

Academic Intervention Proposal for Noblesville High School

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**Literature Review**

Obtaining an education is highly valued, and even necessary, in today's society in order to become a successful individual and experience the quality of life that most people desire (Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). In addition, most job opportunities require at least a high school diploma, and "individuals without a high school diploma are approximately four times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates" (Bruce et al., 2009, p. 451). But there is more to student learning than simply earning a passing grade and graduating high school. Students must develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to become productive adults who positively contribute to society, and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) calls on professional school counselors to foster students' development of these necessary assets (ASCA, 2012).

Although school counselors strive to help *all* students succeed, we are also called on to close achievement gaps between different student populations. Over the past few decades, school counselors, and all other stakeholders, have worked to improve the academic, career, and personal/social success of female students who traditionally underachieved compared to their male counterparts. However, instead of bringing female and male students to the same high standard of success, male students now appear to be falling behind (Clark, Flower, Walton, & Oakley, 2008). This new gender achievement gap is receiving increased attention, as national data on test scores, grades, and dropout rates show that "boys are having more academic difficulties and are achieving at lower levels across most school subjects as a group than are girls", and male students are

receiving more ADD/ADHD diagnoses, special education placements, and discipline referrals than female students (Clark et al., 2008, p. 127). Beyond the P-12 school years, statistics have shown the long-term impacts of male underachievement in that females are graduating high school, enrolling in college, and completing their degrees at higher rates than males (NCES, 2006 as cited in Clark et al., 2008). Clark et al. (2008) also state, “In addition to achievement data, there are attitudinal and motivational data that indicate boys as a group do not seem to think school is as important in their lives as do girls” (p. 127). These negative beliefs are having serious impacts on boys’ success in school.

Others agree that motivation is one of the most significant factors related to student learning, as researchers have found that lack of motivation often leads to a disengagement in school, underachievement, and potentially dropping out of school completely (Rowell & Hong, 2013). ASCA further emphasizes the importance of academic motivation in their *National Standards for Students* (ASCA, 2004), in which school counselors are expected to foster students’ demonstration of the following: “the motivation to achieve individual potential” (A:B1.1); “dependability, productivity, and initiative” (A:A3.4); “how effort and persistence positively affect learning” (A:A2.2); and “a positive interest in learning” (A:A1.2). In their extensive discussion of academic motivation, Rowell and Hong (2013) identify students’ beliefs/perceptions (e.g., self-efficacy, autonomy, and attributional beliefs), goals, values, and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation as key motivational components that impact student learning. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves and feel more confident in their potential for future success, while students with low self-efficacy often engage in avoidance tactics when faced with difficulty in their education. The authors further

outlined how autonomy also has positive impacts on student learning, as students who are given choices in activities tend to be more engaged and interested in their learning. Students' attributional beliefs, classified by "locus of control (*internal* – ability/effort and *external* – luck/task difficulty), stability over time (*stable* – ability/task difficulty and *unstable* – effort/luck), and controllability or responsibility of the student (*controllable* – effort/mood/getting help from school counselor and *uncontrollable* – ability/task difficulty)", have also been found to be highly influential in students' academic motivation (p. 160). In addition, goal-orientation is a particularly prominent issue in today's high-stakes testing atmosphere, which pushes students towards *performance goal orientation* as they are expected to "demonstrate their competence relative to others" (p. 160). On the other hand, *mastery goal-oriented* students strive to master and *learn* material, which are related to intrinsic motivation and steady, positive learning outcomes. With this extensive discussion, Rowell and Hong (2013) also provide specific suggestions of strategies to increase students' academic motivation, which will be presented later in this proposal.

### **Data Reviewed**

Before beginning this project, I went to one of the assistant principals to consult on the biggest areas in need of intervention in our school. At Noblesville High School (NHS), students have an hour and a half Academic Lab (AL) period at the end of every other day during which they can work on homework, get support from a peer tutor, visit their teachers to ask for assistance with class material or homework, and take advantage of other opportunities to promote their academic success. The assistant principal wanted to examine the Senior At-Risk AL, an intervention currently in its third year of

implementation with the purpose of assisting students who are not on track to graduate on time. He noticed that there seemed to always be more boys in this class, and suggested that I look at the current students in the class as well as the previous two cohorts to determine where these students started to veer off-track and find a way to intervene earlier with future students.

I began by gathering demographic data on students from each cohort, as well as their Free/Reduced Price Lunch Status, Special Education Status, and English Language Learner Status, all through PowerSchool, the web-based student information platform used at NHS. Lunch Status proved to be a problematic category, as this data was only available for current students, not the previous two cohorts. I also gathered achievement data including students' grade point averages (GPA) and grades in core classes during grades 9 through 11, specifically looking at the number of F's students earned in these courses. I also took into account attendance for these students over all four years of their high school careers as achievement-related data. Further, I compiled demographic data on students who graduated in the previous two years with less than a 2.0 GPA, as well as students who did not graduate. I disaggregated all data by gender, because I was specifically looking at the gender gap in student placement in the Senior At-Risk AL. I also disaggregated all data by race/ethnicity to determine if there were any other gaps beyond the gender gap that might not have been considered. Finally, I compared all of these data pieces to the demographic makeup of the general population for the current 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, as well as the previous two years of graduates. See Table 1 and Table 2 for general data. Data tables on individual students from the Senior At-Risk AL are not included in this proposal to protect these students' privacy.

### **Findings and Conclusion Based on Data Review**

After analyzing the data, males were clearly disproportionately represented every year in the Senior At-Risk AL. Males made up 48.5% of the total population of graduating students in the 2013-2014 school year, 51.6% in 2014-2015, and 47.1% of the total 12<sup>th</sup> grade population in the current 2015-2016 school year. However, the Senior At-Risk AL included 89.5%, 79.2%, and 73.3% male students in each school year respectively. While these percentages only represent 10-20 students out of over 600 in their grade, the drastic difference from the general population demographics are still cause for concern. In addition, male students made up 78.6% of 2014 low-GPA graduates, two-thirds of 2015 non-graduates, and even more startling, 90.9% of 2015 low-GPA graduates. Thus, even when male students are graduating, they are significantly underachieving compared to their female peers.

In regards to other potential gaps, I found that of the low-GPA graduates, students who received Special Education services were slightly overrepresented compared to the general graduate population, and the makeup of the Senior At-Risk AL also followed similar trends of over-representing these students. Another finding was that almost half of students in the current Senior At-Risk AL are receiving Free Lunch. Minority students were also highly overrepresented in the non-graduate population, and slightly overrepresented in all other areas. Hispanic students had the highest rates of disproportionate representation in low-GPA graduates, non-graduates, and the current Senior At-Risk AL cohort. Although these additional findings are important to note, the focus of this project is to help close the male underachievement gap. School counselors' time is already limited, so we need to be focused and intentional in our interventions and

not try to tackle all gaps at once (Hatch, 2014). Future interventions should target these areas.

After analyzing achievement and achievement-related data for students included in the Senior At-Risk AL class, I became confused. Although there were clear trends in high numbers of F's in their core classes, low GPA, and high numbers of absences, there were some students in each of the three cohorts who did not fit these trends. Average GPAs in each of the cohorts were between 1.8 and 2.2, however there were some students with GPAs in the high 2.0s and even above a 3.0. This led me to search for answers as to how students were being referred to this class. After speaking with the two teachers in charge of the class as well as the assistant principal, I discovered that teachers and/or school counselors simply suggest students who they think might benefit from some extra support and someone to keep them on track with doing their homework. Then the assistant principal and the dean of students (in charge of attendance and discipline) review the students' grades, attendance, and discipline records, and also consider the students' personalities to determine if they should be placed in the class. Some students are turned away from the class because of motivation and discipline issues, which could distract other students in the class. Thus, these differences in makeup of the Senior At-Risk AL compared to the general population could be due to achievement gaps, or it could be due to the lack of a clearly defined referral process. Also, as mentioned in the literature review, motivation has a serious impact on student learning and can be a struggle particularly for boys, so counting students out from gaining needed support because of motivation issues is a significant barrier to male students.

### **Proposed Intervention**

First, I would like to solve the problem of inconsistency in referrals by developing a clearly defined referral system and advocating for the use of this system with all NHS staff. In speaking with the two AL teachers and the assistant principal, I believe it would help them feel more confident in their decisions on who to permit to be in the class, and would ensure more equity in this practice. It would also give students more insight into their teacher's or school counselor's reasoning for referring them to this class. Although I do not have data on which specific teachers or school counselors referred each student, I believe many staff members are not aware of the existence of the Senior At-Risk AL as a resource for struggling students. Thus, once the two AL teachers, assistant principal, and I can decide on a referral process and develop a form, I plan on sharing this with the staff.

As far as a specific academic intervention, I plan to offer a group counseling unit to 11<sup>th</sup> grade male students who are underachieving but also lacking motivation, and thus would not qualify for the Senior At-Risk AL next year. In targeting 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, I hope to stop these negative trends of underachievement and low academic motivation from continuing into the boys' senior years. In regards to the format of the intervention, not only is group counseling an effective and time-efficient strategy for school counselors, but it has also been found to be helpful for high school students because "group participation allows members to bond and feel safe sharing personal issues while simultaneously working towards a shared goal" (Bruce et al, 2009, p. 452). By making success a shared goal, students will hold each other accountable so that the whole group succeeds (Salina et al., 2013). Also in relation to group bonding, underachieving boys benefit from a strengths-based approach in which the school counselor highlights



individual and group strengths and creates a positive, supportive environment (Clark et al., 2008). This strategy is especially important during adolescence and the high school years when all students are experiencing changes and developing their identities. Further, boys are often more present-oriented than future-oriented, which can cause academics and preparing for college and careers to fall out of priority status (Clark et al., 2008). Thus, another helpful evidence-based strategy from Clark et al. (2008) that I would like to implement as a part of my intervention is helping boys become more future-oriented by explicitly defining their “possible” or future selves and the steps they need to take to become that person.

Boys with low motivation and a history of academic struggles can benefit from opportunities where they can experience success in a safe environment, such as group counseling (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Researchers have also found great success in relating group activities to male group members’ specific interests (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Thus, I plan on connecting activities to the students’ interests throughout each lesson. Another aspect of motivation that I plan to include throughout this group is the development of mastery/learning goals to go beyond many students’ current desires to “just pass”. Finally, a key theme I want to present throughout this group is to foster students’ autonomy through choices in our activities that can transfer to their own positive decision-making related to academic skills and habits (Rowell & Hong, 2013). Providing underachieving, unmotivated male students with opportunities to make their own choices can be especially empowering after repeated disciplinary actions trying to force the students to do their work (Bruce et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2008).

In addition, research has suggested that boys are best able to focus and learn through hands-on, interactive activities (Bruce et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2008). Both of these articles outline specific, evidence-based interactive activities and session plans similar to the evidence-based Student Success Skills lessons, which focus on learning, social, and self-management skills like goal-setting, problem solving, progress monitoring, time management, and organization. These session outlines also address motivation, choices, and positive communication and negotiation. This last skill can be particularly helpful for underachieving boys who can sometimes fall into the habit of blaming their teachers for their own academic struggles. This is also an opportunity for gaining teacher buy-in by helping students have positive conversations with their teachers (Rowell & Hong, 2013). I plan on using a combination of these session plans and larger themes to develop this group counseling intervention.

Parents have a significant influence on their students' success in school, so I plan to include parents in this group counseling intervention by gaining their buy-in and support in order to best help their sons achieve success within the group. Practicing school counselors have found success in gaining parental involvement by contacting them more often with good news instead of only bad news (Salina et al., 2013). I expect this strategy will be especially important in my situation with parents of boys who are underachieving, lacking motivation, and possibly receiving frequent discipline referrals and negative calls home. I plan to send home discussion points from our group sessions for students to share with their parents to keep them involved in what we are doing in the group. In addition, I think it would be helpful to provide parents with a brief overview of our lessons so they can try to reinforce the topics and skills at home. Lastly, I would like

to invite the parents to attend our last session in which I will be celebrating the boys' commitment to their education through completing the group counseling intervention.

### **Hypotheses**

As a result of my referral intervention, I expect to see more equity in the students referred to the Senior At-Risk AL. I also expect that this will result in improvements in grades and attendance for the new students admitted into this class, as the class has a history of success. In relation to the group intervention, I expect to see improvements in grades/numbers of missing assignments, attendance, and discipline referrals for students in the group. I also expect students to demonstrate future-oriented outlooks by the end of group as measured by students discussing possible future selves and developing plans and goals in group to reach those future selves. Finally, I expect to see improvements in academic motivation as measured by specific pre/post-assessment questions related to ASCA Student Standards (e.g. Students will demonstrate beliefs in their ability to succeed; and Students will demonstrate a positive interest in learning).

### **Planned Methodology and Data Analysis Procedures**

I plan to identify students for the group based on data from the Senior At-Risk AL cohorts focusing on 11<sup>th</sup> grade males with a high number of absences, low GPAs, and a history of failing multiple core courses in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, thus being behind in credits and not on track to graduate. Specifically, I plan to consider students who have a history of lack of motivation based on teacher, administrator, and school counselor suggestions. I plan to interview these identified students to pinpoint a smaller population for the group. Once group members are identified, I plan to collect data on the students' current grades, number of missing assignments, absences and tardies, frequency of discipline

referrals, and motivation information and competency attainment based on students' self-reports in the pre-test. I also plan on collecting each of these data pieces at the end of group and comparing the students' progress to determine if the intervention was a success. I would also like to gather parent and teacher data on their assessments of the students' attitudes and behaviors prior to and at the end of the group intervention.

### **Timeline for Proposed Outcome Research Project**

- December 18 – Meet with assistant principal to discuss options for referral form
- January 8 – Identify potential students for group counseling
- January 15 – Follow up with assistant principal and two AL teachers to decide upon final referral form
- January 22 – Meet with all identified students and obtain parent consent and student assent forms for students invited to participate in group
- January 29 – Develop/deliver needs assessment/pre-test to group members
- February 22 – Assistant principal will share new referral form at faculty meeting
- February 4 – Develop detailed outline of lesson plans guided by student needs
- February 1-March 11 – Group counseling unit during the first 45 minutes of AL on Thursdays or Fridays (6 sessions)
- March 14-25 – Collect post-intervention data through PowerSchool, student, teacher, administrator, and parent reports
- March 25-April 5 – Compare and analyze pre/post-intervention data and compile results
- April 5 – Poster presentation of final results

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<b>TABLE 1</b>														
	TOTAL	Male	%	Female	%	Late Grad	%	SpecEd	%	Free lunch*	%	Reduced lunch*	%	* = IDOE compass data for 12th grade 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, PS data for 2015-2016
<b>General Population</b>														
2013-2014 Graduates	616	299	48.5	317	51.5	12	1.9	84	13.6	88	14.3	37	6.0	
2014-2015 Graduates	609	314	51.6	295	48.4	18	3.0	85	14.0	82	13.5	42	6.9	
2015-2016 12th Grade	624	294	47.1	330	52.9	n/a	n/a	92	14.7	86	13.8	39	6.3	
<b>Low-GPA Graduates (below 2.0)</b>														
# students in Senior At-Risk AL														
2013-2014	42, 6.8%	33	78.6	9	21.4	3	7.1	15	35.7					# %
difference from general			30.1	-	30.1		5.2		22.1					8 19.0
2014-2015	33, 5.4%	30	90.9	3	9.1	8	24.2	8	24.2					
difference from general			39.3	-	39.3		21.2		10.2					5 15.2
change year to year			12.3	-	12.3		17.1		-					
														-3.8
<b>NON-Graduates</b>														
2014-2015	15, 2.4%	10	66.7	5	33.3	n/a	n/a	1	6.7					
# Students in Senior At-Risk AL below 2.0 GPA														
<b>Students in Senior At-Risk AL</b>														
														# % AVG GPA
2013-2014	19, 3.1%	17	89.5	2	10.5	1	5.3	6	31.6					8 42.1 2.06
2014-2015	24, 3.9%	19	79.2	5	20.8	5	20.8	6	25.0					5 20.8 2.22
2015-2016	15, 2.4%	11	73.3	4	26.7	n/a	n/a	2	13.3	7	46.7			9 60.0 1.86

<b>TABLE 2</b>																	
	TOTAL	Am Indian	%	Black	%	Asian	%	Hispanic	%	White	%	Multiracial	%	Hawaiian/PI	%	TOTAL MINORITY	%
<b>General Population</b>																	
2013-2014 Graduates	616	0	0	17	2.8	10	1.6	20	3.2	557	90.4	11	1.8	1	0.2	59	9.6
2014-2015 Graduates	609	1	0.2	16	2.6	11	1.8	30	4.9	539	88.5	12	2.0	0	0	70	11.5
2015-2016 12th Grade	624	1	0.2	21	3.4	14	2.2	30	4.8	545	87.3	12	1.9	0	0	78	12.5
<b>Low-GPA Graduates (below 2.0)</b>																	
2013-2014	42, 6.8%	0	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	6	14.3	31	73.8	3	7.1	0	0	11	26.2
difference from general			0		-0.4		0.8		11.1		-16.6		5.3		-0.2		
2014-2015	33, 5.4%	0	0	3	9.1	0	0	5	15.2	24	72.7	1	3.0	0	0	9	27.3
difference from general			-0.2		6.5		-1.8		10.3		-15.8		1		0		
change year to year			0		6.7		-2.4		0.9		-1.1		-4.1		0		
<b>NON-Graduates</b>																	
2014-2015	15, 2.4%	0	0	2	13.3	0	0	2	13.3	9	60.0	1	6.7	1	6.7	6	40.0
<b>Students in Senior At-Risk AL</b>																	
2013-2014	19, 3.1%	0	0	1	5.3	0	0	1	5.3	15	78.9	2	10.5	0	0	4	21.0
2014-2015	24, 3.9%	0	0	3	12.5	0	0	0	0	19	79.2	2	8.3	0	0	5	20.8
2015-2016	15, 2.4%	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	3	20.0	9	60.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	5	33.3