Case Study: Dropout Prevention

Why ASCA National Model Foundation is Important

Several years ago, Edstar Analytics helped a large southeastern school district use data and the ASCA National Model to implement dropout prevention efforts. Reviewing years of data and comparing students who dropped out to those who didn't revealed that certain academic characteristics were much more predictive of likelihood to dropout than being a member of traditional "at-risk" groups. And, some students with these academic predictors were not members of the "at-risk" groups.

Changing who school counselors target with dropout prevention efforts can require a paradigm shift. In fact, some school counselors told us that they felt uneasy not focusing on the traditional "at-risk" students. This is why examining beliefs and what using data might mean is an important foundational step of the ASCA National Model.

Case Study

In this case study, we identified variable factors that ninth-grade dropouts have in common, and strategies that could eliminate or reduce these factors, thus allowing counselors to target the students who really were at risk.

Initially, we found nine risk factors of which nearly all dropouts had at least one. Many of these factors were correlated with each other, so we were able to reduce the list to three:

- Being retained in any grade
- Scoring below grade level on the 8th grade standardized math test and on the Algebra 1 math test
- Being suspended from school for more than ten days in either 8th or 9th grade.

In addition to identifying data associated with dropping out, we also looked at the students who had these dropout risk factors but *didn't* drop out. We found that students with these factors who participated in extracurricular activities and ninth-grade transition programs, and those who attended middle schools that did not track all of the core courses, were least likely to drop out.

Data in to Action

One of the high school counselors used this information to identify 24 ninth-grade students who had two of more of these risk factors and were not already receiving special services. He set up a tutorial program, reward system for attendance, and small group sessions. Although the students were resistant at first, he remembered our earlier research, which found that after 10 positive contacts with the most resistant students (who are used to only negative contacts from school), they start to buy in.

The school counselor hung in there and eventually built good relationships with these students. All but three of these students were successfully promoted to 10th grade!