# ALL HANDS ON DECK: A COMPREHENSIVE, RESULTS-DRIVEN COUNSELING MODEL

*A graduation rate of 49% alarmed Sunnyside High School in 2009. With graduation rates in the bottom 5% statewide, Sunnyside was awarded a federally funded School Improvement Grant. The "turnaround" principal and the school counselors aligned goals with the ASCA National Model through the program All Hands On Deck (AHOD), based on academic press, social support, and relational trust. In 2012, 78.8% of students graduated. This case study describes student success resulting from the counselor-led program AHOD.*

n 2009, Sunnyside High School (SHS) in Sunnyside, Washington, struggled with a graduation rate of only 49%. Yet in 2011, 78.8% of Sunnyside's seniors graduated. Before this shift, the school's dedicated counselors had tried numerous interventions common to most high schools, including sending letters to parents, making phone calls to students' homes, and having one-on-one conversations with students at crucial junctures. However, they did so without having an overarching plan, and graduation rates remained stagnant. An examination of the reasons for the extraordinary shift in graduation rates in two years was warranted.

A case study was conducted by the turnaround principal, the vice principal in charge of the counseling department, SHS school counselors, and researchers from Gonzaga University. The study, written largely by the Gonzaga researchers with contributions from the above-mentioned stakeholders, describes a program implemented by the counseling department in an effort to answer the following question: How did a school-counselor-led, school-wide program, All Hands On Deck (AHOD), increase high school graduation rates?

**Charles Salina, Ph.D.**, is an associate professor with the School of Education at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA. E-mail salina@gonzaga.edu **Suzann Girtz, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Gonzaga University. **Joanie Eppinga** is a research assistant at Gonzaga University. From Sunnyside High School in Sunnyside, WA, **David Martinez** is an assistant principal; **Diana Blumer Kilian, Elizabeth Lozano,** and **Adrian P. Martinez** are school counselors; **Dustin Crowe** is a school psychologist; **Maria De La Barrera** is a school social worker; **Maribel Madrigal Mendez** is a migrant graduation specialist; and **Terry Shines** is an intervention counselor.

# BEGINNING THE TURNAROUND

In 2009, SHS applied for a School Improvement Grant (SIG). To be eligible for a SIG, schools had to be engaged in school improvement and qualify for Title 1. To qualify for the grant, schools had to either be in the bottom 5% based on their combined state math and reading assessment scores during the previous 3 years of testing or have an average graduation rate that was below 60% for the previous 3 years. The latter criterion was the one met by SHS: the school's

that he continued to fulfill his teaching obligations in higher education, and that the university would provide resources to SHS to assist in the change process. The SIG specified that the principal was to be given freedom from regular district duties and could implement new programs and ideas believed to be effective in improving students' academic achievement and graduation rates.

When the turnaround principal arrived at Sunnyside at the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year, approximately 21% of juniors were on track to graduate and less than 50% of seniors were on track to graduate. The principal discussed with the school

willing to give new methods a chance. Those methods included using data to identify school counseling goals, serving as advocates for students and teachers, increasing collaboration among stakeholders, emphasizing accountability, and embracing systemic change, all of which are recommended in the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012).

The school team formed in an organic way. Members of the counseling department, like those of each department in the high school, began by developing the team purpose, group norms, and semester goals for their professional learning community (PLC). The PLC meetings, which were held once a week for one hour and 40 minutes, clarified how to operationalize the new counseling model. Data such as graduation rate, course grades, attendance rate, and discipline referrals helped school counselors to focus on the nature of their work. Team members in addition to the school counselors included the school psychologist, a migrant specialist, an intervention specialist, and a school social worker. One of the assistant principals became part of the counselors' PLC. His job was not to control or lead direction; rather, he was there to listen and provide support.

> ## COUNSELORS WERE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE LEADERSHIP RISKS AND TO BEHAVE AUTONOMOUSLY AT THE SAME TIME THAT THEY COLLABORATED WITH ONE ANOTHER AND ADMINISTRATORS.

graduation rates were at 46% in 2007, 49.9% in 2008, and 49% in 2009. The SIG, which consisted of more than $5 million disbursed over a period of 3 years, was awarded to SHS in 2009. The grant required the school to replace their principal with a "turnaround" principal in hopes of raising student achievement and the graduation rate. The education professional chosen to be SHS's turnaround principal was selected by an interview committee made up of Sunnyside community members, teachers, and administrators. He was hired in part because the previous year he had acted as a consultant for SHS's intervention program, which was directed toward some of Sunnyside's most academically at-risk students, and was known to the administrators. He also was a professor at Gonzaga University, a liberal arts university that was interested in partnering with SHS to improve student performance. A memorandum of understanding established that the university professor would be the turnaround principal at the same time

counselors the importance of supporting and monitoring all students continuously and suggested that, together, he and the counselors would determine changes needed to support such a system. Aspiring to servant-leadership as explicated by Greenleaf (1970, 1996), the principal sought buy-in by reminding school counselors of their mission, acting on their suggestions, and using persuasion. One is persuaded, according to Greenleaf, "upon arriving at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through one's own intuitive sense" (p. 139), a process the principal encouraged by engaging in one-on-one conversations and listening carefully to school counselors' questions and concerns. The principal also cultivated the counselors' strengths, acknowledging their experience and expertise, which Lewis and Hatch (2008) asserted is behavior that results in school counselors' building "educational environments grounded in the belief that all students have learning power" (p. 115). Because the principal showed them respect, the counselors were

# THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ALL HANDS ON DECK

In order to effect the dramatic improvements that Sunnyside so needed, the turnaround principal and the assistant principal in charge of the counseling department collaborated with the school counselors to create, specifically for Sunnyside, a program they called All Hands On Deck (AHOD), which was designed to improve student performance by:
- redefining the role of the school counselor,
- creating academic press,

- strengthening social support, and
- fostering relational trust.

The following section discusses the theoretical framework of these four strategies and the implementation section, which follows the theoretical framework, discusses the specific ways in which these theories were implemented at SHS.

### Theory of the Counselor's Role

The role of the school counselor has long been clouded in ambiguity (Lambie, 2007; Lieberman, 2004; Trolley, 2011), as the position's duties and standards have been unspecified (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994, pp. 4-6). To clarify the counselor's role, in 2003 ASCA created a model in which school counselors lead the way in connecting counseling with the educational mission of schools (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2005). The third edition of the ASCA National Model (2012) recommended that school counselors use data to drive program development, implementation, and evaluation; provide direct and indirect services to and for students 80% or more of their time; and infuse the themes of advocacy, collaboration, leadership, and systemic change.

Redefining the roles of school counselors at SHS and shifting their roles so that their program was in alignment with the most recent ASCA National Model was an important part of the turnaround program strategy. The counselors also wove the concepts of academic press, social support, and relational trust into the new framework.

### Theory of Academic Press

*Academic press* consists of the pressures within the school environment to meet academic goals and standards (Shouse, 1996) and includes the extent to which students and teachers feel pressure to achieve academic success (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999). Academic press emphasizes high expectations, accountability, and academic rigor (Lee et al., 1999, p. 5). Under this model, academic excellence is the school-wide norm, and all

stakeholders have a common understanding of academic standards (Lee et al., 1999, pp. 2, 10). Academic press can offer a framework and a vision for students and teachers, providing both groups with the opportunity and motivation to achieve at higher levels. In discussing high academic standards, Natriello and McDill (1986) and Ormberg (2013) reported that effort and achievement, as measured by GPA, increased when standards were raised. Lachat (1999) emphasized that if children are given the necessary motivation and tools, they all have the ability to learn more advanced material. Based on this research, for the purposes of AHOD, the concept of academic press was expanded to include a strong belief in each student's academic potential and the communication of that belief to students by teachers and school counselors.

### Theory of Social Support

*Social support* refers to support students get from each other and from adults in the school (Lee et al., 1999). Social support is important because students "learn more in settings in which they are well known and cared for and in which their social and emotional development is supported" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 1). Researchers also have found that students are more likely to achieve educational goals if they have positive relationships within

ers is an essential aspect of healthy emotional and social development" (p. 126). Teachers' beliefs about their students are an important element of social support, according to Bryk and Driscoll (1988) and Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993). These researchers reported that teachers who showed warmth by talking with students about the students' personal and social lives are more likely to be caring in the classroom as well, resulting in students' feeling supported. To enhance social support, the community can be brought in to contribute to the safety net that helps at-risk students to move toward the goal of graduation. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2010) wrote of "the critical role that school counselors can play in bridging and connecting schools, families, and communities" (p. iv). Once such connections are made, the school begins to feel like a family, creating an increased sense of belonging, which is an important element of high-achieving schools (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998, as cited in Fitch & Marshall, 2004). In sum, the notion of social support is based on the idea that if students have more personal connections at school, they will achieve more. For this reason, Mussoline and Shouse (2001) suggested that schools be restructured in a way that allows them to act as supportive, collaborative, and interdependent teams.

EVERY STUDENT WAS ASSIGNED A "GUARDIAN ANGEL," A MEMBER OF THE COUNSELING PLC WHO WOULD CHECK IN TWO OR THREE TIMES A WEEK.

the schools (Benard, 1999; Dixon & Tucker, 2008; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Lange and Sletten (2002) noted that at-risk youth need relationships with people at school who believe in them, and Edeburn (2010) found that such relationships make students more willing to learn. Dixon and Tucker (2008) asserted, "The powerful experience of mattering to oth-

Academic press and social support are necessary to improve student performance, but they are not enough. The element that binds them together and creates synergy is relational trust.

### Theory of Relational Trust

Relational trust, built between participants through day-to-day interactions (Bryk & Schneider, 2003),

is not simply a feeling of affection, but the conscious regulation of one person's dependence upon another (Zand, 1997) coupled with "reliance on another's good will" (Baier, 1986, p. 234). Bryk and Schneider (2003) elaborated upon this idea, asserting that relational trust is built in the "interrelated set of mutual dependencies" (p. 20) that is present in a school when people have role clarity and meet one another's expectations regarding the obligations of those roles. Bryk and Schneider specified that "trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improves much of the routine work of schools and is a key resource for reform" (p. 114). This sentiment was echoed by Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky (2009), who stated that schools at their core are social institutions whose success is dependent on the character of the relationships fostered within them. They added, "Many efforts to understand and improve academic outcomes for all children fail to focus directly on the important link between the quality of school social relations and the effectiveness of teaching and learning" (p. 293). AHOD was developed in an effort to heighten the focus on the relationship between social relationships and academic success. The relationship among the elements of the conceptual framework is displayed in Figure 1, with the addition of a centralized piece—learning—that emerges when all three come together.

The common goal decided upon by school counselors at SHS was to improve graduation rates by monitoring and supporting students continuously through the application of academic press and social support in an atmosphere of relational trust. The next section details the method employed in carrying out this project.

**FIGURE 1** THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ALL HANDS ON DECK. (SALINA, 2013)
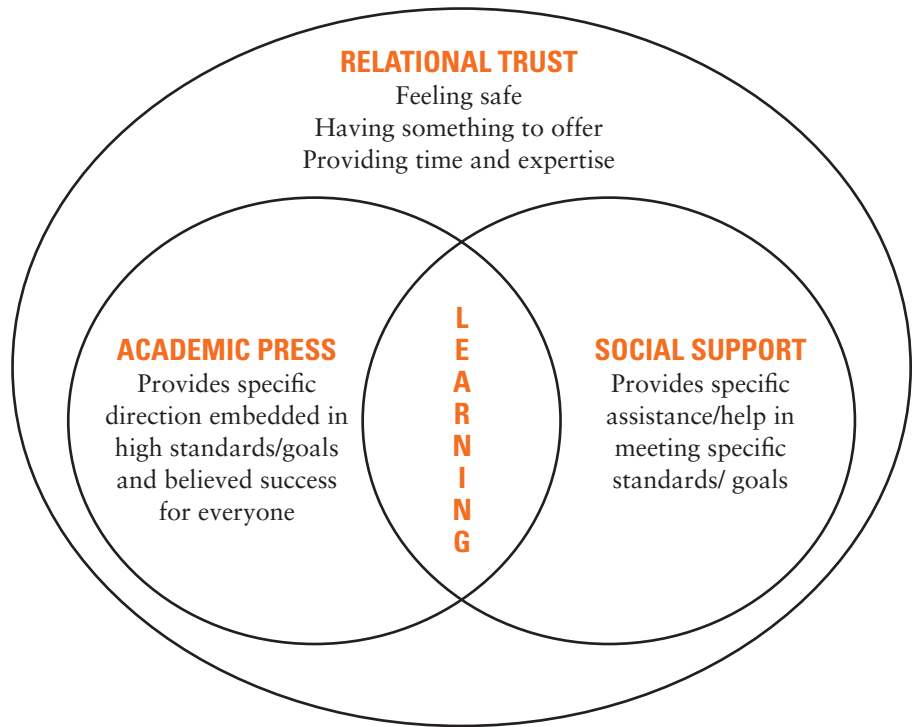
# IMPLEMENTING ALL HANDS ON DECK

The name of the program, All Hands On Deck, suggests its underlying tenets of inclusion, collaboration, and personal responsibility. AHOD was created in an organic process based on the practical experience and research-based knowledge of a scholarly practitioner, the turnaround principal. Leaders of AHOD were the turnaround principal and the assistant principal in charge of the counseling department, and school counselors at SHS who collaborated on implementation of the program. When the study was conducted, the counseling department employed four grade-level school counselors, two bilingual migrant specialists, a school psychologist, a social worker, an intervention counselor, an academic/behavior specialist, a student advocate, and a drug/alcohol counselor.

### Method of Redefining the Counselor's Role

AHOD redefined the role of the school counselor by requiring counselors to attend to the themes of the ASCA National Model: leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012, pp. 1-10). Counselors were encouraged to take leadership risks and to behave autonomously at the same time that they collaborated with one another and administrators. They also advocated for every student to help each individual achieve high academic goals. Finally, counselors used data and new academic programs to create systemic changes that moved students toward graduation.

Leadership. These changes were made in an atmosphere in which risk-taking leadership was approved

**THE PRINCIPAL DEVELOPED A USER-FRIENDLY DATA SYSTEM, CALLED THE DATA DASHBOARD, TO PROVIDE WEEKLY SUMMARIES OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE.**

once relational trust had been built between the assistant principal in charge of the counseling department and the counselors; at that point, the counselors felt free to create systems to support students. AHOD trusted counselors to identify and use their own gifts and skills in projects related to their own interests. The counselors' areas of expertise were identified, and tasks were reassigned to reflect the dispositions of the counselors. Those who enjoyed making home visits made them; those who were more interested in data analysis collected and assessed data. All staff were presumed to have relevant knowledge and were encouraged to contribute.

**Collaboration.** The counseling staff no longer worked in isolation, but rather in collaboration with one another, with teachers, and with administrators. Counselors expressed the belief that the former isolation was one of the primary factors eroding their morale and contributing to the failure of previous interventions. After AHOD was implemented, counselors met on a weekly basis, mirroring the PLC format the leadership team had implemented in academic departments. Additionally, responsibility for seniors was distributed among all counseling staff rather than confining the senior case load to one counselor. Information about the students was also shared more freely among the counseling staff. Programs and processes that capitalized on the counselors' expertise and centered on academic achievement, behavioral management, and social/emotional needs were developed within departments and across the school. Furthermore, specialists at SHS, such as the migrant specialists, were brought in to assist in increasing the attendance and graduation rates. The principal explained to the staff that if a particular system did not work, school counselors and administrators would revise it together and try again.

**Advocacy.** As part of AHOD, every student was assigned a "guardian angel," a member of the counseling PLC who would check in two or three times a week to make sure the student was on track and that his or her learning needs were being met. Assigning an advocate to each student improved communication regarding teacher expectations, and increased support clarified for students what they needed to do to move forward toward graduation. For the counselors, emphasis was laid on being tenacious in communicating to students why they were being placed in a specific program, such as the after-school or the noontime tutorial program. The counselors developed a program that allowed them to act as advocates for students with varying levels of intervention, based on the students' individual needs. As this program unfolded, it came to resemble a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, with Level 1 being the lowest level of intervention and Level 3 representing the highest-need students. As advocates, school counselors identified what was needed for students to graduate, communicated this to the students, and placed students in specific supportive programs that were designed to help them meet the graduation requirements.

**Systemic change.** AHOD included specific systems, such as one that implemented and monitored data collection. Based on the information gathered, school counselors worked with parents, teachers, administrators, and their PLC team to connect all students with programs that provided homework tutoring, outside agency intervention, attendance/tardy support, and team meetings designed to support students in being successful.

The leadership team, consisting of the four vice-principals, a technical vocation director, an athletic director, and the language and mathematics learning coaches, modeled behaviors that were directed toward the common goals, collaboratively identified and agreed upon by the staff, of increased attendance and improved graduation rates. These goals emerged through the school counselors' PLC process and aligned with the overall School Improvement Grant goal of increased graduation rate. Each PLC goal was routinely brought to the leadership team PLC, where the lead administrator of the specific PLC shared the overarching goals, the expected outcome, and the data that would be relied upon to indicate success. Success of the goal was gauged by the evidence collected to support that goal. Evidence was grounded in attendance, increased passage rate, and reduced discipline referrals.

> ## AHOD FOSTERED SOCIAL SUPPORT BY GETTING COUNSELORS INTO THE CLASSROOMS, ENCOURAGING STUDENT LEADERSHIP, AND IMPLEMENTING TARGETED ACADEMIC INITIATIVES.

Once the role of the school counselor had been redefined to allow for autonomy, specialization, and collaboration, the counselors were in a much stronger position to implement academic press, social support, and relational trust.

### Method of Implementing Academic Press

The primary way in which AHOD created academic press was through collection and sharing of data. The principal developed a user-friendly data system, called the Data Dashboard, to provide weekly summaries of student performance, including grade-level reporting of attendance, grades, suspensions, and expulsions. With the mission of improving graduation and attendance rates, school counselors wanted to track data that had the greatest impact on the goals of the program. An advantage SHS had in implementing academic press

was, because of the SIG, four hours had been added to the academic week, extending class time and giving counselors more time to take action based on the data acquired through the Data Dashboard.

The SHS technology department created a custom report in the district's required data retrieval program. The data retrieval program allowed school counselors to create a custom report that provided the data staff had agreed were most relevant to improv-

egorization was a key component of how each counselor monitored his or her caseload—not only for the seniors, but for all students. School-wide and departmental data were sent to administrators on Mondays, discussed at an administrative meeting on Tuesdays, and sent to all PLCs on Wednesdays. On alternate Wednesdays, data were shared with the student council, and every Thursday, attendance data were shared with the whole school via intercom.

iar with each student as a person. In sum, the Data Dashboard supported academic press with outcome data that counselors were able to capitalize on to improve academic scores because they had already built social support and relational trust through their increased knowledge of each student as an individual.

## Method of Implementing Social Support

Armed with outcome data, school counselors assisted in implementing new programs to provide students with social support. AHOD fostered social support by getting counselors into the classrooms, encouraging student leadership, and implementing targeted academic initiatives.

> ## AS TEACHERS FELT INCREASINGLY SUPPORTED, THEY RESPONDED WITH GREATER WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS.

ing graduation rates: percent of all students passing classes, attendance rates, and numbers of discipline referrals. The registrar took those data and formatted them into the dashboard. The dashboard reported timely information by school, department, and students. Based on these data, a simple color-coded system was devised and applied to each student in the school. Counselors collaborated with students to implement graduation contracts created to match each student's color-coded category. Red indicated a student who was deficient in credits, was failing multiple classes, and/or had not met one or more state assessment standards. Yellow represented a student who had credits to make up but was working effectively on credit retrieval, making progress, and following a graduation plan. Orange was the color assigned to a student who needed only to pass a state assessment. Finally, green indicated a student who was on track with graduation requirements. The purpose of the Data Dashboard was not only to identify students' placements on the journey to graduation, but also to serve as a call to action resulting in AHOD's connecting students to appropriate resources and programs both in and outside the school building based on students' individual needs. This system of cat-

Academic data specifying the percent of students passing all classes were disaggregated by grade level and by department on a weekly basis. One category showed the number of students who had one or more failing grades. Along with the attendance data, the academic data were made available to the administrative team each Monday and were shared with the PLC every Wednesday. Posters were displayed in the hallways that showed the weekly percentages of students in each color category.

The reports generated by the Data Dashboard spurred conversations regarding what teachers could do to support all students and reduce the number of failing grades in their classes; the reports also provided school counselors with data on whether the systems of support were having the desired impacts. The counseling department focused particularly on the failure rate and changes in the percentage of students passing classes. The simplicity of the Data Dashboard reports meant viewers were not overwhelmed. The Data Dashboard allowed school counselors to see which departments might be in need of extra support. A final difference from pre-SIG data reports was that students' names were used, allowing teachers and counselors to become more famil-

Whereas previously school counselors called a student down to the office if there was a problem, they now went to the classrooms and had a conversation there with the student, often with the teacher witnessing or participating. The content of that conversation also shifted; previously, counselors had simply informed the student of his or her status, but with the advent of AHOD, counselors coupled that information with offers of support, including access to tutoring, help with credit retrieval, and resources relevant to state testing. These conversations took place in the hallway or in a quiet corner of the classroom to preserve confidentiality. As a result of these conversations, both the teacher and the student came to understand that the counselor was there to advocate for both of them.

As teachers felt increasingly supported, they responded with greater willingness to support students. If the issue at hand was deeply personal, a Success Team meeting was held with the student and appropriate stakeholders, usually parents, teachers, and a school counselor. At this meeting, everyone present contributed to a plan of action, which the counselor monitored by going to the classroom and/or discussing developments with the relevant outside agency.

Staff suspected that another route to increasing social support was strength-

ening leadership among students, so school counselors worked with the math department to develop a mentorship program in which *all* students were challenged to find and use their own leadership interests and talents. Counselors encouraged students to mentor one another, particularly in mathematics, knowing that such mentoring can greatly increase the number of students affected by the counseling program (Karcher, 2009). An earned open-campus option, based on school cleanliness and a 93% attendance rate, could be earned each week. When the attendance and cleanliness goals were deemed to have been achieved by the school custodian and the student leadership team, juniors and seniors were allowed to go off-campus for lunch. This incentive allowed students to have ownership; they encouraged one another to come to school and to be invested. Furthermore, under the terms of the memorandum of understanding, the principal and the assistant principal established a partnership with Gonzaga University in which student leaders at SHS were paired with school counseling graduate students at the university in a mutually beneficial relationship. The university mentors helped the student leaders prepare lessons that the high school students shared with their peers on such topics as "The Power of Choice" and "Relationships."

School counselors also invited past graduates to encourage all students by speaking at assemblies about the value of working hard and staying abreast of credit requirements. No longer just providers of schedules, college reference letters, or one-on-one counseling, school counselors were now allies, colleagues, and collaborators with teachers (Fitch & Marshall, 2008). School counselors began to work more closely with parents as well, seeing them as partners. They contacted parents more often, invited them to witness their students signing the graduation contracts, contacted them about positive as well as negative developments, and invited them to school more often, which fostered social support by creat-

ing a more familial atmosphere.

Finally, school counselors improved social support through specific academic initiatives. For example, staff created Grizzly Time, a 20-minute tutorial session students attended during lunch period. They also identified which academic and/or social support systems (such as credit retrieval and state-testing assistance) were most appropriate for specific students.

## Method of Developing Relational Trust

In an effort to build trust, administrators and school counselors at SHS began being more visible and present. They talked one-on-one with teachers to listen to their concerns and ideas about types of support that would improve teaching and learning. They then integrated teachers' thinking into viable programs grounded in academic

or if the student was in academic trouble, at which time parents would get a certified letter informing them that their child had not met the criteria to graduate. But as a component of AHOD, the counseling team included parents in the education process by making and maintaining personalized communication, with a different intent than in the past.

The team personified the spirit of relational trust by being more deliberate in their conversations with parents, such as during phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, and discussions about graduation contracts. These conversations were no longer viewed primarily as informational opportunities in which school counselors told parents that their child was not on track to graduate. Rather, these were now deeper, two-way conversations among teachers, school counselors,

> ## THE COUNSELING TEAM INCLUDED PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS BY MAKING AND MAINTAINING PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION.

achievement, improved behavior, and addressing social/emotional needs. The more teachers received support in helping students to be successful through academic achievement and social support systems, the more likely the teachers were to reconnect with their students and to offer them assistance and encouragement.

Another important method of developing relational trust involved counselors' reaching out to parents and creating a more inclusive environment at school, as was suggested by Van Velsor and Orozco (2007), who recommended that counselors "take a leadership role in creating communitycentric parent involvement" (p. 22). School counselors visited the families of students, building trust by making sure that parents knew their children's academic statuses and resources available to them. Previously, parents were seen as people who had to be informed only at the scheduled monthly visit,

students, and parents regarding programs the high school had in place to support the student's needs. These programs included a community/parent-run truancy board, tutorial programs, drug rehabilitation systems, and others. School counselors encouraged parents to be on committees that assessed students' senior projects and on those that met with students to hold them accountable for getting to school. Counselors began to see parents as partners in their work, and parents and counselors started to build the reliance on one another that is necessary for relational trust to grow (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

AHOD's use of data also was directed toward creating relational trust. Girtz and Cox (2012) asserted that data can be used as grounds for punishment or as a starting point for growth. They further noted that people must feel safe and data need to be seen as information if changes

are to be made successfully. Counselor actions of listening, giving more time, and incorporating others' ideas changed beliefs previously held by faculty and students about their roles and responsibilities: they now saw themselves as intricately dependent upon and accountable to one another.

# METHOD OF STUDY

Due to the scale and complexity of the SIG efforts, a case study was chosen as a method of inquiry regarding the research question, How did a school-counselor-led, school-wide program, AHOD, increase high school graduation rates? According to Bogdan and Bilken, "a case study is formally defined as a detailed examination of a single setting, single subject, or a particular event" (as cited in Mertler, 2012, p. 90). In 2007, Bogdan and Bilken described a case study as a funnel used by the researcher to examine a variety of data sources to explore the topic (as cited in Mertler, 2009, p. 79). This article describes an action research in the form of a case study

rate of poverty (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI] Report Card, n.d.). The school's student population was more than 88% Hispanic, 11% White, and less than 1% other races/ethnicities. Almost 12% of students were categorized as Transitional Bilingual, and almost 20% were migrant students. Special education services were received by more than 9% of the students. A large proportion of the students' parents, many of whom spoke only Spanish and were employed as migrant farmworkers, worked two or three jobs. A small town with a population of approximately 16,000, Sunnyside struggled with violent crime, as was evidenced by the occurrence of six homicides in the town in 2010 ("Crime in Sunnyside, Washington," 2013). At the time of the study, escalating gang issues and other crimes had resulted in the city's decision to allocate resources that had once been dedicated to youth programs to law enforcement. Students beginning high school typically performed below grade level academically, and many struggled with issues related to discipline and attendance.

employed to report these findings. Further, qualitative perception data were gathered by survey and focus groups using a semistructured interview format.

# RESULTS

The case study accessed quantitative data from the school's records to investigate impact on academic achievement and graduation rates. Those results are reported in Table 1, disaggregated where possible by graduating cohort.

Since AHOD was implemented, the cohort dropout rate decreased to only 8% of the class of 2012. This rate was figured on a cohort beginning in academic year 2010-11, when support systems were put in place. The percentage of all students passing all classes increased from 60% to 78% over the same period. Most important, the percentage of students graduating increased from 64.8% in 2010 to 78.8% in 2012 (OSPI, 2012).

As trust was created, teacher efficacy increased, according to perceptual data reported in a survey administered by the BERC Group (2011). Data indicated that teachers perceived not only themselves but also their peers as making a difference in helping students learn. This same study also indicated that teachers had increased confidence and felt supported by the administration. All three factors that Salina (2013) found were required for relational trust—feeling safe, perceiving that the people one works with have something to offer, and having the sense that others will put in the time necessary to help one achieve success—were present.

Conclusions drawn from this quantitative data were reinforced by qualitative data drawn from a BERC survey and from focus groups. A Likert-scale survey conducted by the BERC group (2011) showed that students' perceptions that teachers cared about them went up 33% from 2010 to 2012. The focus groups were convened for the specific purpose of

RELATIONAL TRUST EMERGED AFTER ADMINISTRATORS AND COUNSELORS SHOWED RESPECT FOR AND INTEREST IN EACH OTHER, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS.

using quantitative data to analyze the impact of All Hands On Deck on student achievement and graduation rates through a program that was grounded in the conceptual framework of academic press, social support, and relational trust. The article also shares themes in the anecdotal data that were derived from focus groups.

### Participants and Setting
All students at SHS were included in the case study. At the time the study was conducted, the school had about 1,800 students. At SHS, more than 95% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, signifying a high

Students at the high school encountered a variety of factors that might inhibit academic achievement, including gang violence, drug/alcohol addiction, low parent educational level, poverty, and extremely low-level math and reading skills.

### Data Collection
Various data sets were used to examine AHOD's impact on graduation rate, including historical data gathered from the high school's data retrieval system. These data included student academic achievement and graduation rates from the state's and school's records. Descriptive statistics were

## TABLE 1 SUNNYSIDE HIGH SCHOOL DATA

| | 2008-2009 | 2009-2010 | 2010-2011 | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grad Rate[1] | 49.7% | 64.8% | 71.5% | 78.8% | est. 81% – 83.4%* |
| Extended Grad Rate[2] | 55.2 | 68.2 | 70.2 | 80.3 | 86%* |
| On Track to Graduate GREEN STUDENTS | Unknown | Unknown | 100/419 | 141/350 | 205/426 |
| Students Passing All Classes | 65% | 60% | 76% | 78% | 74% |

*Sources:*

[1] On-time graduation: OSPI website: http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx#dropoutgrad

[2] Extended graduation rate: http://www.k12.wa.us/ (OSPI 2012 Report

*Note:* The Extended Graduation Rate includes students who graduated after their expected year and uses the size of cohort as the denominator (OSPI, 2012).

\* Based on Sunnyside High School projections

discussing the impact of the SIG in reference to the thematic elements of academic press, social support, and relational trust. The focus groups included all SHS counselors and two interviewers from Gonzaga. Both interviewers coded findings so that repeated answers and thematic responses could be identified. And just as the quantitative data suggested that applying academic press, social support, and relational trust would increase student graduation rates, so did the qualitative data.

Some of the major themes expressed by students, teachers, and counselors in their responses within focus groups included:

1. Accountability through data decreased both student and staff anonymity.
2. A common focus by teachers and counselors ensured that each student was known, cared for, and expected to succeed.
3. Visibility and increased contact time were perceived as an increase in caring.

One counselor summarized the idea of using data to be intentional and aligned in focus, being visible with staff and students, and expecting students to succeed in their work, stating, "We are not an island. We cannot close our doors. We have the same purpose…we can't do that in isolation."

## ONE OF THE UNANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM WAS THE STRONG BUY-IN FROM STUDENTS REGARDING MAKING DATA PUBLIC… "IF SOMEBODY IS A RED, EVERYBODY TRIES TO SUPPORT THEM TO HELP THEM GET TO GREEN."

Girtz and Cox (2012) found that at SHS, relational trust emerged after administrators and counselors showed respect for and interest in each other, teachers, and students as individuals. Girtz and Cox also learned that staff and students felt confident that the data being collected were not going to be used to evaluate them, but rather to reflect upon and support behavior and outcomes intended to move the school closer to its goals.

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of support systems through the lenses of academic press, social support, and relational trust at Sunnyside High School led to perceived and actual gains in graduation rate and student achievement. Before AHOD was implemented, the number of students who were behind academically constituted more than 50% of the student population. The teachers and school counselors were overloaded and in triage mode as they tended at-risk students. Systematic use of data, monitoring of student progress, and timely interventions resulted in a dramatic increase in student academic success as measured by the number of students on track to graduate.

SHS's newfound academic success also increased resources and opportunities for the school as a whole. The increase in pass rates greatly reduced the need for and cost of the online credit retrieval model commonly used by students to catch up with graduation requirements. The total number of online seats was cut in half over three years, which had two primary beneficial effects: (a) the district saved $45,000 each year and (b) the academic intervention program at Sunnyside was reduced from three to two teams, freeing up three teachers for the academic core. Further, the increased course pass rate reduced the need for students to repeat classes in required courses. The resulting cost savings and the ability to reassign teachers led to

students' having access to more electives, additional Advanced Placement classes, and College in the High School courses. These changes were remarkable and valuable in a low-income school.

A study conducted by Parrett and Budge (2012) explored leaders' attempts to meet goals in high-poverty schools. Parrett and Budge found that the factors most critical for improving student achievement were (a) implementing accurate and useful data systems and (b) fostering caring relationships. Porter and Chester (2002) found that "assessment and accountability, by themselves, are unlikely to turn around low level of student achievement…Supports must be put in so students can be successful" (p. 85). Building trusting relationships at all levels—between administration and staff, between staff and staff, and between staff and students—is key in a turnaround school.

the classroom curriculum. The color-coding model used to identify students for AHOD services was seen as largely successful in bringing resources to those most in need and was reported as spreading to the middle schools. As a member of the counselors' PLC noted, "AHOD has trickled into the classroom. More and more teachers are using the concept." The emphasis on communicating data caused one student to say, "I know exactly what I have to do to get to green. We can't really get away with stuff or hide." Another student concurred: "They call your parents and let them know [your academic status] way more often now than before." AHOD was cited repeatedly by teachers to the university research team as one of the main reasons for growth in graduation as well as for staff satisfaction. Several SHS school counselors told interviewers from the university that if the school were to eliminate the AHOD program, they

grades. School counselors reported that green students asked for more help from them regarding college entry and scholarships.

School counselors increased their focus on the green (on track to graduate) students and their postgraduation opportunities. But counselors continued to feel that, despite the extended school day, there was not enough time in the day to do everything. One counselor acknowledged, "Working to support yellow and red doesn't allow much support of greens." Another added that changing state requirements had further intensified teachers' heavy task loads and shortage of time, resulting in an increased number of "red kids." A counselor noted that in "apples-to-apples comparisons we are doing better, but the goal posts keep moving." Another observed, "Our numbers [in the old red category] have shrunk. The little fires have gone away and we are at that 10-20% that really need us." But counselors reported that time was a critical factor in that success, and one articulated that "if we have to adjust and lose that [extra] time [provided by the SIG], it is going to be a real challenge." School counselors were pleased with their successes over the years covered by the study and were very concerned that they would be asked to continue helping the same percentage of students to graduate despite having an hour less time per day.

WHEN SCHOOL COUNSELORS CLARIFY THEIR ROLES, PROVE THEIR DEPENDABILITY, HOLD HIGH EXPECTATIONS, AND USE DATA TO BUILD APPROPRIATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS, THEY EQUIP THEIR STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS.

The two primary areas in which SHS counselors felt they had the greatest impact were those of relational trust and social support. They described the process as beginning with relational trust. One counselor noted, "We have found that building trust is critical and it takes time," especially when the counselors worked with so many constituent groups. Another counselor explained, "First we had to gain trust with the staff and then with the parents." The counselors earned the teachers' trust through the commitment they demonstrated within the All Hands On Deck model. As a teacher reported, "The extra time [afforded by the SIG grant] allows kids to not be pulled out of class," so teachers perceived AHOD as supporting the efforts of the teacher with no cost to

would quit, because AHOD had made their work so much more satisfying and productive.

Students, too, responded positively to AHOD. It appeared that when students perceived the data were being used as a tool to support them, they took this development as a sign that someone cared for them. One of the unanticipated outcomes of the program was the strong buy-in from students regarding making data public. Leadership students announced attendance rates and the number of all students passing all classes to rouse friendly class competition during homecoming. Further, as reported through advisory, students demonstrated a willingness to share their graduation statuses with their peers and to ask for ways to improve their

Nonetheless, the increased sense of social support in the school was nearly palpable. One student explained, "If somebody is a red, everybody tries to support them to help them get to green." The public transparency of the AHOD program meant that students were less isolated. According to an SHS teacher, AHOD provided "an early spotlight and consistency" that helped students, school counselors, and teachers relax into faith in the system and one another. As one student put it, "The counselor is like a big brother to help you out and keep you on track." Fullan (2003) reported that the one element present in every successful attempt to implement change

is that "relationships improve" (p. 77). Students who feel connected do better in school, and school counselors succeed when they build relationships with one another, with teachers, with parents, and with students.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

A particularly appealing element of AHOD is that its underlying principles are applicable to any school, and many of its components are generalizable as well. A program based on AHOD would need to be grounded in the three elements of academic press, social support, and relational trust and would include a way to record, analyze, and use data on a regular basis. The most difficult and important part of implementing the program may be changing school counselors' beliefs about their roles. This shift takes place when school counselors assume leadership roles, collaborating with administration and staff to effect change. Such change begins when counselors and administrators build relational trust through demonstrating new and collaborative behaviors and refuse to allow departments to be isolated. An AHOD initiative will likely be most successful when school counselors and administrators come to a common understanding that the counselors are the beating pulse of the school and that they act as the conduit through which information flows: to students, to teachers, and to parents.

The transformation begins in a school building when all students are cared for and expected to graduate in an environment in which school counselors align their work with the ASCA National Model and with a conceptual framework that is grounded in academic press, social support, and relational trust. Academic press is implemented by using data to track and communicate to students the belief that they can achieve expected graduation requirements. Social support is demonstrated through actions that ensure that students attend programs that assist them in their success. Relational trust is an outgrowth when academic press and social support are present and visible to all stakeholders. Some basic strategies for high school counselors to make academic press and social support visible to staff and students include:

1. Develop a *simple* monitoring system that tracks each student's progress toward graduation. This system includes real-time data of each student's success in moving toward these requirements, which include discipline, attendance, grades, credits, and mandatory tests.

2. Communicate, communicate, and then communicate again. This means counselors need to be out of their offices and in classrooms, hallways, and the lunchroom regularly throughout the school day, talking with identified students and teachers on a regular basis. Students and teachers should be seen up to three times a week. The goal of these conversations is threefold: to convey that counselors are tracking that student on progress toward graduation, to emphasize that counselors have a strong belief in the student's capabilities, and to ensure that the student is connected and is attending school and/or community services.

3. Be seen as advocates for teachers. Teachers are key in this process. They want their students to do well, so keep them informed regarding the types of support being provided for their students and ask them what assistance they might need in helping their students to be successful. Integrate their thinking into the plan of action for the students.

4. Develop a professional learning community for counselors. Coming together weekly to collaborate and to keep track of how each student is progressing toward graduation promotes a sense of accountability at all levels of the schoolhouse. Very few excuses should be considered acceptable for absence.

Within the context of the relationships that begin to develop in the atmosphere of relational trust resulting from these strategies, *each student* must be targeted and offered academic press and social support. Counselors can take on the responsibility of knowing their students by name and personal circumstances rather than as abstract statistics. Developing norms supports school counselors in opening themselves to sharing their ideas, struggles, and solutions with their colleagues. Furthermore, articulating a common language that increases shared understanding allows counselors to work in a streamlined and effective manner toward common goals. School counselors, administrators, and teachers must use language that is supportive and positive; this shift will not be lost on the students, who are likely to follow suit. Of utmost importance is that school counselors redefine their roles to include being accountable for students' academic performances. School counselors who monitor students closely, sharing recorded data with students, parents, and counseling staff, enhance students' perceptions that they are part of a watchful and caring community, thereby inspiring students to greater academic efforts.

# CONCLUSION

When school counselors foster a culture of academic press, social support, and relational trust, deeper connections are made within the school community, the school benefits financially, and graduation rates go up. When school counselors clarify their roles, prove their dependability, hold high expectations, and use data to build appropriate support systems, they equip their students for success. The Sunnyside case study provides strong evidence that this approach is successful even where others fail. After

many interventions had proved fruitless in increasing student achievement, this turnaround program improved not only students' graduation rates but also their sense of their capacity. We conclude by offering the thoughts of Christine Kim, the valedictorian of the Sunnyside class of 2011, on the effectiveness of All Hands On Deck:

We as an entire high school started to care about our attendance, grades, and graduation. Not only that, but we started to care about other people too. You could hear people say, "Come to class." "We want off-campus lunch." "Get your grades up. You can graduate!" These kinds of changes are what were really important this year. It is what defined us from the rest of the classes that have graduated at SHS. We were the beginning of this amazing change, but we're certainly not the end. ■

# REFERENCES

American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Baier, A. (1986). Trust and antitrust. *Ethics, 96*(2), 231-260. Retrieved from www.jstor.org

Benard, B. (1999). Mentoring: Study shows the power of relationship to make a difference. In N. Henderson, B. Benard, & N. Sharp-Light (Eds.), *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families and communities* (pp. 111-116). San Diego, CA: Resiliency in Action.

BERC Group. (2011). *Assessment of progress-STAR report*. Sunnyside, WA.

Bryan, J., & Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2010). Collaboration and partnerships with families and communities. *Professional School Counseling, 14*(1), ii-v.

Bryk, A. S., & Driscoll, M. E. (1988). *The high school community: Contextual influences and consequences for students and teachers.* Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Bryk, A. S., Lee, V., & Holland, P. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership, 60*(6), 40-44. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar03/vol60/num06/Trust-in-Schools@-A-Core-Resource-for-School-Reform.aspx

Crime in Sunnyside, Washington. (2013). *City-Data.com*. Retrieved from http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Sunnyside-Washington.html

Dixon, A. L., & Tucker, C. (2008). Every student matters: Enhancing strengths-based school counseling through the application of mattering. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 123-126.

Edeburn, S. (2010). *Students' perception of relational trust and the impact it has on their desire to learn*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA.

Fitch, T. J., & Marshall, J. L. (2004). What counselors do in high achieving schools: A study on the role of the school counselor. *Professional School Counseling, 7*, 172-177.

Fitch, T. J., & Marshall, J. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Group work and outreach plans for college counselors*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Leading in a culture of change: Personal action guide and workbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Girtz, S., & Cox, J. (2012, August). *Sunnyside High School – Year 2 School Improvement Grant review* [White paper]. Unpublished manuscript.

Goddard, R. D., Salloum, S., & Berebitsky, D. (2009). Trust as a mediator of the relationships between academic achievement, poverty and minority status: Evidence from Michigan's public elementary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(2), 292-311. doi:10.1177/0013161X08330503

Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis, IN: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1996). *On becoming a servant leader*. (D. Frick & L. C. Spears, Eds.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (1994). *Developing and managing your school guidance program* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Karcher, M. (2009). Increases in academic connectedness and self-esteem among high school students who serve as cross-age peer mentors. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 292-299.

Lachat, M. A. (1999). *Standards, equity and cultural diversity*. Retrieved from www.lab.brown.edu/pubs/standards/StEqDiv.pdf

Lambie, G. W. (2007). The contribution of ego development level to burnout in school counselors: Implications for professional school counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 85*, 82-88.

Lange, C. M., & Sletten, S. J. (2002, February 1). *Education: A brief history and research synthesis*. Retrieved from www.projectforum.org/docs/alternative_ed_history.pdf

Lee, V. E., Smith, J. B., Perry, T. E., & Smylie, A. (1999). *Social support, academic press, and student achievement*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/p0e01.pdf

Lewis, R. E., & Hatch, T. (2008). Cultivating strengths-based professional identities. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 115-118.

Lieberman, A. (2004). Confusion regarding school counselor functions: School leadership impacts role clarity. *Education, 124*(3), 552-559.

Mertler, C. A. (2009). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mertler, C. A. (2012). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mussoline, L. J., & Shouse, R. C. (2001). School restructuring as a policy agenda: Why one size may not fit all. *Sociology of Education, 74*, 44-58. doi:10.2307/2673144

Natriello, G., & McDill, E. (1986). Performance standards, student effort on homework, and academic achievement. *Sociology of Education, 59*, 18-31.

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2012, March). *Graduation rate calculations in Washington State*. Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx#dropoutgrad

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d.). *Washington State report card*. Retrieved from http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2011-12

Ormberg, T. (2013). Teacher and student perceptions of academic press and social support at Sunnyside High School. (Unpublished master's thesis).

Parrett, W., & Budge, K. (2012). *Turning high-poverty schools into high-performing schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Porter, A. C., & Chester, M. (2002). Building a high-quality assessment and accountability program: The Philadelphia example. In D. Ravitch (Ed.), *Brookings papers on education policy* (pp. 285-337). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Salina, C. (2013, July 29). *Formal leadership and change*. Presentation at the Washington Education Association conference, Marysville, WA.

Shouse, R. (1996). Academic press and sense of community: Conflict, congruence, and implications for student achievement. In Aaron M. Pallas (Ed.), *Research in sociology of education and socialization* (pp. 173-202). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Sommers-Flanagan, R., & Sommers-Flanagan, J. (2005). This is not your grandparents' school counselor. *ASCA School Counselor*. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.org/magazine/blogs/september-october-2005/this-is-not-your-grandparents-school-counselor

Tobin, T., & Sprague, J. (2000). Alternative education programs for at-risk youth: Issues, best practices, and recommendations. In H. Walker & M. Epstein (Eds.), *Interventions for academic and behavior problems: Preventive and remedial approaches* (pp. 961-993). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Trolley, B. (2011). School counselor roles and preparation. *Michigan Journal of Counseling Research, Theory and Practice, 38*(1), 15-32.

Van Velsor, P., & Orozco, G. L. (2007). Involving low-income parents in the schools: Communitycentric strategies for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 11*, 17-24.

Zand, D. E. (1997). *The leadership triad: Knowledge, trust, and power*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

**Earn CEUs for reading this article. Visit *www.schoolcounselor.org* and click on Professional Development to learn how.**