulse control and coping skills, instituted check-in and check-out practices for students who would benefit from intervention, held small-group counseling on "self-control surfers" and "seeing red" and held individual counseling lessons based on need. As necessary, the school counselor made referrals to outside agencies.

Seeking to reduce the number of misconduct reports among second-grade Hispanic and Black students by one-third, school counselors at another school identified some interesting data. For example, some of the students were new to the school or had IEPs that didn't reflect their current needs. Data on suspensions from the last three years showed that Hispanic and Black students were suspended at higher rates than white students. School counselors also noted that although staff are trained on diversity, equity and inclusion, the training does not include weaknesses specific to the school. Among the student services school counselors employed were a core classroom curriculum focused on coping strategies and conflict management (four lessons), small-group counseling with second-grade students who have at least one misconduct report as well as students teachers identify as at-risk (six sessions) and individual counseling for students who have three or more misconduct reports (three-four sessions). Additionally, they added a weekly family communication, weekly teacher collaboration meetings, a family engagement/equity committee and needs assessments to help students access services.

At another elementary school, school counselors identified a group of second-grade males who had more than one office discipline referral and set a goal to decrease their number by 19%. Like school counselors in other schools, the team at this RAMP elementary school was seeing the lingering effects of pandemic shutdowns as students moved back into structured environments and were expected to engage in long periods of learning and self-regulation. To address the issues, school counselors added lessons to help students develop productive behaviors, build and maintain positive relationships, and set and achieve goals. They also worked with students

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to help them understand they are in control of their own choices. Each class creates a social contract, or an agreement of behavior, to be followed and self-managed by students. When misbehavior occurs, educators use four questions to hold students accountable for behavior and help them behave in the classroom setting: “What are you doing? What should you be doing? Are you doing it? What are you going to do about it?” Additionally, whole-group lessons included making friends, problem-solving, and having empathy and kindness. The team also identified a systemic issue where teachers had different levels of tolerance for behaviors or lacked appropriate classroom management procedures. School counselors advocated for classroom management training for teachers.

At a K-5 RAMP school, school counselors targeted fifth-grade students with one or more physical contact and physical aggression incidents on the playground. They set a bold goal to reduce incidents by 41%. These students, who had missed two years of in-person school due to the pandemic, lacked social and problem-solving skills. Some had experienced trauma and difficult home lives, which interfered with their choices at school. School administrators suggested that expectations for students aren’t clear and connections between students and teachers needed improvement. There was also some inconsistency in playground behavior expectations among administrators, playground supervisors and teachers. School counselors met with the principal to advocate for trauma-informed professional development for teachers and staff and collaborated with administrators and teachers to review, clarify and update behavioral expectations. For students, they held classroom lessons on managing peer pressure, problem-solving and being assertive. Individual sessions with targeted students were held as well.

School counselors at a RAMP middle school identified seventh- and eighth-grade female students who had been assigned to Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement (DAEP) and sought to reduce their number by 50%. School policy had dictated that these violations of the student code of conduct should receive in-school and out-of-school suspension as a consequence. However, when students receive out-of-school suspension, school counselors are not able to meet with students to provide support. Among the violations were arson, breaking and entering, possession of narcotics and fighting. The

students had faced personal obstacles, such as multiple admissions in psychiatric hospitals, suicidal ideation and family members being incarcerated and/or involved with drugs. Consequently, the students struggled with low self-esteem, identifying themselves as “bad girls,” and searching for personal validation and social relevance. Due to the administrative policies, these students were receiving punitive disciplinary consequences without receiving mental and emotional support or instruction. Attendance at DAEP is challenging because parents must provide their own transportation to the site, which is far from the school’s campus. Another problematic

policy was these students were not allowed to participate in clubs and athletics. School counselors advocated with administrators for having in-school suspension instead of out-of-school suspension so they could have access to meet with the students. They also advocated with administration and coaches for students to be able to rejoin sports after returning from DAEP placement. Having the chance to remain in athletics and clubs fosters a positive connection to the school, elevates the girls’ self-esteem, reduces the number of repeated disciplinary infractions and creates a mindset for high expectations for their personal future.



School counselors met with the principal to advocate for trauma-informed professional development for teachers and staff.

Eighth-grade students with two or more relational aggression office discipline referrals (assault, bullying, fighting, harassment, initial stages of a fight, intimidation, physical aggression or threats) were the focus of one RAMP middle school’s closing-the-gap report. School counselors set out to reduce these referrals by 18%. School counselors noted that they “would like to be more involved when students return from a conflict and include restorative conversations with students. Students are fighting to solve their issues and need more strategies to manage their emotions,” according to the school’s RAMP application. Further, families had indicated they were concerned about bullying and would like the school to be more involved in dealing with cyberbullying reports. From a systems standpoint, school counselors noted that discipline may be inconsistently or incorrectly entered into the school’s database. For example, a student was given a consequence for an incident described as “hands to self/fighting,” although the actual incident involved the student jumping on a friend’s shoulders. The students were not fighting but simply behaving in an unsafe, but not aggressive, manner. Students also seemed to receive inconsistent consequences for some behaviors, from a two-day out-of-school suspension for fighting to an in-

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school suspension for the same infraction. In addition to advocating for consistency in reporting of incidents and consequences, school counselors held classroom lessons on managing emotions and appreciating diversity. They also held small-group counseling sessions with students who had office discipline referrals and made themselves more visible in the morning near the cafeteria where incidents often occur. They also created a Google form to use when holding restorative meetings with students to better document and track conversations and plans for re-entering school.

At a RAMP high school, school counselors set a goal to reduce the number of Black and Hispanic female ninth-grade students with one discipline infraction by almost one-third. Female students at the school traditionally have had a number of interpersonal conflicts and few skills to alleviate this conflict, school counselors reported. This often leads to verbal or physical violence toward each other and/or toward adults in the building in an attempt to defend themselves against a real or perceived threat. Many of the students have been overexposed to trauma and operate in fight-or-flight mode, the school counselors said. In individual counseling sessions, anecdotal responses from female students point to a desire to reduce these behaviors and learn to respond in more productive ways. “While our staff has an intermediate understanding of the way that trauma may impact students and engagement, behavior and attendance, many of our students are not aware of the ways that trauma may be impacting them and/or their classmates,” according to the RAMP application. “It’s not uncommon for a student to walk out of class abruptly in anger or to completely zone out with their head down when feeling overwhelmed.” To best serve students, school counselors held a classroom lesson on trauma for all ninth-grade students. They also hosted a Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS) Group and collaborated with teachers, the school’s behavioral health team and on-site mental health service providers.

Native Hawaiian students were the focus for school counselors at another RAMP high school. Seeking to reduce the number of office referrals for these students

by 9%, school counselors acknowledge that the students faced a number of factors that contributed to behavioral issues, including generational trauma, high rates of low-socioeconomic-status families, lack of trust in institutions/authority, childhood trauma and incarceration rates. Students feel it’s OK to fight because they are defending themselves, according to school administration. Systemic issues included suspensions that exclude students from the school environment and reinforcement of mistrust of institutions. There was also a lack of school-community partnership to support struggling families and students. While school counselors advocated to mitigate systemic issues, they also engaged in classroom instruction on relevant topics and individual counseling sessions as needed for identified students. They also worked to build relationships with students’ families, including hosting monthly coffee hours. Additionally, school counselors held weekly administrator/school counselor meetings to discuss student behavior and school program improvements.

These are just a few examples from the 2024 RAMP class. Each day, school counselors at RAMP and other schools are using data to identify and eliminate gaps in opportunity and achievement, ensuring students are better connected to their schools and the adults in those schools and receiving the equitable services essential to their success. On multiple occasions, RAMP schools reported their closing-the-gap plans were directly tied to their school improvement plans, which calls attention to the value of collaborative relationships between school counselors and administrators. School counselors at RAMP schools are recognized as essential partners in meeting school goals. “Stakeholders perceive the school counseling department to be a thriving hub of support using research-based, data-driven approaches,” according to school counselors at one of this year’s RAMP schools. “School counselors are leaders, problem-solvers, collaborators and communicators for the students, teachers and parents they serve.”

Examples drawn from school counseling programs that earned RAMP in 2024. Learn about the winners [here](#).