# Inspiration & Innovation

## Ten Effective Counseling Practices from the College Board's Inspiration Award Schools

November 2008

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## Acknowledgments

The best practices in college counseling highlighted in this booklet are condensed from research commissioned by the College Board from the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research. Their report, entitled *What School Counselors Do to Affect College Preparation and Application Rates of Low Income Students in High Schools That Are Nationally Recognized for High Performance*, was written by Matthew Militello, Jay Carey, Carey Dimmitt and Jason Schweid. We would also like to thank Phyllis Hart, who conducted follow-up visits to Inspiration Award Schools and contributed to this publication.

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# **The success** of the **Inspiration Award Schools**

that the College Board honors each year clearly shows that when young people are given the support and rigorous academic preparation needed to go to college, they are eager and determined to do what it takes to be successful. Not surprisingly, I have found while visiting these schools that school counselors play a critical role in inspiring young people and helping them achieve college admission, despite social, economic, and cultural challenges.

To generate a greater understanding of the value of school counselors as leaders in providing rigorous academics for all students, the College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) commissioned research to determine what these school counselors are actually doing that contributes to broadening access to college, especially for underrepresented students. Inspiration & Innovation highlights the results of that research and shares the 10 strategies used by the remarkable counselors and administrators in these successful schools.

**Inspiration** & **Innovation** also showcases some of the wonderful stories we have heard. I hope this booklet will provide valuable insight to other educators by describing the exemplary practices that increase student learning and preparation for college. By improving the academic environment, these high schools are positively affecting college enrollment for deserving young people. I'm sure that other schools can be as successful.

We are proud of all these schools have accomplished. I challenge each of you to exert your leadership and influence to ensure that the school counselors in your community are supported in their work. Using the strategies that have been proven successful in Inspiration Award-winning schools, I'm confident college will become a reality for many more students.

Sincerely,

Gaston Caperton
President, The College Board

# Inspiration & Innovation

can be found in schools from coast to coast. The schools highlighted in this paper are part of a select group of exemplary, odds-defying schools recognized by the College Board Inspiration Awards for taking remarkable steps to give their students the bright futures they deserve. In 2006, the College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy sponsored a study conducted by the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research of the school counseling practices, skills, and dispositions that are found in these award-winning schools. We are proud to present the stories of a few of these Inspiration Award Schools and to share some of their strategies for making college a reality for so many young people.

# Miracles & Milestones

## Santa Maria High School, Santa Maria, California

Assemble a roundtable of up-and-comers from California's strawberry belt—the children of immigrant field hands, as well as service and blue-collar workers—and they will tell you straight-on that their school has suffered in the past from more than its share of challenges: middle-class flight, significant pockets of poverty and economic uncertainty, language, some gang issues, and students with low academic expectations. But Santa Maria High School, in the central California agricultural town of the same name, has made a spectacular turnaround, gaining the enthusiastic backing of parents and community organizations, boosting academic performance, and setting new records in the number of graduates heading to a broad spectrum of two-year and four-year colleges.

Visit the Santa Maria campus today, and this is some of what you'll see:

- Students buzzing about the College Center. Organized and run by the school counseling staff, the College Center is a strategically situated focal point of Santa Maria High.
- Students—hundreds of them at a time—being tutored in the school library by their classmates, faculty members, and recent alumni who are now enrolled in college. The library opens before the first school bell rings and closes at 8 p.m. some nights. (Both struggling and successful students avail themselves of tutors.)
- Students dropping in to confer with a teacher, who, like most instructors at Santa Maria, is having lunch at his or her desk in a classroom where the door stays ajar. Access to teachers is part of Santa Maria's college-prep strategy.
- Students jostling for a seat in one of the Advanced Placement Program® courses. The number of courses has increased from a scant 3 sections to 33 sections.

**"It's a philosophy: You are going to college. Get on board."**

Nadia Ventura, Counselor,
Santa Maria High School

**"What we have is a pool of students with a common goal of getting into college. Because we may never know what kids are dealing with, because we do have kids without support at home, we provide that support here. We tell them, 'Yes, you can do this.'"**

Anita Berger, Principal, Benjamin Banneker Academic High School

## Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, Washington, DC

Benjamin Banneker Academic High School is a small, public school partnered with Howard University. Although admission to Banneker is competitive, about 25 percent of the 125 slots in each incoming freshman class are filled by young people performing below grade level in one or more subjects. At least 40 percent of Banneker students qualify for federal lunch subsidies. The student body is 99 percent minority. Located in an area rife with crime, in a district that is in a constant state of fiscal crisis, the school lacks many of the resources it needs: The roof and plumbing leak, and the lighting in the auditorium doesn't always work. Yet Banneker defies every conventional stereotype of an urban public high school: **Banneker was named to *Newsweek's* list of America's 100 Best High Schools.**

Banneker graduates earned one-third of the nine 2008 Trachtenberg Scholarships (a full, four-year award) at George Washington University. This is emblematic of Banneker's standard of excellence. For the decade ending in 2007, 100 percent of its graduates have gone on to four-year universities.

Banneker can brag about standardized test results, college admissions, academic competitions, and the number of AP® courses the students complete successfully. But the most important thing about Banneker is the pride and self-confidence of the students. The "It's Academic" bulletin board, with pictures of some of the successful teams Banneker has assembled over the years, says it all: "They can because they think they can."

**"That we won't go to college is not a question anybody asks around here."**

Anaia Peddie, Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, Class of 2008

## The College Board Inspiration Awards

Each spring the College Board presents Inspiration Awards to three of America's most improved secondary schools. These schools are recognized for their outstanding college preparation programs and partnerships among school counselors, teachers, parents, and community organizations. Through their dedication and commitment, these school communities have opened doors to higher education for students facing economic, social, and cultural barriers. At Inspiration schools, at least 40 percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunches.

The College Board Inspiration Awards salute disproportionately low-income high schools for their extraordinary improvements in three areas: developing rigorous curricula, enrolling students in college-preparatory courses (AP and/or IB), and increasing the tally of high school graduates going on to two- or four-year institutions of higher learning. The winning schools receive $25,000 each; schools with an honorable mention receive $1,000 each.

**"Our successful school communities are celebrated far too rarely,"** says College Board President Gaston Caperton.

**"The Inspiration Awards were created to celebrate America's most remarkable schools and to share their stories as inspiration to do all we can to connect young people with college success."**

For more information on the Inspiration Awards, or to nominate a potential award-winning school, please visit www.collegeboard.com/inspirationawards, or contact InspirationAwards@collegeboard.org.

## About this Study

In 2006, the College Board's **National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA)** sponsored a study conducted by the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research (CSCOR) of the school counseling practices, skills, and dispositions that are found in these award-winning schools. CSCOR researchers conducted phone interviews with key staff members at 18 high schools that were Inspiration Award recipients or earned an honorable mention, with a particular eye toward understanding the profile and positioning of innovative counselors. After analysis of the qualitative data gathered from these initial interviews, CSCOR researchers selected five of the schools to be investigated as in-depth case studies. Data was collected through in-person site visits.

This report will describe exemplary counselor practices that advance student engagement in learning and promote college readiness for students of low-income backgrounds. It will offer specific examples of activities and skills that counselors and schools can adopt to improve the academic environment and positively affect college preparation and enrollment rates for underrepresented students.

### The following schools received in-depth study:

**Santa Maria High School** in Santa Maria, California, is located in a small agricultural city with a growing manufacturing sector. Santa Maria High School has a diverse student body. Eighty-eight percent of the students are Hispanic, 6 percent are white, 3 percent are Filipino, 2 percent are African American, and 1 percent are from other ethnic groups. Many students are first- or second-generation students from Mexico, and few have parents who have attended college. The school has a block schedule and a "Shared Governance Committee" composed of elected administrators, teachers, classified staff, and parents. Tutoring, from teachers and peers, is available before school, after school, and during lunch. The college counselor is responsible for college preparation for all students and for the development of Santa Maria's College Center, which offers essential college information and provides forms and a laptop-assisted work area for students and parents. **College Board 2004 Inspiration Award Winner**

**Gadsden High School** in Anthony, New Mexico, is located in a rural area with a primarily agriculturally based economy and serves over 2,500 students—90 percent of whom are Latino. The school serves a large number of migrant students and a large number of English language learners. The entire student body of Gadsden High School receives free breakfast and lunch. Few parents have attended college. Gadsden offers a comprehensive academic program, including extensive career technical offerings. In addition to the work done by counselors, school faculty members meet with small groups of students throughout the year and assume enhanced responsibility for advising for career development and college transitions.
**College Board 2005 Inspiration Award Winner**

**University High School** is an urban school in Newark, New Jersey. Ninety-two percent of its students are African American, and 7 percent are Latino. Teachers partner with university

professors to help the local low-income students improve academic achievement. The school has excellent connections to local government officials, the Newark board of education, and local celebrities. The school has its own model curriculum. This curriculum and the mandate to increase the number of AP courses and AP student enrollment are the key events that led to the school's transformation. College planning and other activities are shared by teachers, and every staff member is assigned two students to personally mentor. Staff members collaborate to plan college visits, help with college applications, contact recruiters, and help meet emotional needs. All students must complete three college applications as a school graduation requirement.
**College Board 2005 Inspiration Award Honorable Mention**

**Miami Senior High School** in Miami, Florida, was founded in 1903 and has a strong tradition; more than 30 percent of the teachers in the building are themselves graduates of the school. Latinos make up 91 percent of the student body; 5 percent of the student body is African American. Many are first- and second-generation students from Cuba and Central and South America. There are six school counselors (one for each grade level, plus one ESL and one SPED) and a guidance director, as well as a career specialist who directs career programs, a TRUST Counselor who provides mental health counseling, and a college assistance program (CAP) adviser.
**College Board 2004 Inspiration Award Winner**

Located in South Texas, **Edinburg North High School** has a student body that is 96 percent Latino. Eight academic counselors and six additional staff members directly assist in counseling: a career and technology counselor, two migrant counselors, a financial aid officer, a GEAR UP coordinator, and a social worker. School counselors work at each grade level, building teams responsible for required academic disciplines (math, science, social studies, English) to enhance career and academic counseling efforts. The school offers after-school, weekend, and summer opportunities for course and state assessment remediation and support for AP and college entrance exams. The school publicly honors student achievement in attaining entrance into postsecondary institutions, and there is a great deal of teacher involvement with student services traditionally provided solely by school counselors.
**College Board 2004 Inspiration Award Winner**

**"The collective message of the counselors to parents is that nothing can stand in your way in sending your child to college. It is our job to demystify access to college and help all students complete college preparation, testing, applications, and financial aid forms."**

Leonora Deaton, Counselor, Edinburg North High School

**Benjamin Banneker Academic High School** is a magnet school located in Washington, D.C., with 400 students. Ninety-two percent of the student body is African American, 5 percent is Hispanic, 2 is percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent is white. Students come to Banneker from every quadrant of the city. They start their high school education with the Banneker Summer Institute, a five-week, four-hour-a-day program that prepares incoming ninth- and tenth-graders for a demanding curriculum and raises student aspirations. All of Banneker's students take a college-preparatory curriculum. Its entire class of seniors graduate and go on to college. Although not one of the five schools studied in depth, Banneker was chosen for a recent follow-up visit.
**College Board 2005 Inspiration Award Honorable Mention**

## Effective School Counseling Practices from Inspiration Award Schools

In their report, CSCOR researchers found that counseling practices in these schools could be described in terms of several broadly themed characteristics and strategies. Although the schools in this study are unique, and no school exhibited all of the characteristics identified, each of the schools exhibited several of them.

Effective management of school counseling programs calls for teamwork and collaboration. The magnitude of change needed to create school environments that support and engage all students cannot be the responsibility of school counselors alone; change requires marshalling forces from across the school organization. CSCOR identified these common practices as follows.

# 10

# Effective School Counseling Activities from the College Board Inspiration Award Schools

### 1. Practicing Effective Program Management

Teamwork, collaboration throughout and across the school, and specialized practices (e.g., development of college counseling positions) are hallmarks of effective school counseling programs.

### 2. Establishing an Achievement-Oriented School Climate

Effective school counselors promote and support high expectations for all students (e.g., open enrollment for Advanced Placement® courses and required college applications).

### 3. Providing Academic and Financial Outreach Programs for Parents

Schools with effective counseling programs provide creative opportunities to increase parent involvement. The schools offer programs in multiple languages after normal business hours, and they help parents complete the required college application and financial aid forms at school.

### 4. Offering College-Focused Interventions for Low-Income Students

School counseling practices that encourage students—especially low-income students—to prepare for college include early college initiatives, completion of college applications and personal statements, and the establishment of college placement centers for ongoing assistance.

### 5. Partnering with Colleges and the Community

Effective school counselors maintain extensive alumni connections, community affiliations, and local college partnerships.

### 6. Sharing School Leadership

School administrators who support shared power and responsibility create the conditions for effective school counseling programs. At their schools, counselors are effective in "teaming" with each other and with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to improve school practices.

### 7. Providing Systemic, Multilevel Counseling Interventions

Effective school counselors demonstrate the ability to see the big picture; they conceptualize student issues from a systemic perspective and work with teachers, parents, support staff, and administrators to solve problems. Through these collaborative efforts, all stakeholders share in the responsibility of developing student safety nets and support structures to increase academic success.

### 8. Using Data to Support Student Achievement

Effective school counselors actively utilize school data to promote enrollment in rigorous classes (e.g., to identify potential AP students). Additional forms of data are increasingly being used to enhance student opportunities and to trigger support mechanisms for students in need of academic assistance.

### 9. Contributing to the Development of School Policies and Practices

Effective school counselors are integrally involved in the development and implementation of programs and supportive features of schools. They have a role in both the formation and implementation of school policy.

### 10. Helping Counselors to Counsel

Because of the addition of support (e.g., clerical), technical (e.g., schedule input staff), and specialized (e.g., college counselor) employees, routine responsibilities of school counselors can be handled efficiently by others, allowing the school counselors time to increase effective practices that advocate and advance academic success for all students.

# 1. Practicing Effective Program Management

One thing is clear when looking at the Inspiration Award Schools: most of them utilize **effective management practices that support collaboration, teamwork, and efficiency**. They understand the critical role of school counselors in student success. In each school, the role of the school counseling program is clearly defined and understood by both school administration and faculty. Effective management practices result in efficient use of resources and the greatest possible impact.

The **role of school counselors in academics, especially scheduling, is a key component of promoting high achievement**. Getting students into the right classes at an early stage is critical to helping more traditionally underrepresented students aspire to and prepare for college. All of the Inspiration Award Schools have counselors who work with specific groups of students in need of academic support, which is done in "real time." That is, student needs are identified and interventions targeted during the semester, not only after report card markings. Much of the counseling work at several of these schools is conducted in the classroom.

At Edinburg North, **counselors stay with the same group of students for four years**, although the head of the counseling department works with all incoming immigrant students and their parents for the students' first year. One counselor immigrated to the area as a youth and therefore personally knows the challenges involved with the transition to a new country and language. An AP teacher pointed to noticeable gains—achieved through this strategy—in AP participation within a student body that is comprised of recent immigrants to the United States.

Most of the Inspiration Award Schools choose to have **counselors become specialists in important areas**, such as college counseling. While the counselors continue their expertise in all aspects of emotional, personal, and career counseling, specialization enables them to become more efficient and expert in a given area. The team approach led one Miami Senior High counselor to state, "We have different expertise, and we support each other as well." Edinburg North, for example, has a "one-stop shopping place for college" room staffed by specialists, including a financial aid counselor and the school's GEAR UP coordinator. Resources include computer applications for testing and financial aid. A staff member told researchers, "Everything is centralized; this helps because the process is changing, and this ensures that students get more consistent information. We show students how to create résumés that will help them secure recommendations."

**"Collaboration is a big theme here. Our philosophy is to prepare all students to do well academically and be able to do well in college. When budgets forced reduction in counseling staff, we made the decision to hire guidance technicians who would make sure students got into the right classes for college, and we also have a mental health center as well as other counselors to help students with personal, social challenges, and we have a college counselor."**

Craig Huseth, Principal,
Santa Maria High School

Some Inspiration Award Schools, such as Santa Maria, use flexible hours allowing counselors to facilitate evening and weekend outreach to working parents. During the college application season, the school's College Center is open and staffed until 10 p.m. to assist parents and students in college search, application, and financial aid matters. Computers are available for parent and student use.

# 2. Establishing an Achievement-Oriented School Climate

Inspiration Award School counselors encourage students to take **challenging courses** (e.g., college prep, honors, and AP), monitor student progress, and connect students to **academic supports**. They are active leaders in establishing a school climate that conveys **high expectations** for all students, encourages students to accept challenges, and supports their efforts. The counselors actively help parents understand the importance of rigorous course work, and they consult with teachers on issues such as increasing college prep-course rigor, creating college expectations, and working with more diverse groups of students in AP courses.

**"My message to the staff is clear…Care, show a positive attitude, and engage the students in the classroom. Counselors are the link to getting students into AP courses. It is important to show students how to get into college not just talk about it."**

George Foster, Principal,
Gadsden High School

Counselors, teachers, and administrators share a student-oriented philosophy that emphasizes every student's worth and potential. At Miami Senior, when students transition to the high school, the ninth-grade counselor holds an orientation in the classroom for all students about services and resources that are available to help them. "Right then, at the very beginning, we talk with them about our expectations, as a school, as a community, that they will do the best they can, that they will succeed," said the counselor.

**"High expectations permeate the school—not just the classes, but the extracurricular activities too. …The students have inner drive because of the high expectations of the administration, counselors, and teachers."**

Norma Guerra, Parent,
Edinburg North High School

Counselors and teachers work to create an environment that is simultaneously supportive and challenging. Moreover, the focus on achievement is seen as a schoolwide responsibility. For example, at Santa Maria, teachers and counselors work together to monitor student progress, consult with students and parents, and refer students to academic supports in these schools.

In one school, teachers worked together to create a college-focused Individual Advising Team Program that pairs each student with a teacher who serves as a mentor. Each teacher handles about 12 students, meeting with each of them several times from start to finish of the academic year. Counselors train teachers in high school graduation requirements, college admissions requirements, and in how to monitor student academic progress.

Academic achievement for all students is everyone's focus in the school building. Principals and counselors work together to create such school-based institutions, such as College Centers, and prioritize academic preparation for college as part of a high school's broad vision. Counselors team with middle schools to start preparing eighth-graders for college preparation by demystifying college admissions, financial aid, and PSAT/NMSQT® and SAT® testing early on. They work with students to begin a high school plan that includes planning and preparation for college.

**"The bottom line at this school is academics and an AP culture—for ALL students."**

Ramiro Guerra, Principal,
Edinburg North High School

# 3. Providing Academic and Financial Outreach Programs for Parents

## Characteristics of Effective Parental Outreach Programs

- Understand and resolve barriers to parental involvement.
- Design outreach programs to surmount these barriers.
- Experiment. Don't repeat something that is not working.
- Begin college awareness/outreach prior to high school, or in early high school at the latest.
- Have parental outreach activities in a variety of formats.
- Conduct parental outreach in a variety of languages.
- Give parents, especially those who did not attend college themselves, comprehensive information about issues relating to college.
- Pay special attention to the financial aspect and the many options available for paying for college.

Effective school counselors know that parents and families play an essential role in helping students prepare for college and work to involve counselors/parents in many ways. Parent outreach sessions provide a comprehensive range of content that is needed by all parents so that they can support their children's college aspirations and transition. These outreach sessions offer information on the benefits of attending college, the college application process, and on how to apply for financial aid. When necessary, programs are delivered in **multiple languages**. For example, most of the staff at Miami Senior High is bilingual, so programs and communication are delivered in both Spanish and English to accommodate Spanish-speaking parents.

In two schools, teacher-mentor programs were established so that teachers could provide supplemental help in college planning and transitions, encouraging college attendance, and managing the application financial aid process, with counselors functioning as expert consultants. Outreach activities are "hands-on," with parents actively **guided through the financial aid and admissions process**. Edinburg North staff organizes an annual March parent night focusing on college preparedness, financial aid, and the importance of AP course work.

**"The collective message of the counselors to parents is that nothing can stand in your way in sending your child to college. It is our job to demystify access to college and help all students complete college preparation, testing, applications, and financial aid forms."**

Leonora Deaton, Counselor,
Edinburg North High School

At these schools, counselors understand and try to resolve the barriers to parental involvement. For example, one school's College Center is open and staffed until 10 p.m. to assist parents with the financial aid process. In another school, **parent nights** are scheduled to coincide with the first student progress reports. Parents can stop by after work, get something to eat at school, and meet with teachers and counselors. Counselors employ an experimental attitude; if turnout at an event is unsatisfactory, they try new approaches rather than repeating ineffective outreach practices.

The most effective college outreach **begins prior to or early in high school**, and it occurs in multiple formats, such as **monthly meetings** of migrant parents. Parent outreach programs at Inspiration Award Schools consistently address the issue of student transition, both to high school and later to college. Most of the Inspiration Award Schools begin delivering **college orientation programs** when students are in the eighth grade.

**Counselors pay special attention to the financial aspect of college** so that low-income parents do not ignore the college option because of perceived financial barriers. Edinburg North counselors work with parents to get copies of tax information that are then used by students in their 12th-grade government and economics classes to complete the FAFSA form. In addition, financial aid nights are held to offer parents access to both computers and the help of staff in completing financial aid forms. Santa Maria offered parents open access to computers to complete FAFSA forms and integrated this process into students' regular academic program by requiring completion of this form as a math assignment. Assisting parents and students with the financial aid process improved postsecondary placement rates.

These schools **distribute the responsibility for parent outreach** by involving the rest of the school staff or by employing specific "community outreach specialists." Miami Senior hires Community Involvement Specialists who work to connect with parents who are not able to come to the school, delivering information instead through phone calls and home visits.

At Santa Maria, parents do not need appointments to come onto campus to receive help or services. **All programs, whether dealing with financial aid or course selection, are held at times that accommodate parents' schedules**, including on evenings and weekends. During peak times, the College Center is open until 10 p.m. with both counselors and teachers available to assist parents.

Several schools frequently hold community events on campus to foster the sense among families that the school is part of their larger community. Santa Maria's parent barbeque nights coincide with the release of student progress reports.

**"Counselors meet with every 11th- and 12th-grade student to help them complete college applications, and they have an open door policy for parents. Since parents live a distance from the school, it is imperative that parents feel welcome and that counselors are available if they are on campus. Counselors even come in on Sundays during the financial aid deadline period."**

Laura Provencio, Counselor, Gadsden High School

# 4. Offering College-Focused Interventions for Low-Income Students

Getting their students prepared for college is the main goal of all Inspiration Award Schools, and most make a powerful statement about the importance of college by having a staffed, technologically well-equipped (e.g., multiple computers for student use) **college center**. A well-supported college center serves as a vital source of information, connection, mentoring, and support. For example, Edinburg North has a "one-stop shopping place for college" room staffed by a financial aid counselor and the school's GEAR UP coordinator. Resources include computer applications for testing and financial aid. A staff member told researchers, "Everything is centralized; this helps because the process is changing, and this ensures that students get more consistent information. We show students how to create résumés that will help secure recommendations."

**"It is critical to have a college center where students can access information on a daily basis. Ours is located in the administration building which sends an important message to the community."**

Nadia Ventura, College Counselor, Santa Maria High School

Counselors at Inspiration Award Schools achieve high rates of college application and placement because they have developed interventions that are not typically available to students from low-income backgrounds, especially those whose parents did not attend college. These counselors recognize that when students and parents were unfamiliar with the college process, more **direct and active counselor interventions** were warranted. Most counselors have aggressive outreach initiatives that begin as early as eighth grade and that include **information on the financial benefits of college, the mechanics of the application process, and detailed information about college affordability and financial aid**.

Parents who have not previously attended college need information and support, and counselors at these schools have developed interventions to provide it. They take responsibility for providing information to students about college admissions and for monitoring students' progress in applying for both admission and financial aid, and place a special focus on **helping first-generation students** by monitoring their completion of college forms and applications.

One school requires that all students complete college applications as a graduation requirement; the school begins orienting students to the elements of an application in ninth grade. In some schools, counselors deliver **classroom guidance lessons on careers** during academic courses. In other schools, all seniors fill out FAFSA and state scholarship applications as part of a required civics and government course. In yet another school, students develop college essays during English class. Most schools organize **trips to local colleges**, and one sponsors a yearly trip for all seniors to a local community college, where students complete applications and placement exams.

**"It's important to work with teachers in order to get seniors to complete their personal statements and college applications. English teachers collaborate with counselors to get the job done."**

Maria Halley, College Assistance Program Advisor, Miami Senior HIgh School

## CASE STUDY: **Gadsden High School, Anthony, New Mexico**

Despite a desperate lack of resources, Gadsden High School has taken significant strides in exposing its students to higher education options and opportunities. About 98 percent of its students are first-generation college attendees who find the college admissions process confusing and often overwhelming. Gadsden High School is helping its seniors to search and apply for scholarship opportunities, and its staff continues to push the envelope.

- The school's Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) program is a precollege program in which students who achieve core requirements may earn up to $1,000 in college tuition. Some admitting colleges and universities elect to match MESA funds.
- A summer camp for grades 9–12 focuses on addressing college issues.
- An *Applying to College* handbook is being developed to promote greater involvement of parents.

The principal, school counselors, teachers, parents, and community voice a collective commitment to "change the cycle of our school and community." Through an unflappable will to overcome adversity and find creative solutions to address resource restrictions, Gadsden High School is working to create its own "miracles."

# 5. Partnering with Colleges and the Community

**"Banneker High School has a philosophy of high expectations—college for all—and supports for teachers and students to make the outcomes happen. We have a strong partnership between teachers, counselors and other agencies to create safety nets for students and their families."**

Anita Berger, Principal, Banneker High School

School counselors, teachers, and principals recognize the importance of partnerships with higher education institutions and the community. These partnerships strengthen the college counseling program. All five of the schools studied in depth have very strong, **on-campus relationships with universities**; some partnerships were initiated by the school and some by the university. Santa Maria partners with both local community colleges, with counselors from two state universities, and with an Upward Bound program. These counselors deliver classroom guidance lessons geared at broadening understanding of the benefits of a college education, and they "put a face to college."

Many Inspiration Award Schools participate in initiatives such as **GEAR UP**. One even has a full-time college transition counselor, funded by a local state university, who offers individual and group college counseling, classroom-based developmental guidance lessons, and parent outreach programs. These partnerships promote college aspirations, enhance the resources of the school counseling program, and establish relationships between students and parents and colleges.

At University High School, state university financial aid counselors conduct a series of parent and student workshops on the financial aid process. Gadsden students are invited to the local university for meetings of various social groups. Counselors at Edinburg North invite college recruiters to speak to classes two or three times a month.

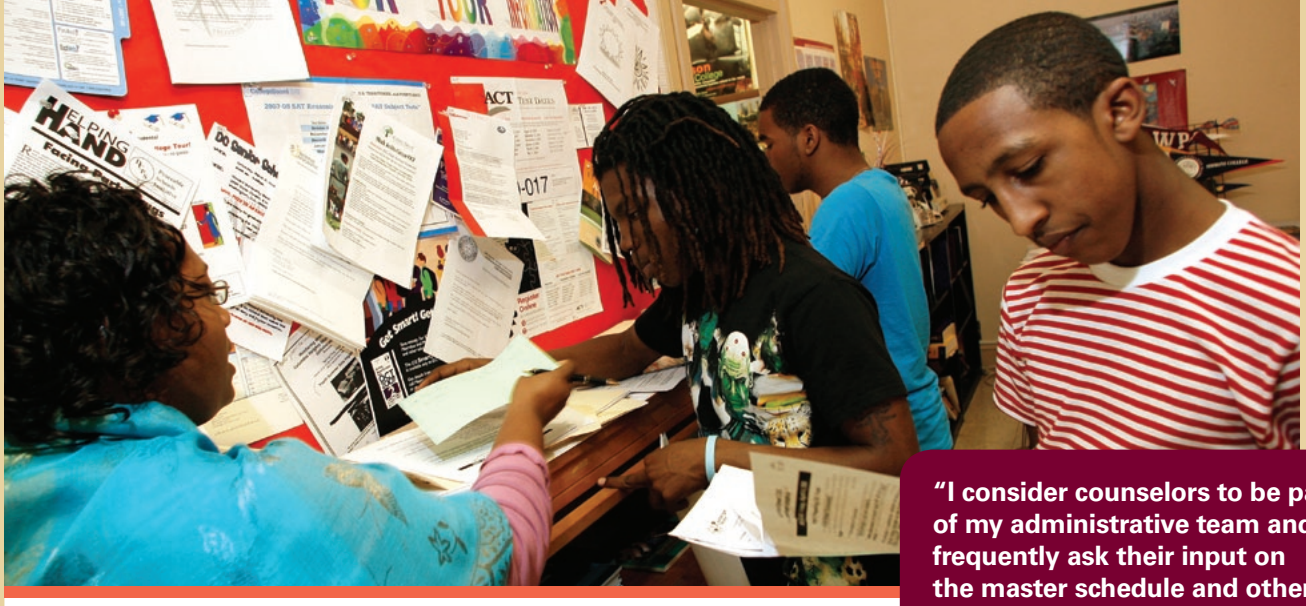
Inspiration Award Schools have **active academic partnerships with local universities**. A local community college provides college classes free of charge to any Santa Maria student needing a class that is not offered at the high school. An AP teacher explained that "Not only do they get to take classes there, but they get to see that they can succeed." Miami Senior High arranges a community college visit where students take placement exams and workshops.

Inspiration Award Schools make effective use of **alumni-school relationships**. Many Santa Maria alumni return as teachers, some conduct information sessions, and others tutor current students. The college counselor explained their importance, saying, "They help make college seem real, within reach. The other kids look to them and say, 'If they can do it, so can I.'"

**Business partnerships offer mentoring, and internships provide scholarships and/or financial support** for college applications and even fund AP Exams. Miami Senior has developed a reputation for providing good interns, resulting in many opportunities for student employment. An aerospace company provides science mentors to Santa Maria students identified as having an interest in engineering. Edinburg North works with local media to recognize students and school achievement, including the College Board Inspiration Award, and top finishes in statewide academic competitions.

**"Counselors work closely with students who will be the first to go to college in their family. They often tell their stories and the barriers they had to overcome so that serves as inspiration to the students. Counselors also work closely with parents to address any fear and obstacles. Additionally, counselors take 11th- and 12th-graders on extensive college tours each year where they stay overnight in the dorms, attend classes, and see what it's like on each of the campuses."**

Leonora Deaton, Counselor, Edinburg North High School



# 6. Sharing School Leadership

**"I consider counselors to be part of my administrative team and frequently ask their input on the master schedule and other policy decisions. Every counselor must have a philosophy of high expectations, which includes preparing ALL our students for admission to university."**

Anita Berger, Principal,
Banneker High School

School counselors feel that they are more effective when they routinely operate as **members of the school community** and participate in the school's leadership. More students successfully prepare and transition to college after high school when school counselors are recognized within the school for their special knowledge and expertise, exercise their role as school leaders, and promote effective programs and practices. Counselors at Santa Maria are active in the school's shared leadership, with the college counselor appointed to the **Administrative Leadership Team** at the request of the academic department chairs. They recognized that the college counselor's expertise in college requirements and student need was critically important for curricular decisions. An important aspect of distributed leadership is accountability, and teachers, counselors, and administrators at Edinburg North have a clear sense of their responsibility to help students. The high number of teachers and counselors involved in after-school and weekend academic tutoring sessions is one clear indication that leadership is imbued and actualized at multiple levels of this school organization.

Working closely with the school's counselors, the department chairs at University High have taken on a number of responsibilities that are traditionally seen as counseling duties, including ninth-grade orientation and college night. When issues of college are discussed, all faculty members are active and equal participants.

In a strong demonstration of distributed leadership, teachers and administrators at Edinburg North added a **"Campus Planning" period** to their day, in which four interdisciplinary groups are led by the dean of instruction. The dean meets regularly with department heads, counselors, the financial aid officer, and the GEAR UP coordinator. The dean sets the agenda for each meeting, but also provides time for instruction and announcements by the AP Coordinator, the financial aid counselor, the migrant and career counselors, and the guidance counselors. They take advantage of this time with teachers to discuss matters related to testing, financial aid, character education, AP, migrant law and responsibilities to migrant children, assessments, and other issues as they arise.

# 7. Providing Systemic, Multilevel Counseling Interventions

Effective school counselors employ a systemic approach to understanding problems and creating solutions. That is, they recognize that often multiple factors must be integrated in order to achieve the desired results. Their ability to understand complex problems in systemic terms and to intervene effectively contributes greatly to a school's effectiveness, especially by improving the college preparation, application, and placement of their students. For example, **several related interventions** are needed in order to achieve a goal of having more students take Advanced Placement courses. Students must be convinced of the importance of taking rigorous course work, parents need to understand that it is better for students to take rigorous courses even if grades suffer, teachers need help in teaching a broader range of students, and administrators must understand that holding teachers accountable for average AP Exam grades (rather than increases in number of students taking AP Exams) is counterproductive.

These schools were notable for their **sense of community**. At University High School, teachers stated that everyone in the building is a "go-to person," including the security guards, custodians, and even substitute teachers. At Miami Senior High, the school building is open from early in the morning to late at night, as there are adult education programs in the afternoon and evening as well as over 200 clubs for students.

**"Counselors can't do it all so we had to figure out how we could reach all students so they would get assistance in being academically successful as well as prepared for college. Sometimes we have to learn about systemic approaches outside our own walls. We visited Mayfield High School, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and learned about an Individual Advising Program where each teacher is assigned a group of students to mentor. We came back and implemented this approach, and we are monitoring student progress and parent participation. We're beginning to see substantial improvement."**

Laura Provencio, Counselor,
Gadsden High School

In schools with a systemic orientation, people work together to get things done, with student achievement as the acknowledged focus. For example, school counselors at University High School taught teachers about a new AP Exam, since it was the counselors who had received the training. The Miami Senior High course enrollment system is another example of systemic change. The curriculum bulletin is online, and counselors go into classrooms while meeting with students, rather than having students come to the guidance office. This results in much less time being wasted by students who are doing schoolwork while waiting to meet with the counselor; in addition, teachers gain an understanding of the complexities and effort involved in scheduling. To explain the new system, the guidance director used an instructional video that was created and acted by counselors and students in the TV production class.

**The College Counseling Center (CCC)** at University High School is seen by administrators and teachers as integral to efforts to improve outcomes and rigor because of the important insight and input the college counselor has about improving curriculum and instruction. Parents (most of whom have not attended college) see the CCC as an advocate for their children, who in turn see the CCC and its staff as a crucial source of inspiration, information, encouragement, and support. The college counselor takes care to create opportunities for parents to meet with college representatives and visit colleges with students. University High School also supports student achievement through monetary assistance such as scholarships and test-fee waivers. Unused waivers from other schools are solicited in order to provide all students in the school with two or three SAT waivers. The district pays for all students to take the PSAT/NMSQT for two years and for students to take AP Exams. The principal pays for AP teachers to attend professional development specific to their AP content area.

# 8. Using Data to Support Student Achievement

School counselors use data to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. The most frequent use of data at the Inspiration Award Schools is the documentation of **levels of participation in programs** (e.g., parent nights) and **college placement outcomes** (e.g., college acceptances and scholarship awards) in order to present accountability data to administrators. For example, a school counselor at Santa Maria makes an annual presentation to district leadership showing the proportion of students admitted to college and the number of scholarship awards these students received.

**"We host an AP Potential™ night where we invite students and parents. We use the results from the PSAT/NMSQT to identify students for AP, and we're finding this to be a successful strategy to increase the number of students who take AP. "**

Maria Halley, College Assistance Program Advisor,
Miami Senior High

Data are also collected by counselors, teachers, and administrators to advocate for higher levels of student support. For example, counselors at one school noted that when a program to finance AP Exams ended, the number of exams taken decreased by 50 percent. They then used these data to advocate for the reestablishment of the AP financial aid program. At University High School, one department chair uses state assessment data to provide teachers with student-level data disaggregated by the state learning standards. Counselors at another school use PSAT/MNSQT scores and the AP Potential™ to identify students who need interventions or who could likely succeed at AP courses with support.

# 9. Contributing to the Development of School Policies and Practices

School counselors contribute to the development and implementation of school policies that have a powerful impact on their students' success. Capitalizing on their recognized expertise and credibility, effective counselors influence graduation requirements, AP and honors course admission, attendance policies, and other policies and practices that have a direct bearing on student achievement.

All of the schools had significant numbers of students taking AP classes, and counselors play a significant part in **creating an expectation** of rigorous course taking. There is a focus on all adults in the building being involved in the AP process. In order to encourage AP course taking, Edinburg North has open enrollment for AP classes. The dean of instruction discusses with the teachers different strategies that can be used to keep students in AP classes. In some schools, AP grades are weighted and have a pass/fail option. AP teachers are required to tutor students at Edinburg North High School and Miami Senior High School.

Santa Maria has a formal **shared governance structure** in which staff members serve on an elected body that establishes all noncurricular policies. The college counselor was asked to join the leadership team because of her particular expertise in college requirements, college-prep curricula, and student needs. She had significant input into academic policies, including curriculum decisions and the development of the master schedule, which enabled her to advocate for inclusive policies and practices. Membership in the leadership team put her in a powerful position to affect both policy formation and implementation at this school, a position that was earned through collaborative work with administrators and teachers.

**"I realized that if counselors are going to have a broader school impact, we need to be on committees that give us access to policy decisions and budget. By doing so, I was able to get a budget which funded 30 laptop computers for the college office."**

Cynthia Moreno, College Counselor, Santa Maria High School

At Gadsden, counselors have input into policy implementation rather than policy development. After the school's leadership team decided to implement a faculty mentor program, two school counselors volunteered to be on the design committee that would select the model program. The counselors were responsible for designing the mentoring curriculum and training and supporting the involved mentors.

# 10. Helping Counselors to Counsel

Inspiration Award Schools let their counselors counsel. "Nonprofessional" aspects of a counselor's work are handled efficiently and effectively by support staff. In one program, **technicians** handle routine student scheduling, enabling the school counselor to focus on developmental interventions, teacher consultation, and parent outreach. At three of these schools, on-campus health centers provide crisis intervention and ongoing mental health counseling, freeing the counselors to focus on academic and career issues. At the most effective schools, school counselors are able to devote more time to professional activities that directly promote college aspirations and attendance.

Additionally, counselors often receive support from **counseling specialists** (e.g., migrant counselor), **coordinators** (e.g., AP Coordinators and financial aid officers), and **administrators** (e.g., principals and department chairs). The support ranged from assisting counselors with tasks ranging from test coordination (e.g., state exams and AP Exams) to student orientation to college visits.

In several of the schools, counselors work with **social workers** who provide much of the ongoing therapeutic services to students. The social workers and counselors together provide crisis counseling and work with students and families to access community resources. The student support staff, including counselors, social workers, health care providers, school psychologists, substance abuse counselors, career counselors, college counselors, and various others meet on a regular basis (from weekly to monthly) to coordinate services and to share necessary information about the students. Counselors at these schools work extensively with teachers and administrators; there is mutual respect there for the work that people do in their various roles. A concerted effort is made to understand and value the work done by others and to communicate effectively about programs, policies, and changes in practice.

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UC MERCED
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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
WARRIORS
SMHS

## Conclusion

Despite overwhelming odds, these outstanding Inspiration Award Schools from across America are taking remarkable steps to give their students the bright futures they deserve. High expectations were clearly embraced on all levels and delivered in varied ways throughout these schools. Counselors are integral as members of the larger team of administrators and teachers that sets high expectations for students and provides appropriate support mechanisms to ensure student success.

The magnitude of change needed to create equitable school environments that support and engage students requires a collaborative effort of all stakeholders. The powerful lessons learned from these case studies demonstrate the need for of a community of educators and learners to work collectively. The research also mandates that exemplary school counseling practices must be fully incorporated into the academic mission of schools. More specifically, the case study results articulate the need for school counselors to possess the knowledge, skills, and will to engage in actionable practice as collaborators, leaders, advocates, and effective team members.

However, to ensure systemic acquisition of knowledge, skill and will, school counselors need to be prepared as collaborators, team leaders, advocates, and team members if they are to

be effective contributors to student-centered schools that make a difference in the lives of all students. Assistance from school counseling organizations, preservice training programs and other ongoing professional development opportunities for practicing school counselors are necessary to ensure exemplary school counseling practice in schools.

Although academic and college preparation, as well as college selection and application, depends on all members of a school organization, it should be stressed that the surrounding community and family support mechanisms are also important. This study clearly articulates the meaningful and effective ways school counselors can be significant contributors to college attainment for all students.

For more information about the **National Office of School Counselor Advocacy**, please visit www.collegeboard.com/nosca.

For more information on the **Inspiration Awards**, or to nominate a potential award-winning school, please visit www.collegeboard.com/inspirationawards, or contact InspirationAwards@collegeboard.org.

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## About the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research

Based at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research (CSCOR) is dedicated to improving the practice of school counseling by developing the research base that is necessary for responsible and effective practice. CSCOR provides national leadership in the measurement and evaluation of the outcomes of school counseling interventions and programs. CSCOR helps K-12 leaders and practitioners use research findings and methods to improve school counseling practice by enabling them to set standards, establish benchmarks, implement evidence-based interventions, measure student learning outcomes, and evaluate program effectiveness.

## About the College Board

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