<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Keys Strands</th>
<th>Actions, Strategies, Interventions</th>
<th>Timeline/When will target be reached?</th>
<th>Estimated Costs, Funding Sources, and Resources</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Evaluation of Implementation and Impact on Student Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I 2.II.2.6</td>
<td>Provide research or evidence-based interventions targeted to student needs (HeadSprout, Early Success, Soar to Success, Sidewalks Read Naturally, etc.).</td>
<td>August 2013-May 2014</td>
<td>Professional Learning Funds Title IIA, Title I, IDEA</td>
<td>Principal, Asst. Principals, Teachers, Interventionists, Special Education Administrators</td>
<td>Intervention data reports, Fidelity checks</td>
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<tr>
<td>I 2.II.2.6</td>
<td>Explore and potentially pilot specialized and research-based curriculums or interventions for SWDs.</td>
<td>August 2013-May 2014</td>
<td>Professional Learning Funds, GLRS, Title IIA, Title I, IDEA</td>
<td>Principal, Asst. Principals, Teachers, Interventionists, Special Education Administrators</td>
<td>Consultant presentations, meeting agendas/sign in sheets, teacher surveys, inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFC 1.1</td>
<td>Increase parental involvement.</td>
<td>August 2013-May 2014</td>
<td>Professional Learning Funds, Consultants, Title I, Title IIA, IDEA</td>
<td>Principal, Asst. Principals, Teachers</td>
<td>Agendas, Sign in sheets, Electronic communication documentation, Ident-A-Kid System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL 1</td>
<td>Develop and Implement Career Awareness Lessons for all students grades 1-5; 5th grade students will produce career portfolios.</td>
<td>August 2013-May 2014</td>
<td>Professional Learning Funds, Title IIA, Title I, IDEA, State &amp; Local Funds</td>
<td>Principal, Asst. Principals, Teachers</td>
<td>Lesson Plans, Essays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCHOOL:** David Evans Elementary School  
**PRINCIPAL:** Larry Mullen Jr., Principal
## SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Based, and Time-Bound) GOAL

**WHAT IN THE SCHOOL-LEVEL DATA SUGGEST THAT THIS SHOULD BE A GOAL?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Keys</th>
<th>Actions, Strategies, Interventions</th>
<th>Timeline/When will target be reached?</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strands</td>
<td>Provide extra instructional time by certified staff for students who want or need additional help through before and after school tutoring.</td>
<td>Aug 2012- May 2013</td>
<td>Local Funds Instructional Extension Funds</td>
<td>ELA Teachers</td>
<td>Posters showing tutoring days times (posted thru out building)Sign-in sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage students in weekly writing assignments reflecting CCGPS Math requirements for students to use written expression to explain and justify mathematical reasoning.</td>
<td>Aug 2012- May 2013</td>
<td>Professional Learning Funds Title IIA</td>
<td>Administrations, Academic Coaches, Dept. Heads, Teachers</td>
<td>Student examples of weekly writing assignments with teacher feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage students in multi-disciplinary science, math, technology and agriculture (STEM) activities, lessons and projects with real-world applications to increase student engagement and achievement.</td>
<td>Aug 2012- May 2013</td>
<td>Grant partners including post-secondary professors, local industry and farming leaders</td>
<td>Central office, Administrators, STEM Coordinator GaDOE, Academic Coaches</td>
<td>Student work samples Meeting minutes from STEM Grant Governance Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase rigor and prepare students for college through the promotion of AP Math courses</td>
<td>Aug 2012- May 2013</td>
<td>Local Funds AP teacher training grant</td>
<td>AP Teachers</td>
<td>Student rosters, schedules Lesson Plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Culturally Competent Responsive Services to Improve Student Achievement and Behavior

This article illustrates standards blending, the integration of core academic and school counseling standards, as a culturally alert responsive services strategy to assist in closing the achievement gap while also enhancing employability skills and culturally salient career competencies. The responsive services intervention described in this article resulted in knowledge gains in both the school counseling and language arts curriculum competencies for a diverse group of 78 high school students. The article includes implications for school counseling practice.

The clarion call to respond to the needs of diverse students and to remove the barriers to student success has reverberated throughout the national and local educational arenas (Crethar, 2010; Education Trust, 1997; Howard & Solberg, 2006; Martin & Robinson, 2011; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001; Ratts, deKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006). Delivering culturally competent responsive services to improve student academic performance and to address behaviors that act as barriers to achievement is an essential element of a school counseling program's arsenal for addressing the numerous needs associated with the achievement gap (Chen-Hayes, Miller, Bailey, Getch, & Erford, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Once student needs are identified, school counselors can collaborate with stakeholders in the school and community to plan and provide appropriate interventions (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2008, 2010; Bryan & Henry, 2008; Epstein, Sanders, & Sheldon, 2007; Griffin & Steen, 2010; Grothaus & Cole, 2010; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Ideally, school counselors select and evaluate their evidence-based instructional and behavioral interventions based on relevant data and use desired outcomes as a guide or goal (Grothaus, Crum, & James, 2010; Stone & Dahir, 2011). Best practice for school counseling also involves recognizing and responding to the central role of culture “as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and attitudes in schools” (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2005, p. 22). This can be facilitated via the employment of culturally responsive instructional and classroom management strategies to promote student development and learning (Bennett, 2007; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005; Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Robles de Melendez & Beck, 2010; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004).

Standards Blending—A Culturally Competent Responsive Service

One such strategy is standards blending, an empirically supported, culturally sensitive responsive intervention that can be used to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). School counselors systematically identify and blend specific core academic standards with school counseling standards in a culturally competent manner to create integrated lessons that assist students across curricula. This integration of academic and school counseling standards can also assist in aligning school counseling programs with academic achievement while addressing the achievement gap (Hines & Fields, 2004; Schellenberg, 2007, 2008; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). As a focused responsive service strategy, it is also aligned with the response to intervention (RTI) process to assist in improving student achievement and behavior (ASCA, 2008).

To enhance the cultural responsiveness of the lessons, standards blending seeks to establish “direct connections between the daily lives of students outside the classroom and the content of instruction…. These connections also afford the teacher (and counselor) to learn the cultural backgrounds… (of) each set of students” (Erickson, 2005, p. 47). Researchers have linked this type of approach to the development of background knowledge, intrinsic interest, and higher order intelligence, and to greater academic achievement and a heightened motivation toward learning (Marzano, 2004;
Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). To gain the awareness and knowledge necessary to implement lessons likely to resonate with students’ values, beliefs, and experiences, school counselors are encouraged to be active in the school’s communities (Erickson, 2005; McAuliffe, Grothaus, Pare, & Wininger, 2008; Vera et al., 2006). School counselors also can garner greater understanding by seeking the wisdom and experiences of the students and bicultural resource people in the school and community (Day-Vines, Patton, & Baytops, 2004; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Standards blending is illustrated here using a large group intervention with four classes of public high school students of diverse race and ethnicity, gender, educational level, and academic strengths. An examination of the school’s student outcome data indicated that a disproportionate number of students of color and students receiving special education services were not experiencing success in language arts and were also struggling to meet positive behavioral expectations in specific career and technical education (CTE) classes. Consultation with the CTE faculty led to a decision to implement a Tier 2 focused response (i.e., from the multi-tiered RTI approach, a supplemental/strategic intervention addressing students at some risk) (ASCA, 2008; Jenkins, 2007). Given the call to infuse culturally relevant career domain interventions into core curriculum (Akos et al., 2011) and the evidence that students may foreclose early on some career possibilities based on race and ethnicity, gender, and social class (Jackson & Grant, 2004), a culturally sensitive career related theme was chosen. The school counselor (the lead author of this study) designed a large group intervention (Delivery System), which focused on established employability skills (Akos et al.; Cobia & Henderson, 2008; Gysbers & Lapan, 2009; Hughey, 2005) and select language arts and school counseling curriculum standards and competencies (Foundation). The intervention utilized both curriculum and closing the achievement gap action plans (Management), and curriculum and closing the achievement gap results reports (Accountability) (ASCA, 2005).

METHOD

Study Design
The goal of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the Improving Academic Achievement and Employability Skills program with regard to enhancing student performance in language and the career development curriculum, while also seeking to improve student behavior. Program evaluation with a pre- and posttest design utilizing descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test allowed the investigators to purposefully and systematically collect and analyze data to determine whether the intervention was effective for the target population in this school setting. In addition to examining the aggregated data for all participants, the investigators analyzed scores for groups who have experienced a gap in achievement, specifically African American and Latino/a students and those receiving special education services.

Participants
The Improving Academic Achievement and Employability Skills classroom guidance lesson was designed and implemented by the first author for 78 high school students, grades 9-12, who were enrolled in the four classes targeted by the responsive intervention. All participants were students in the public, urban high school where the first author was employed. The high school, located in a southeastern U.S. state, had an enrollment of approximately 1700 students. The community consists of a wide range of socioeconomic levels. The school’s demographics include: White, non-Latino/a (69%); African-American (25%); Latino/a (2%); Asian/Pacific Islander (2%); American Indian/Alaskan Native (1%); unspecified (1%). The demographics of the participants in this study included: White, non-Latino/a (60%); African American (36%); Asian/Pacific Islander (3%); and Latino/a (1%). A proportionally representative percentage of participants were receiving special education services (18%) and gender ratio was almost even (49% female; 51% male).

Procedures and Curriculum Content
The curriculum, which focused on employability skills, was designed in response to outcome data that indicated a need to enhance the academic performance of low achieving students (i.e., those with below benchmark scores on standardized tests) in language arts. Teachers also reported a desire for improved student behavior in particular career and technical education (CTE) classes. The curriculum content choices were made after consultation with faculty. In addition, culturally valued skills and activities were infused in the lesson. The learning objectives were determined by using a blend of the National Standards for the English Language Arts (NCTE, 1996) and the National School Counseling Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The four classes each met one time for 60 minutes. Figure 1 shows the action plan, which lists details including the curriculum content and core academic and ASCA standards addressed in the group sessions.
Principals can't lead the school improvement process alone. They must enlist the help of others in the school community. School counselors, whose role is often viewed as peripheral and isolated from teaching and learning, can help principals, teachers, students, and parents balance the duties and responsibilities involved in continuous student growth and performance.

In the last 10 years, school counselor education has shifted from a focus on individuals to a systemic view, partially in response to the absence of counselors' voices in the school improvement process, the lack of organization in school counseling programs, and the failure of the profession as a whole to address the issue of student achievement (Brown & Trusty, 2005). This shift was engendered by the work of the Education Trust and the development of a national model by Campbell and Dahir (1995) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), which defined a school counseling program as comprehensive, developmental, driven by data, and aligned to the primary mission of the school.

### Challenges

Training is one of the major challenges to partnerships between school counselors and principals. School counselors who were trained before the implementation of the ASCA standards may need ongoing training to understand their roles and responsibilities in the school improvement process. Inappropriate duties, such as testing coordination and data clerical roles, may be required of counselors who have fallen victim to an old model of counseling. Principals' training may not have made them aware of the professional competencies of school counselors. School counselors and principals must discuss their professional skills—such as data analysis, goal setting, conflict management, and team building—and how they can be employed in the school improvement process.

The challenge of understanding the new roles often begins in university training programs, in which there has been little or no collaboration between counselor education programs and educational leadership programs. Although both programs are often housed in the same department, seldom do principal interns and counselors-in-training attend common classes and there is little focused dialogue about how to train counselors and principals to understand each others' roles and responsibilities (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001; Kaplan, 1995; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

### Call to Action

In response to the lack of collaboration between training programs and an understanding of the complexities of the demands placed upon principals, we have begun experimenting with ways to create meaningful interaction between school counselor interns and principal interns at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. During a seminar held in spring 2006, a group of school counselor interns and a group of principal interns discussed the professional competencies of school counselors and principals in an attempt to identify ways that they can work together to improve schools. The interns compared the Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards to the ASCA standards and studied a list of appropriate duties for counselors from Kathy Cox, the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools (personal communication, May 25, 2005).

As a follow-up activity, principal interns were asked to note how principals in their assigned schools were engaging school counselors. In their next class, the interns reported on the strategies being used by principals and school counselors in the school improvement process that capitalized on the professional roles of counselors. Following are brief descriptions of the appropriate practices principals are using to balance the duties of school leadership.
Talk Walk

One busy principal found a way to exercise while building relationships with students in an after-school detention program. Students assigned detention for minor infractions of the code of conduct spent 30 minutes of the detention hour walking on the school’s track (or an inside walking trail on days of inclement weather) with an assigned mentor, who was a teacher, a community volunteer, or an administrator. The principal used the time to build relationships with students by listening to them talk about their school performance.

The school counselor organized this program as part of the school improvement goal to reduce infractions that kept students out of class. The counselor, using baseline data, tracked the numbers of students who were assigned to the after-school detention program and found that the number of students who violated classroom infractions decreased by 58% over a three-year period. The counselor trained the mentors who walked with the students to focus on listening to students talk about their perceptions of their academic performance in the school. Those mentors referred students to the counselor if they needed help setting goals to improve their academic performance. Teachers in the school viewed this after-school detention program as a major contributor to the school improvement goal.

Supporting Hispanic Students

Recognizing that the graduation rate for Hispanic students in Georgia was 56.3% (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004), a counselor worked with the school improvement team to develop strategies to address the needs the school’s Hispanic students. The counselor coordinated tutorial services for students and organized a meeting of Hispanic parents in the community to explain the accountability system and testing requirements in high school courses. The counselor also worked with the Spanish teacher to develop a Hispanic counseling center within the school, in which students in advanced Spanish classes serve as peer tutors for Hispanic students. At the suggestion of several students in tutoring program, the counselor created a student handbook in Spanish that addressed questions often asked by students and parents about such things as college application procedures, admissions requirements, and career training needs.

The reduction of the number of dropouts—a school improvement goal—is largely attributed to the counseling program goals that aligned with the school improvement plan. The principal views the counselor as a "lifesaver" and collaborates with the counselor often in sustaining school improvement goals.

Training Student Leaders

As student council sponsors, the school counselor and the social studies teacher used the student council election as experiential learning in governmental processes. The school counselor provided training in leadership skills to the newly elected council.

To further the learning process, the counselor and the teacher approached the principal about forming an executive committee of student council members to involve student leaders and enhance communication between administrators and students. The executive committee met with the principal biweekly and used the time to convey ideas and concerns from the student body to the principal. The principal, in turn, shared concerns, discussed upcoming events, and enlisted the support of students during their meetings. Several projects came out of this alliance, such as an anti-bullying effort. By the end of the school year, the number of reported incidents dropped by more than half. Behavior referrals in general had also dropped by about 30%.

Implications

Principals who work with counselors to sustain school improvement create partnerships that can greatly affect the quality of life for everyone within the school community. First, however, principals must understand the potential that school counselors have to effect change. This requires an open dialogue between the principal and the school counselor.

School counselors must become self-advocates for their professional skills, adherence to professional standards, and contributions to the school environment. Given the current emphasis on standards and accountability, school counselors must also learn how to discuss students’ development and use data to support their assertions (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994).

University training programs must emphasize the contributions that principal–school counselor partnerships can make to teaching and learning. Partnerships between educational leadership and school counseling training programs are models that can be repeated at the elementary, middle level, and high school levels. Principals must tap the resources that incoming school counselors offer, and new principals should expect that school counselors have more to offer than merely fulfilling their traditional roles of testing administrators and record clerks.
Reflection and Summary
For a principal to engage a school counselor in the school improvement process, both must understand the roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of their professions. Their dialogue may begin by agreeing on the counselor's roles and responsibilities. They need to address differences that may lead to conflict and the ineffective use of energy, time, and skills, and they must discuss confidentiality issues and student advocacy. The school counselor should have counseling plans and goals that are aligned with the school improvement plan, and the principal and the school counselor should agree on how those goals contribute to student achievement and progress.

During the spring seminar, principal interns reflected on the practices they had described and realized that principals who recognized the knowledge and skills of school counselors and who engaged them in the school improvement process helped distribute leadership. Not only were the leadership responsibilities shared but also the synergy that comes from collaborative efforts energized stakeholders. Principals can alleviate the professional isolation inherent in their roles by engaging counselors in appropriate roles to improve conditions for teaching and learning within the school. By doing so, principals are building capacity within the school to sustain school renewal.

References

Appropriate-Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors

**Appropriate Activities for School Counselors**
- Individual student academic program planning
- Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests
- Counseling students who have discipline problems
- Collaborating with teachers to present guidance curriculum lessons
- Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems
- Analyzing disaggregated data for goal setting
- Advocating for students at IEP meetings

**Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors**
- Registration and scheduling of all new students
- Coordinating or administering cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests
- Performing disciplinary actions
- Teaching classes when teachers are absent
- Helping perform clerical duties in the principal's office
- Data entry
- Preparing IEPs

Source: Adapted from Kathy Cox memo, personal communication, May 25, 2005.
## ASCA Closing-the-Gap Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Impact on Academics, Behaviors or Attendance</th>
<th>ASCA Student Competency</th>
<th>ASCA Domain/Standard</th>
<th>District/Building SIP Goals</th>
<th>Type of Activity to be Delivered in What Manner?</th>
<th>Resources Needed</th>
<th>Projected Number of Students Affected (Process data)</th>
<th>Evaluation Method - How Will You Measure Results? (Perception and results data)</th>
<th>Project Start/Project End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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