

RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP

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

RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP

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

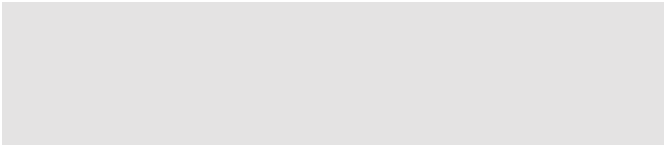
RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP

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 in support of students who do not have access to transportation. They are also connecting students to the district’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act resources and the School Health Services 178.3601 program for basic needs.

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RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP



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.

RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP

RAMP STORIES: CLOSING THE GAP

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 impacted 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

