

# SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF A FEDERALLY FUNDED VIOLENCE PREVENTION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM: RESULTS BRING SUSTAINABILITY

*Sixty-four federal Elementary and Secondary School Counseling (ESSC) program grants were awarded in 2009. One awarded school district implemented a comprehensive school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model at three high-needs elementary schools. This case study describes a district initiative that provided prevention education for all students and interventions for students with identified needs. Based on improvements in attendance, behavior, and achievement, the district funded and expanded the program after federal funds ended.*

Thirteen school districts in California were among the 64 national Elementary and Secondary School Counseling (ESSC) program grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009. The purpose of the ESSC grant (84.215E) is to fund the establishment or expansion of school counseling programs with the goal of expanding the quality of school counseling services (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). One awarded school district in southern California designed and implemented a comprehensive school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005) and evidenced-based practices (Dimmit, Carey, & Hatch, 2007). The requirements of the grant were written to include providing developmental prevention education curricula for all students and targeted interventions for students with identified needs. The grant proposal included three main goals: (a) implement an assessment-based, results-driven, comprehensive school counseling program that will serve as a catalyst and model for expansion throughout the district; (b) increase the social and emotional competencies and academic achievement of all students; and (c) minimize the barriers and increase resilience for students who are at higher risk of school failure. Through designing and implementing a comprehensive program with school counselors and a school social worker, prevention education would be provided to all students, and social and academic interventions would be created for students in need of more support. The purpose of this

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article is to share the successes and challenges of designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive elementary school counseling program, for use as other schools begin or refine their own counseling programs. This case study's emphasis on sustaining and expanding school counseling programs also provides practitioners with suggestions about how to gain school, district, and community buy-in, with the goal of continuing school counseling programs despite budget changes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Comprehensive, Data-Driven School Counseling Programs

Data-driven practices have become increasingly necessary in the profession of school counseling (ASCA, 2012; Carey, Dimmitt, Hatch, Lapan, & Whiston, 2008; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). ASCA's professional competencies, position statements, ethical guidelines, and the ASCA National Model call for school counseling programs to use data to systematically identify and address the needs of students for purposes of accountability and program improvement (ASCA, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). School counselors are urged to implement research-based interventions and accurately measure the impact of their activities on the students they serve (Carey et al., 2008; Johnson, 2002; Poynton & Carey, 2006). Wilkerson, Pérusse, and Hughes (2013) compared school-wide Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results in Indiana K-12 schools between Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) schools and non-RAMP schools. Results indicated that professional school counselors are willing to collect data in order to create comprehensive school counseling programs. Furthermore, the implemen-

tation of data-driven school counseling programs continues to yield positive results on student achievement. In addition to collecting and analyzing data, sharing positive results with school administrators, school district officials, and other school stakeholders is essential to garnering support for school counseling programs (Hatch, 2014; Sink, 2009). To ensure the needs of the student population are being met, it is important for professional school counselors to identify evidenced-based curriculum and interventions using a data-driven decision-making process.

### Second Step Violence Prevention Program

"Second Step" (Committee for Children, 2010) is a violence prevention curriculum used to teach social skills and reduce social/emotional problem behavior. Classroom lessons are focused around three unit topics: empathy training, impulse control, and anger management. The National Panel for School Counseling Evidence Based Practice (Carey et al., 2008), which independently analyzes outcome research of school counseling interventions, described Second Step as an "exceptionally well-researched intervention" (p. 203). Results include findings of improvement in elementary school participants' prosocial beliefs and behaviors, such as caring, cooperation, and positive coping mechanisms (Cooke et al., 2007). Other research found decreases in aggressive behaviors and less adult intervention in minor conflicts for students who received Second Step lessons, in contrast to students who did not (Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005). Results such as these prompted the school district in this case study to select and implement Second Step to address the social/emotional competencies of all students.

## ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELING (ESSC) PROGRAM GRANT

Federal Elementary and Secondary School Counseling (ESSC) program grants fund the establishment or expansion of school counseling programs with the goal of improving the quality of counseling services available (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The primary measures for the ESSC grant program are the reduction of student-to-school-counselor (or mental health provider) ratios and the reduction of incidences of violence as measured by the number of student discipline referrals. Grantees are required to report these data along with other project-specific goals and objectives they identify, such as improving student attendance, academic performance, social skills development, parent involvement, and professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Grantees are also expected to share their projects as potential models of effective practice to assist schools and communities across the nation to improve their programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The award-winning grant that led to this case study was written to address both the needs of the students and the needs of the district. Within this rapidly growing southern California school district, student performance measures were steadily decreasing as behavior problems and social/emotional needs increased. District demographic trends revealed an ever-growing, ethnically diverse, high-needs student population (Stowers & Hatch, 2009). In the early 1990s, the district had an elementary school counseling program that provided comprehensive services for all students. Over the next decade, the fiscal crisis in California resulted in the elimination of district-funded elementary school counseling positions, leaving only two school counselors serving

THE PRIMARY MEASURES FOR THE ESSC GRANT PROGRAM ARE THE REDUCTION OF STUDENT-TO-SCHOOL-COUNSELOR RATIOS AND THE REDUCTION OF INCIDENCES OF VIOLENCE.

8,600 students in 10 schools. The grant award provided funds for additional staffing and a new approach to designing, implementing, evaluating, improving and sustaining school counseling services in three of the district's most needy elementary schools.

## METHOD

This case study focused on the implementation and impact of one particular federally-funded ESSC grant that was written with a focus on three main goals: (a) implement an assessment-based, results-driven, comprehensive school counseling program that will serve as a catalyst and model for expansion throughout the district; (b) increase the social and emotional competencies and academic achievement of all students; and (c) minimize the barriers and increase resilience for students who are at higher risk of school failure.

The first goal of the grant was to address the creation and execution of school counseling services at each school. This goal was accomplished by hiring four grant staff consisting of one full-time credentialed school counselor at each of three school sites (one of whom also served as the project director for the grant), and a school social worker who provided services for high-needs students and families at all three schools. The external evaluator (also the co-author of this article) provided extensive training to the grant staff; she also provided consultation, support, and training on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) and evidence-based practices. The grant team members attended a series of additional trainings and conferences on topics including Second Step implementation, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and effective teaching pedagogy.

The second goal addressed the school-wide culture and climate: increase social and emotional competencies and academic achievement of all students. This was accomplished through the delivery of Second Step

(Committee for Children, 2010), a research-based violence prevention program that includes a series of classroom lessons and school-wide prevention activities like Stand Up to Bullying Month, Red Ribbon Week, and College and Career Day. Ancillary programs such as Peace Patrol, student council, coordinated recess activities, and parent education also contributed

## STUDENT PERFORMANCE MEASURES WERE STEADILY DECREASING AS BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL NEEDS INCREASED.

to overall learning. Dropout prevention researchers recommend collecting data to track early warning indicators of potential dropouts (e.g., attendance, behavior, grades in reading and math, and benchmark test scores) as early as elementary school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Targets for goal two aligned with these early warning indicators and were determined collaboratively by the grant writing team. Measures of success for the school-wide grant goal reflected proposed increases over a 3-year period and were identified as follows:

- 10 percent increase in Satisfactory (S) and Excellent (E) marks on teacher-reported Life Skills and Work Habits section on student report cards;
- 10 percent increase in students reporting high levels of empathy/problem solving skills, as reported on the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS); and
- nine percent increase in students scoring proficient and above on California Standards Test (CSTs).

The third goal focused on providing interventions for at-risk students: minimize barriers and increase resilience in students who are at higher risk of school failure. The intervention goal was written to identify students who were off-track and in need of more intensive interventions and support (Balfanz et al., 2007). These students were provided small group counsel-

ing, individual counseling services (i.e., short-term individual counseling, parent and teacher contact and collaboration, behavior support plans), and attendance interventions (i.e., parent contact, student incentives). Measures of success for the third goal, intervention for at-risk students, reflected increases over a 3-year period, and were identified as:

- 10 percent decrease in Needs Improvement (N) or Unsatisfactory (U) on teacher-reported Life Skills and Work Habits section on student report cards,
- 10 percent decrease in school-wide discipline referrals and suspension rate, and
- 10 percent decrease in school-wide unexcused absences and truancy rates.

Baseline data prior to the grant implementation indicated that the number of combined N's and U's at each school ranged from 6.7% to 12.6% of students. The three schools reported 808 discipline referrals during the year prior to services (287 at School A, 275 at School B, and 246 at School C). At all schools, 2,140 unexcused absences were recorded before the program began.

### Participants

The participants in this research comprised students in kindergarten through fifth grade who attended one of the three schools within the same district in southern California receiving federal funds to implement a comprehensive ESSC program. During program implementation, school sizes ranged from 609 to 936 students, with average enrollment of approximately 775 students; that figure varied slightly each year. The three school communities were fairly homogenous: approximately 70% Latino, 20% Caucasian and 10%

## TEACHERS OPENLY SHARED THEIR APPRECIATION OF THE SUPPORT OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS, WHICH ALLOWED THEM MORE TIME TO FOCUS ON TEACHING.

varying ethnicities, with a high percentage of English Language Learners. During the first year of grant implementation (beginning in 2009), 64.7% of the students attending the three identified schools received free and reduced meals (FARMs), compared to 43.2% of the elementary schools district wide. In this first year, School A enrolled 649 students: 86.6% Latino and 9.7% White with 81.2% FARMs. School B was in its second year with 777 students: 72.2% Latino and 16.9% White with 73.7% FARMs. School C was the largest with 907 students: 38.8% Latino, 35% White, and 39.9% FARMs. In the second year of the grant, School A's free and reduced percentage increased to 91%, indicating the extreme financial challenges for families during this time period (Ed-Data, 2014). This same school had a truancy rate of 45.8%, in comparison to average truancy rates of 22.6% for the non-grant funded schools (in 2007). The sheriff's department also reported that a high percentage of the city's gang population lived in this area, and the department received a disproportionate number of police calls, criminal activity, incidents of domestic violence, and arrests in this region (Stowers & Hatch, 2008).

### ASCA National Model Implementation

The ESSC grant reported in this case study was created to systematically design, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). The ASCA National Model provided a framework for the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, through which the school-wide (goal 2) and intervention (goal 3) goals were met. The program's foundation was established at the beginning of the first year when the school counsel-

ing team created a mission statement and developed a common philosophy aligning with the program focus. Utilizing the management system, the grant team analyzed school-wide and individual student baseline data to guide the selection and assessment of prevention and intervention services. The school counseling program was organized through the establishment of yearly calendars, weekly classroom curriculum lesson schedules, and action plans for addressing school-wide and small group intervention activities. Within the delivery system, "Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum" (Committee for Children, 2010) was selected and implemented regularly, along with other preventative programs such as Peace Patrol, a peer mediation program. A menu of counseling services was created to appropriately address the varying needs of students. Finally, the accountability component was met through the grant review team's collection, monitoring, and review of process, perception, and impact data quarterly, yearly, and prior to and at the end of interventions. The team created results reports and used them to monitor changes in the beliefs and behaviors of students as a whole, and based on intervention groups. Review of data resulted in modification of services and counseling practices as needed.

### School-Wide Activities

All three schools focused on the same goals, and grant team members collaborated at monthly meetings to design, implement, and assess the school counseling programs. Although the needs of each school were similar, different school cultures, varying numbers of students, dynamics of administration, and school demographics called for slightly different ways of implementation. For example, all

schools utilized Second Step classroom lessons. The curriculum was taught in every classroom at least two times per month, and many classes received weekly lessons. At some schools, the counselors led the lessons, and at others, the teachers taught the curriculum. Sometimes school counseling trainees and/or other counseling staff taught the lessons. Despite slight differences in program curriculum implementation, all three schools demonstrated positive results achieved for the grant goals.

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is a statewide measure assessing risk and protective factors related to health, violence, and drug abuse prevention. The grant team reviewed CHKS data to compare student reported perceptions and behaviors to state averages and to determine the focus of school-wide activities, classroom curriculum, and intervention needs specific to each school. For example, School A had an increasing number of students reporting they were spreading rumors and/or other students were spreading rumors about them. At this site, the school counselor addressed this challenge through classroom guidance lessons around rumors. At School B, 16% of the 100 fifth-graders who took the CHKS reported they "saw another kid bring a weapon to school." This led to a school-wide lesson addressing what students should do if they see a weapon at school. Each school counselor identified and appropriately addressed their own site-specific, data-driven concerns based on the California Healthy Kids Survey data.

### Group Counseling Interventions

At each school site, counselors identified students in second through fifth grade for participation in small counseling groups based on receiving five or more Needs Improvement (N) or Unsatisfactory (U) ratings (out of 13) on the Life Skills and Work Habits section of report cards. Examples of report card items include: "works without disturbing others," "observes classroom rules," and "works cooperatively with others."

**TABLE 1 POSITIVE LIFE SKILLS AND WORK HABITS REPORT CARD MARKS: 2009-2010**

Report Card 2009-2010	E's T1	Target (+10%)	E's T2	E's T3	% Change	Goal Met?
School A (n = 619)	29.5%	32.5%	35.2%	42.6%	+44.0%	YES
School B (n = 787)	62.1%	68.3%	63.8%	65.3%	+5.1%	NO
School C (n = 931)	54.9%	60.4%	60.8%	65.3%	+18.9%	YES
Average (N = 2288)	45.5%	50.0%	53.3%	57.7%	+22.6%	YES

Note: T1 = trimester 1, T2 = trimester 2, T3 = trimester 3

**TABLE 2 POSITIVE LIFE SKILLS AND WORK HABITS REPORT CARD MARKS: 2010-2011**

Report Card 2010-2011	E's T1	Target (+10%)	E's T2	E's T3	% Change	Goal Met?
School A (n = 609)	30.4%	33.8%	39.2%	46.9%	+54.2%	YES
School B (n = 817)	45.6%	50.2%	52.6%	59.0%	+29.3%	YES
School C (n = 901)	57.3%	63.0%	61.9%	67.7%	+18.1%	YES
Average (N = 2327)	44.4%	49.0%	51.2%	57.8%	+33.8%	YES

Note: T1 = trimester 1, T2 = trimester 2, T3 = trimester 3

School discipline referrals were also used to help select students for group counseling interventions. The raw number of discipline referrals for the baseline year (2008-2009) was 287 for School A, 275 for School B, and 246 for School C, for a total of 808 discipline referrals. Students were screened to determine if they might benefit best by participating in the counseling group or in another type of intervention. In some cases, students were already participating in group counseling because their report card behavior marks reflected a previous referral. Once students were selected, school counselors sought parental or guardian consent for each identified child to participate in an 8-week group led by the school counselor or school counseling trainees/staff, with sessions lasting for approximately 35 minutes. During the 2010-2011 school year, 167 students participated in counseling groups. School A served 82 group participants, School B provided groups for 35 students, and School C had 50 students who participated in groups. Each group counseling intervention was created by the school counselor

and was based on student needs as identified during screening processes. Topics included goal setting, self-control, problem solving, and academic skill building. Participating students were monitored over time to evaluate the impact of interventions and to provide additional and/or different services if improvement was not made.

#### Description of Data Collection Methods

Data collection was accomplished utilizing (a) an online report card grading system for Life Skills and Work Habits data, (b) California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data, (c) California Standards Test (CST) scores, (d) individual school site records for discipline referrals, and (e) student information systems for attendance and truancy rates. For purposes of measuring the positive marks on Life Skills and Work

Habits, school counselors researched the number of E's (for Excellent) and S's (for Satisfactory) on the first trimester report cards. However, since enrollment shifted slightly year to year, the percentage (rather than the number) of students who received positive marks was reported. The California Healthy Kids Survey was administered to fifth-grade students every other year and school counselors assessed specific reports on empathy, problem solving, and feelings related to school environment. Grant team members analyzed data quarterly, yearly, and prior to and after completing interventions for students receiving individual services.

#### Evaluation of Grant Goals

The ESSC program was evaluated in each of the three school years the grant was funded, beginning in fall 2009 and ending in spring 2012. Particular

**BY SEEING THE POSITIVE CHANGES IN STUDENT BEHAVIORS THROUGH SECOND STEP LESSONS, TEACHERS WELCOMED THE SCHOOL COUNSELORS INTO THEIR CLASSROOMS.**



**TABLE 3** LEVELS OF EMPATHY AND PROBLEM SOLVING AS REPORTED IN CALIFORNIA HEALTHY KIDS SURVEY

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) Total Average	High 2008-2009	Medium 2008-2009	Low 2008-2009	Target (Increase % High by 10%)	High 2010-2011	Goal Met?
Empathy/Problem Solving: Positive School Environment	37.3%	55.2%	7.3%	41.0%	43.8%	YES

emphasis was placed on year 2 data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The rationale for highlighting second-year data was to garner early support from stakeholders for the allocation of district funds necessary to sustain school counseling services at the end of the third and final year of federal grant funding. Presenting the results of year 2 implementation in the fall of the third year of the grant allowed time for key stakeholders to advocate for the district and school board members to approve new funding to sustain the positions when the grant ended.

## SCHOOL-WIDE RESULTS

Results for this case study presented below report the impact of the grant program on school-wide data. School-wide data include report card ratings by teachers on Life Skills and Work Habits, student self-reported perception data on the CHKS, state standardized test scores in Math and Language Arts, discipline referrals, unexcused absences, and truancy rates. The authors also share results from one school’s group interventions.

### Life Skills and Work Habits

The first school-wide measurement of achieving grant goals was through positive citizenship and work habits marks on report cards, attaining Satisfactory (S) and Excellent (E) marks.

School counselors set a goal of achieving a 10% increase from Trimester 1 to Trimester 3. In the second year of implementation, all three schools had a 33.8% increase in scores of Excellent comparing the first trimester to the last trimester, with School A improving from 30.4% E’s to 46.9%. See Tables 1 and 2 for school-specific gains of E’s received by students at all three schools for years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. The average of the three schools indicates that the school-wide grant goal was met. Targeted interventions also supported this school-wide increase; students receiving five or more Needs Improvement (N) and/or Unsatisfactory (U) marks on their report cards were identified for interventions (see Targeted Group Intervention Results).

### California Healthy Kids Survey

The second school-wide data collected was the fifth grade assessment on the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). In 2009, 37.3% of the students who self-reported were categorized as “high” in the empathy/problem solving and positive school environmental factors on the CHKS. No baseline data existed for one of the three schools (School B) during the baseline year of 2008-2009 because it was a new school that was not open during that school year. CHKS data for 2011 (see Table 3) indicate that 43.8% of the students surveyed reporting “high,” a 41% increase that surpassed the grant goal of a 10% increase.

### Standardized Test Scores

The third school-wide measurement was the number of students who scored proficient and above on the California Standards Tests (CST). The objective was to increase the number of students who scored proficient and above on the CST by 9%. Data analysis (See Tables 4 and 5) required disaggregation to separate Math scores from English Language Arts (ELA) scores. Both categories were disaggregated by grade level, by category, and by school. Although all three schools reported an increase in CST scores, only School C met their goal of increasing by 9% in the first year (2010). In 2011, all schools met their CST ELA goals and two of the three schools met their CST Math goals. In averaging results from all three schools, the overall grant goals of improvement greater than 9% in both Math and ELA were met.

### Discipline Referrals

A 10% decrease over a 3-year period in discipline referrals was proposed for the grant schools. The raw number of discipline referrals for the baseline year (2008-2009) was 287 for School A, 275 for School B, and 246 for School C, for a total of 808 discipline referrals. The goal was to reduce the incidences of discipline by 10% over the three years of grant funding. The target for 2012 (-10%) was 728. In 2009-2010, the total number of discipline referrals decreased by 43%, from 808 in 2009 to 464 in 2010. All three schools on the grant reduced their number of discipline referrals (ranging from 21% to 64%). In 2010-2011, the total number of discipline referrals decreased by 64%, from 808 in 2009 to 289 in 2011. Every school on the grant

**GARNERING ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT EARLY ON WAS EXTREMELY CRUCIAL FOR THE ONGOING SUCCESS OF THE ESSC PROGRAM.**

**TABLE 4** ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) PROFICIENCY LEVELS ON CALIFORNIA STANDARDS TEST (CST)

CST (grades 2-5) Proficient and above	ELA 2008-2009	GOAL (+9%)	ELA 2009-2010	Goal Met?	ELA 2010-2011	Goal Met?
School A	46.0% (n = 603)	50.1%	48.3% (n = 619)	NO	52.0% (n = 609)	YES
School B	54.3% (n = 754)	59.1%	55.3% (n = 787)	NO	72.8% (n = 817)	YES
School C	69.9% (n = 951)	76.1%	76.8% (n = 931)	YES	81.0% (n = 901)	YES
Total (Average)	56.7% (N = 2308)	61.8%	60.1% (N = 2288)	NO	68.6% (N = 2327)	YES

**TABLE 5** MATH PROFICIENCY LEVELS ON CALIFORNIA STANDARDS TEST (CST)

CST (grades 2-5) Proficient and above	Math 2008-2009	GOAL (+9%)	Math 2009-2010	Goal Met?	Math 2010-2011	Goal Met?
School A	66.0% (n = 603)	71.9%	67.0% (n = 619)	NO	65.3% (n = 609)	NO
School B	69.5% (n = 754)	75.8%	71.3% (n = 787)	NO	81.0% (n = 817)	YES
School C	77.3% (n = 951)	84.3%	84.5% (n = 931)	YES	88.0% (n = 901)	YES
Total (Average)	70.9% (N = 2308)	77.3%	74.5% (N = 2288)	NO	78.1% (N = 2327)	YES

reduced their number of discipline referrals (ranging from 64% to 65%). The goal was met (See Table 6).

**Unexcused Absences and Truancy Rates**

The final school-wide data element collected was unexcused absences at all three schools. The grant proposed a 10% decrease in this category over a 3-year period. The raw number of unexcused absences for the 2008-2009 year was 732 for School A, 666 for School B, and 742 for School C, for a total of 2,140 unexcused absences. The goal was to reduce the number of unexcused absences by 10% and the target for 2010 was 1,926 total unexcused absences. In 2009-2010, the total number of unexcused absences increased for all three schools. The largest increase was at School C (+16.8%). However, in 2010-2011, the total number of un-

**THE COUNSELORS AND SOCIAL WORKER FURTHER PROMOTED THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY PRESENTING PROGRAM GOALS AND RESULTS TO THEIR ENTIRE SCHOOL STAFF DURING STAFF MEETINGS.**

excused absences for all three schools showed a significant overall decrease of 39.8%: School A decreased by 64.2%, School B by 37.8%, and School C by 17.5% (See Table 7). The overall goal for the data element was met. Based on the school district’s average daily attendance rates of \$40 per day per student, more than \$40,000 was earned/saved for the school district. Related to this attendance improvement, the number of students classified as truant—receiving three or more unexcused absences in one school year—decreased by

more than half, as 339 students were classified as truant in 2010, and only 137 in 2011.

**Targeted Group Intervention Results**

Although small group intervention impact data was not required as a part of this grant, each school implemented and evaluated the impact of small group interventions. For example, School B’s small group intervention had a total of 54 students participate (35 in 2010 and 19 in 2011). Prior to group, the identified students received a total of 305 Needs Improvement

**TABLE 6** NUMBER OF DISCIPLINE REFERRALS

Referrals	2008-2009	GOAL (-10%)	2009-2010	Goal Met?	2010-2011	Goal Met?
School A	287 ( <i>n</i> = 603)	258	104 ( <i>n</i> = 619)	YES (-64%)	100 ( <i>n</i> = 609)	YES (-65%)
School B	275 ( <i>n</i> = 754)	248	216 ( <i>n</i> = 787)	YES (-21%)	100 ( <i>n</i> = 817)	YES (-64%)
School C	246 ( <i>n</i> = 951)	221	144 ( <i>n</i> = 931)	YES (-41%)	89 ( <i>n</i> = 901)	YES (-64%)
Total	808 ( <i>N</i> = 2308)	728	464 ( <i>N</i> = 2288)	YES (-43%)	289 ( <i>N</i> = 2327)	YES (-64%)

**TABLE 7** TRUANCY RATES

Truancy	2008-2009	GOAL (-10%)	2009-2010	Goal Met?	2010-2011	Goal Met?
School A	732 ( <i>n</i> = 603)	659	742 ( <i>n</i> = 619)	NO (+1.3%)	262 ( <i>n</i> = 609)	YES (-64.2%)
School B	666 ( <i>n</i> = 754)	599	684 ( <i>n</i> = 787)	NO (+2.7%)	414 ( <i>n</i> = 817)	YES (-37.8%)
School C	742 ( <i>n</i> = 951)	668	866 ( <i>n</i> = 931)	NO (+16.8%)	612 ( <i>n</i> = 901)	YES (-17.5%)
Total	2140 ( <i>N</i> = 2308)	1926	2292 ( <i>N</i> = 2288)	NO (+6.6%)	1288 ( <i>N</i> = 2327)	YES (-39.8%)

## WITH THE THREAT OF LOSING SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES THE FOLLOWING YEAR, ADMINISTRATORS HELPED ADVOCATE FOR FUNDING SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS.

(N) and Unsatisfactory (U) marks on their first trimester report card. After intervention, their third trimester report card data revealed only 212 N's and U's—a reduction of 30%. These students also demonstrated improvement in “effort” marks on their report card for showing more discipline and dedication to their math and language arts work (also rated on the E, S, N, U scale). In addition, more than half (63%) of the fourth- and fifth-grade students who received group interventions showed improvement on their Language Arts portion of the CST when compared to the previous year. In 2010, the average score for students receiving interventions was 329; scores improved to 356 in 2011—an average gain of more than 25 points.

## DISCUSSION

During their 3 years as grant-funded school counselors, each school counselor became integrated into the schools as they supported improved school climate and were referred to as esteemed colleagues on the team. They participated on school site team meetings including the parent teacher organization, school site council, and leadership teams, and were also integrated into school-wide activities. Teachers openly shared their appreciation of the support of students' social and emotional needs, which allowed them more time to focus on teaching.

Administrators were particularly impressed that the school counselors and social worker both collected and shared

data on improved attendance and the reduction of behavior referrals and suspensions. They believed this information was an eye-opener for teachers and staff about the positive effects of prevention and intervention programs. Successes were celebrated school wide and these behavior improvements were viewed as contributing factors of the academic increases of students.

Although class time and instructional minutes are highly coveted in the educational setting, by seeing the positive changes in student behaviors through Second Step lessons, teachers welcomed the school counselors into their classrooms. School counselors also provided teachers with behavioral interventions to be implemented in the class setting, which was a huge support to the staff. As school counselors became influential adults on campus, students self-referred when they had a problem or challenge such as family changes, arguments with friends, or bullying. Parents also became more receptive to working with the school counselors and social worker to support their children and



actively pursued the support. During 2010-2011 (year 2), 413 parent/guardian attendees participated in the variety of parent workshops coordinated by the school counselors and school social worker, a reportedly large increase from previous years (although no specific data had been collected previously), demonstrating improvement in the home-school connection. Overall, the services provided by the school counselors and social worker helped develop and refine a three-tiered model for behavioral and social/emotional interventions, while positively contributing to the school-wide climate and culture.

The ESSC grant team in this selected southern California school district purposefully and meaningfully shared the successes of the school counseling program with key school stakeholders, with the specific intention of continuing the school counseling program services at the conclusion of federal funding. Garnering administrative support early on was extremely crucial for the ongoing success of the ESSC program. At the beginning of the grant, each school counselor met with his or her site's principal and assistant principal, along with the project director and external evaluator, to discuss the program's missions and goals and gain buy-in. School counselors communicated with site administrators regularly to update them on the program activities and share results. The counselors and social worker further promoted the services provided by presenting program goals and results to their entire school staff during staff meetings. The ESSC program team received positive feedback from administrators, teachers, and families on the services provided and ongoing progress.

The positive results collected and the support of school administration helped to fully realize the goal of implementing an assessment-based, results-driven, comprehensive school counseling program that would serve as a catalyst and model for expansion throughout the district. At the start of the third year, with the threat of losing school counseling services the following year, administrators helped ad-

vocate for funding school counseling programs. The grant team attended a meeting with the district superintendent of instructional services, the director of curriculum and instruction, the director of student services, and all three site principals. At this hour-long meeting, the school counselors, school social worker, and program evaluator presented a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that included straightforward charts and graphs. The team showed process, perception, and outcome data to explain the progress towards program goals, how they were being addressed, and the positive results achieved from the first two years. Decreases in truancy rates were

nia budget crisis, which has contributed to the decrease and even elimination of school counselors in districts throughout the state (Murphy, 2011), the school district in this case study chose to continue their school counseling programs at all three schools and expand services to a middle school after federal funding diminished. The success of the programs presented in this study is attributed to the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of a school counseling program aligned with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005; 2012) and the strategic decision to present positive program results early in the process to key central office administration.

## IMPROVEMENTS IN STUDENT ATTENDANCE SINCE THE START OF THE ESSC PROGRAM EARNED/SAVED NEARLY \$40,000 FOR THE DISTRICT.

emphasized, highlighting the growth in Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Improvements in student attendance since the start of the ESSC program earned/saved nearly \$40,000 for the district. During this meeting, the grant team also explained the potential impact of discontinuing the program when the federal funding ceased at the close of the school year and suggested alternative funding scenarios for program continuation. Based on site administrator support and the positive data presented, the school district agreed to not only fund but also expand the elementary school counseling program to service the feeder middle school after grant funds ended.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

California has the highest ratio of students to school counselors in the nation, at 1,016 students per counselor (ASCA, 2011). Yet, despite the Califor-

The success of garnering sustainability is also attributed to effective marketing of the ESSC program. The school counselors created websites for each of their schools, which shared the program mission and services, introduced the staff, provided resources and promoted program results (as they became available). Bilingual brochures with this same information were created and readily available for families and staff. A Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC)—“a continuous improvement document sponsored by the California Department of Education and the Los Angeles County Office of Education” (California Department of Education, 2014)—was created for each school, publicizing the school program by highlighting services and results. This document was disseminated to school staff, families, school board members, and community partners. School counselors also periodically and informally shared program successes with school communities, school board members, and key district staff. For example, one school counselor spoke during open session at a school board meeting about the successful College

and Career Day, including improvements in students' knowledge of two or more careers. During National School Counseling Week, another school counselor displayed declines in students' behavior referrals after participating in a group, thanking school staff for supporting the school counseling program and providing cookies.

## THE SCHOOL COUNSELORS CREATED WEBSITES FOR EACH OF THEIR SCHOOLS, WHICH SHARED THE PROGRAM MISSION AND SERVICES, INTRODUCED THE STAFF, PROVIDED RESOURCES AND PROMOTED PROGRAM RESULTS.

The team also wrote an article about their program implementation, which was featured in *The California School Counselor* magazine, and contacted the local newspaper to feature several school programs that were implemented by the school counselors. The counselors and social worker were also selected to present their programs and results at the California Association of School Counselors' annual conference. Each of these marketing activities was intended to promote understanding of and gain buy-in to the ESSC program by school staff, families, school board members, district personnel, and community members. Through this publicity, school counseling services were well defined and understood and, therefore, recognized as important and essential to promoting well-rounded student development.

Regular and purposeful ESSC team meetings were another essential part of the effectiveness of the grant implementation, evaluation, and sustainability. During the first year, meetings took place every other week to address program implementation, create action plans, review data, and consult about ethical situations. The grant team created a mission statement and designed school-specific core curriculum action plans addressing academic, career, and personal/social student development domains. Once referral, attendance, and report card data were available

and analyzed, the grant team identified specific needs and designed intentional guidance action plans to address these needs via group counseling and other supports. School counselors also made yearly calendars for each school site, incorporating events throughout the year such as Red Ribbon Week, Stand Up to Bullying Month, and College

and Career Day. The bimonthly planning meetings allowed the grant team to continually review each school's action plans and yearly calendars, while also analyzing data.

The school district's technology department set up a system for the school counselors to easily access academic and behavior (Life Skills and Work Habits) grades of all their students, which was extremely valuable in accessing data, and therefore analyzing it. The skill level in accessing and analyzing data varied between members of the ESSC team, and regular meetings allowed school counselors to support one another. By regularly examining the data, the grant team monitored program success in order to continue implementing components that showed positive results. This also helped them recognize areas for improvement as the program progressed, helping ensure that goals were met. During the second and third year of the grant, meetings took place monthly, but continuing meetings every other week might have supported further consistency of implementation and school counselor and social worker role definition, which is noted as a concern below.

## LIMITATIONS

One of the important clarifications necessary in this study is the varying

ways in which each ESSC team member responded to the specific needs of the student populations served by the grant. Each school counselor delivered the curriculum and held group counseling sessions a bit differently to accommodate differing school cultures and administrator requests. For example, at some grade levels at grant schools the counselors led all of the Second Step classroom lessons, while at other sites, the teachers, school counseling trainees, and/or other counseling staff taught the lessons. Some schools and grades received weekly lessons, while others received lessons every other week. The curriculum implementation differences may have impacted the outcome results, but to what degree is not known. The role of the school social worker also varied slightly at each school based on site administration expectations, which at times impacted the social worker's ability to focus primarily on student attendance and other high-need situations. At School A, where the social worker's responsibilities were most clearly aligned with the grant, the largest reduction in unexcused absences (64%) was seen. The authors recommend greater consistency in program implementation by grant team members to determine if this provides more reliable results and supports greater student improvements.

The results shared herein were designed for use in program evaluation only, not research (Weiss, 1998). The outcome data were collected and shared through a systematic assessment that aligns with the fundamental elements of program evaluation, and the data are not intended to imply or attribute outcomes to causation (Weiss, 1998). Continual evaluation will be needed to assess the impact of the school counseling programs in these schools over time. Evaluating the expansion of the program to the middle school will be important to determine the relationship between the school counseling services and any improvements in attendance, behavior, and achievement. Finally, research is recommended to determine whether

shifts in data at these three schools differs greatly when compared with data at other schools in the district that did not have elementary school counseling programs.

## CONCLUSION

This case study presents one example of program implementation and evaluation conducted by practicing school counselors in consultation with their program evaluator. It tells the story of how a comprehensive, evidenced-based school counseling program that aligns with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005; 2012a) can be developed, analyzed, marketed, and sustained. This study also demonstrates and validates the importance of collecting data and sharing results with appropriate stakeholders to create awareness of services and to highlight obtained results. The authors encourage practicing school counselors to recognize the importance of analyzing and presenting results data to strengthen and promote the sustainability of their school counseling programs. ■

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