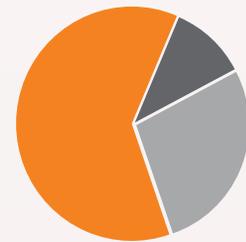


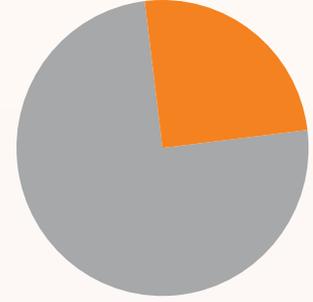
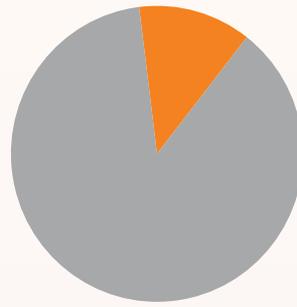


USING RESULTS TO GET RESULTS

Making a presentation to your school board requires solid data, excellent presentation skills and the knowledge of what's important to the school board.

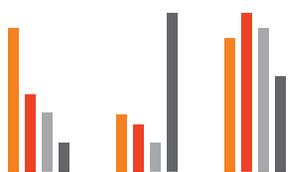
BY KATY O'GRADY





Do your school board members know how many students raised their state test scores thanks in part to the mentoring program you started? Have they heard how many fewer days of school your students missed last year? Do they know how many more of your students are currently taking AP courses vs. two years ago? Or how much more time your students are spending in class these days with fewer behavior referrals?

If not, you have a great opportunity to use the power of results data. Sharing these numbers demonstrates the measurable difference school counselors can make on students' education and on a school's success. Results data give impressive substance both



to presentations supporting a specific objective, such as an increase in school counseling staff, and to those that simply reinforce the value of school counseling for administrators and school board members.

Timothy Conway undertook a year-long effort to add a staff member to the school counseling department at Lakeland Regional High School in Wanaque, N.J. The first school in the state to achieve Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) status, Lakeland was facing the budget impacts of the 2009 recession. But Conway believed the best way to alleviate the recession's impact on students, families and the community was to increase school counseling services, not cut them. His culminating presentation to his Board of Education resulted in the addition of a fifth full-time school counselor halfway through the school year.

To make sure his message resonated with board members, Conway presented his data with a powerful cost/benefit analysis approach. "You have to quantify for them how things have changed, where we want to go and be able to show how you're making a difference with what you're doing," he said. And his impression on the board has been a lasting one. At his budget presentation last year, one board member assured Conway he wasn't worried about the school counseling budget. "I can see the value for my dollar," the school board member said.

In Utah in 2010, school counselors across the state were tasked with closing achievement gaps and improving and measuring the impact of their school counseling curriculums. The school counselors in Jordan District's five high schools and nine middle schools aimed to expand participation of ethnic minority students in early college programs and increase students' use of Utah Futures, the state's career information

portal. Nancy Karpowitz, the district's current secondary guidance specialist, and Chris Richards-Kong, who held that title at the time, were invited to present the results of both efforts to their school board.

The numbers were striking. Use of Utah Futures had increased exponentially, from fewer than 4,000 student enrollments to nearly 40,000 in one year, thanks largely to direct school

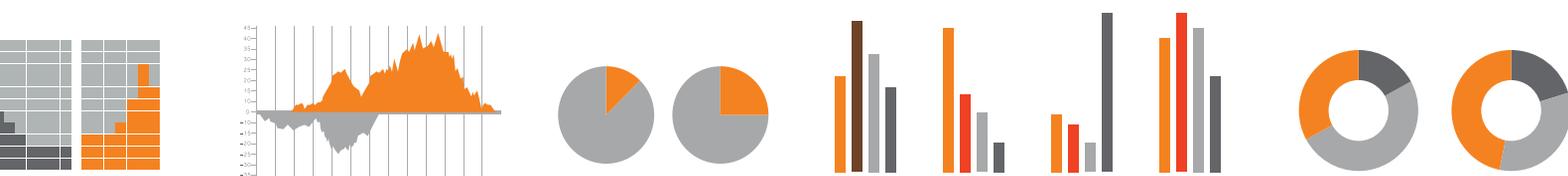
"You have to quantify for them how things have changed, where we want to go and be able to show how you're making a difference with what you're doing,"

counselor interventions. And instead of the hoped-for 10 percent increase in minority students taking pre-college courses, 86 percent of the students identified and invited by school counselors enrolled in concurrent enrollment or Advanced Placement classes. With the powerful impact of school counselors before them, Jordan District took action to significantly reduce its high student-to-school-counselor ratios. "We had hoped to have maybe five or six school counselors added, and the district added 14 new school counselors," Karpowitz said.

School counselors in Mobile, Ala., identified and addressed opportunity gaps for their students. In 2011, they held their first data celebration to share the results of their efforts with

district leaders and with one another. Valerie Johnson, then an elementary school counselor and now with Mary G. Montgomery High School, worked with her school counselor colleagues in feeder pattern teams to present "what we could do in being a piece of the puzzle to help struggling students." Although there was no immediate danger of staffing cuts, "this was an opportunity to tell people how important we are, so people understand that school counselors are essential to schools." Of particular interest to the attending board members was the achievement data, which in Johnson's case related to bringing up state test scores among low-performing fourth- and fifth-grade students. The data celebration, now an annual event in Mobile, lets school counselors show specifically how they're helping students to learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to be successful, Johnson said.

It was the interruptions and inquisitiveness that surprised Shelly Morton when she and Deana Brown presented to Forsythe County (Ga.) School District's Board of Education. Morton is the school counselor for grades three through five at Settles Bridge Elementary School, and Brown works with the school's kindergarten through second-grade students. As a requirement of their successful re-RAMP application, they presented in October 2012 to address the question, "How are students different as a result of school counselors?" With abundant results data from their school counseling curriculum lessons, a small-group program and attendance improvement goal (not to mention great videos of student testimonials), staying within the board's 10-minute time limit was a challenge. And despite the school counselors' preparation, they went overtime, "because the board interrupted



us so many times asking questions about the particular things we were sharing with them,” Morton said. Most compelling, eliciting an audible “wow” from board members, was attendance data shown not in percentages but by giving the actual number of days students’ attendance had improved from one year to the next.

In all of these situations, presenting results data reinforced board awareness of school counselors’ value. “When you can quantify the impact the school counseling department has on the students, this will have an impact on a board of education,” Conway said. Karen Woodward, superintendent of Lexington County School District One, in Lexington, S.C., agrees. With 11 RAMP schools in her district, Woodward and her board are absolutely committed to school counseling, she said. As part of regular instructional updates at board meetings, school counselors provide an overview of their program, addressing the current major issues and accomplishments.

Communication Starts at Home

To achieve an outcome that affects budgets, like Coway’s or Karpowitz’s, presenting to the school board is definitely not the first step, and adding staff positions won’t happen overnight. Making sure the administrators in your own building understand the value of school counseling for students is a critical starting point. “All too often, administrators even within the schools don’t understand what a school counselor does or can do that impacts the bottom line,” Conway said. He delivers a support personnel accountability report card (SPARC), twice a year to provide updates showing “the impact that is happening in the school in kind of real time, with text and charts to show them year-over-year impact.”

Karpowitz also encourages school counselors to “communicate regularly with your administration about what your school counseling department is doing and how you are helping students overcome roadblocks to success.” She notes that school counselors need to

understand their school’s and district’s vision and goals and demonstrate how their school counseling program contributes to reaching those goals. She recommends reviewing the school counselor/principal relationship documents ASCA developed in conjunction with the College Board’s National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, available at www.schoolcounselor.org/relationship.

This ongoing communication – with results data – is vital for the relationships with school board members that can lead to desired changes. Woodward supports regular communication from school counselors to administrators and board members. In her district, many school counselors copy the board on their regular e-mailed newsletters and invite board members to scholarship briefing events, workshops about bullying prevention or college preparation opportunities. Conway has a seat on his board’s education subcommittee, which puts him at meetings in person and gives him regular communication with the subcommittee. Every communication opportunity is another chance for school counselors to advocate for their own work and the overall value of school counseling. “You’ve got to regularly be the cheerleader for your program,” Conway said.

Harness the Data

A powerful presentation starts with the data itself. Morton and her colleague set benchmarks and a timeline as they collected data for their Re-RAMP application and the accompanying presentation. “You can’t wait until the end of the year, and then look back and say, ‘Oh, I want to see how our results data added up,’” she said. The pair used their closing-the-gap action plan and curriculum action plans as a road map on how to gather that data. Conway and his department track data for every type of intervention they are using,

School Counselors and Steve Jobs

The following tips taken from “The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs: How to Be Insanely Great in Front of Any Audience,” by Carmine Gallo, can help school counselors make effective presentations.

- Identify the one big idea you want to leave with your audience. It should be short, memorable and in subject-verb-object sequence.
- Write out the three messages you want the audience to receive, and develop metaphors and analogies in support of them.
- Invite stakeholders to participate.
- Include video clips if helpful, but keep them short.
- Answer the “Why should I care?” that’s in the audience’s mind. Have a passion for creating a better future.
- Simplify your presentation.
- Make numbers meaningful. Morton’s presentation included, “Those who improved attendance were in school an average of 10.4 days more than in the previous year.” Conway pointed out the “19.68 percent increase in the number of students taking the PSAT from 2008–2009.”
- Don’t use bullet-point style visuals; instead, use short phrases that accompany your talk or pictures.
- Practice, practice, practice, and ask for feedback.



“whether it’s an assessment to gauge the amount students have learned or just administering the PSAT,” providing year-by-year numbers of students taking the exam.

Johnson knows the importance of dedicating enough time and effort to data gathering when showing others the importance of your work. “When you can prove that your small-group and large-group counseling sessions are effective, that’s huge. When you can share data showing a mentoring program you started helps kids improve their grades, that’s how you make progress,” she said.

Conway’s data direction starts with an annual community needs assessment survey, which tells him what the community really wants for their students. “Do they want more college planning, more financial planning, more study skills and organizational techniques?” he said. Having the survey data lets him take the message to his board that the school is focusing on the community’s directly expressed needs. Conway’s frequent SPARC reports also help by making sure administrators and board members have current figures on a regular basis.

Get Their Attention

What attracts the most attention from a school board audience? The results data itself was the star in these presentations. Year-by-year comparisons, such as the growing use of Utah Futures or increases to proficiency rates on state tests, proved to be extremely powerful. Both Morton and Conway considered a new perspective to make their numbers even more compelling. Wherever possible, Morton presented information not as percentages but in values such as the number of days students were in school over the previous year and the number of behavior referrals before and after students participated in her conflict resolution program. Conway’s approach

of focusing on the bottom line value of school counselors highlighted figures such as the increase in graduation rates and decrease in dropouts.

Understanding what is important to board members is essential for a successful presentation. Morton’s school board had been pressuring administrators to improve attendance, so her results data on success in that area was very welcome. With the assignment in Karpowitz’s state to identify an achievement gap and address it, the board was impressed by her district’s successful program of identifying qualified minority students and inviting them to participate in pre-college programs. Karpowitz and Richards-Kong went on to deliver

“When you can share data showing a mentoring program you started helps kids improve their grades, that’s how you make progress.”

data in the following years about the continued success of the identification program and the excellent academic outcomes of the participating students. Johnson and her colleagues also had a mandate to address opportunity gaps for students. Their presentation addressed how they identified students who were having difficulty and the school counselors’ results in meeting the needs of these struggling students.

Woodward’s school board was interested in how school counselors personalize their support to students and help them plan for their future and encouraged school counselors to share stories illustrating this support. In this

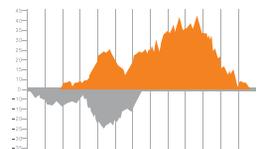
vein, Morton’s presentation included short videos of students about how the conflict resolution program had helped them, and her board members “were just captivated,” she said.

Prepared to Present

As the only school counselors presenting to their board that year, Morton and Brown felt pressure to represent their profession, advocate for school counselors and impress their school board audience. Morton learned to use a newer tool for their presentation visuals, a program called Prezi (see www.prezi.com). Free accounts are available to educators, and Morton calls the format “more dynamic” than the traditional PowerPoint. PowerPoint presentations also can be imported into Prezi. The program has a bit of a learning curve, according to Morton, and she recommends school counselors become familiar with it and try a presentation before using it for an important event like a board presentation.

Not only does Morton suggest getting comfortable with the presentation format being used, she urges school counselors to practice out loud so they feel prepared and confident, especially if presenting with a partner. “We practiced so much before we went in front of the board, just so we looked like a professional, cohesive team,” Morton said. To help herself and Brown prepare, Morton used guidelines from the book “The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs” (see p. 13). And the pair did not neglect their own visual impression, wearing their official Settles Bridge Elementary button-down shirts. “We just looked like a very unified team to the board, and I know that was commented on afterward,” Morton said.

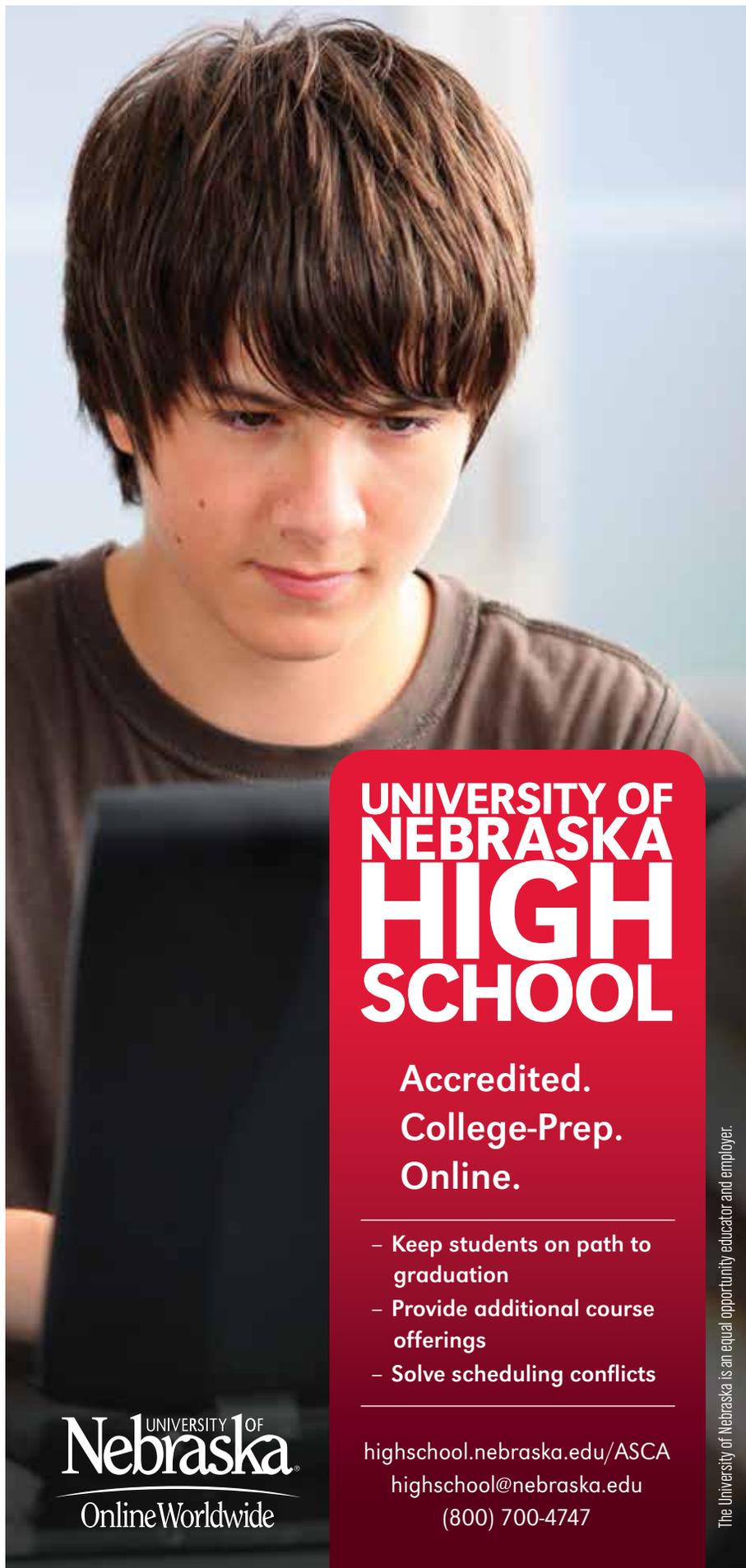
Finally, know your time limit and be prepared for interaction. Karpowitz and Richards-Kong provided school board members with an advance study



packet including background information. They had prepared the requested 15-minute PowerPoint, to be followed by five minutes of questions. “We wound up going over half an hour because the board kept asking questions. They were very interested in what we had to say and in our data,” Karpowitz said. Morton had a similar experience, “They were really inquisitive; I hadn’t expected them to be interrupting us and asking us questions, so that caught me a little off guard, but it was very encouraging how interested they were.”

This high interest level is a reminder that school board members serve because they care about the success of students. Woodward said board members value providing good advice and support and guidance to students about their future direction, and they appreciate helping students navigate personal and emotional challenges. Still, Conway said, “You absolutely have to have the data and be able to prove the impact your school counseling department is having and can have.” 

Katy O’Grady is a freelance writer based in Fairfax, Va., who last wrote for *ASCA School Counselor* about 2012 School Counselor of the Year Nicole Pflieger.



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