Engaging Families and the Community as an Alternative to Expulsion: An Innovative Approach to Dropout Prevention

Karen Cooper-Haber
May 7, 2013
Agenda

• To describe R-2s Intervention Services model
• To describe how and why it began
• To describe the evolution of the program over past 8 years
• To provide outcomes associated with services
• To communicate the importance of having family therapists on the mental health service delivery teams in the schools
• To explain how our model can be replicated in other schools/districts
Richland School District Two in Columbia, S.C.

- K-12 population of over 26,660 (fastest growing in Midlands)
- 39 schools/centers
- Diverse population: 48% ON F/R LUNCH, 59 LANGUAGES, 69% MINORITY, large number transient (military 16% & other)
- Increasing number of Hispanic families
The District’s Concern

Large numbers of students with multiple suspensions in the four high schools (505 in 2004-2005)

the directive

• reduction in the number of students being recommended for expulsion

• reduction in the number of students being expelled

• reduction in the number of students who are unsuccessful in the alternative schools
We were supported in this approach by the research and by the recommendations of the NDPC.

“Family engagement” is one of the 15 most effective dropout prevention strategies identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center.
Family-Based Interventions

• Programs such as MSFT and FFT have been shown to yield up to $13 in benefits to public safety for every dollar spent. Bottom line...family counseling can be more cost effective and produce more public safety benefits than detaining and incarcerating youth.... a likely progression for students being expelled from school.
So we looked at these models:

**Multi-systemic Family Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Brief Strategic Family Therapy**, and other evidence based approaches to working with families with school age children.

**Limitations…**

**Systemic/ Resource Model**
Our services evolved to what we currently see as our model: a multi-dimensional school-based model with family, training, and service as its cornerstones.
In the Beginning

Year I (2005-06)
• 1 licensed FT: 1 MFT graduate student: 1 school counseling grad students: (4 high schools)
• Saw 117 students/families

Year 2 (2006-07)
• 1 FT: 3 MFT graduate interns: 13 school: a MFG: small grant
• Saw 309 students/families

Year 7 (2011-12)
• 4 licensed clinicians: 17 FT grad students: 8 school: EEDA at risk grant funds: 25 MFG’s
Saw 889 students/families (k-12 discipline & other)
Individual &/or group counseling with graduate students placed in the schools and working with students k-12 referred through the discipline process
Multi-Family Groups

• Initially, we ran the Family Solutions Program (a ten week program) in the high schools prior to a recommendation for expulsion. (RSD2 was the first school district implementing the FSP to target the challenges of high school dropouts, truancy, and discipline problems.) For more information on FSP, you can search *Families 4 Change, Inc.*

• In 2009-10, we developed our own curriculum, *Building Bridges to Success*, in response to changes in the needs of our target population (alt. schools) & focused on alternative school population.
Funding for Groups

A SCDE TDOP grant, supplemented by our district, made it possible for us to provide the FSP for the first few years; EEDA at-risk grants & our district have made it possible to continue providing the BBTS and other intervention services to students and families.
We have developed opportunities for service that can be incorporated into the multi-family group program that include:

Service Saturdays

(two Saturdays a month where our students—some voluntary, some mandated—can be involved in service projects)
Service Leaders/volunteers
Placement, training, & shared supervision of graduate students from the Marriage & Family, School Counseling, and Mental Health Counseling programs
Supervision Model 2005-2006

Karen C-H
LMFT, LPC-S, MFT-S, Guidance certification

USC SUPERVISOR

RVH
RVH
RVH
RVH
RVH

SCHOOL COUNSELING INTERNS (USC)

JULIE MFT INTERN

MARRIAGE & FAMILY INTERNS (USC)
What are we seeing?

Since the requirement to participate in family intervention services was made part of the conditions for returning to student’s home school, we’ve seen a significant reduction in the number of students suspended or expelled from district alternative schools.
What happens when the students at the alternative schools return to their home school?

- Many of these students returning to their home schools are not successful.

- **57%** no longer in school at the end of the 2009-10 school year
  - Dropped out
  - Transferred
  - Expelled
What did we do?

Developed transition support program at one high school (Project Success)

- Students receive extra academic support one period a week for eight weeks.
- Students follow that with participation in a group that fosters empowerment, self control, goal setting and decision making for the entire year.
Significant Change

• Student’s goal orientation
• Attitude toward school
• 2010/2011
  • 89.5% Project Success Participants remained at RNH
  • 100% non participants returned to BA
  • RNH had highest # of returnees; now lowest
• 2011/2012
  • 9 seniors (8 graduated)
  • Total participants for 2 years 54 (2011=32, 2012=22)
Future Visions
Goal: provide additional information & resources related to postsecondary options for at-risk students and families

2011-12 (4) Saturday Seminars (3 hrs) (40 students; 30 parents; 12 businesses)

2012-13 (2) Saturday conferences - Spanish Future Visions (274 total: 126 students; 102 family members; 46 out of district families; 17 business, agency or educational program representatives)

Non-Spanish Future Visions - (105 total: 55 students; 50 family members; 23 business, agency or educational program representatives)
Requests from other mental health & social work practitioners in the schools and the community continued to grow as reports of positive outcomes for students were seen.
Challenges

• School buy-in (a process); changing the culture to see “alternatives” to suspension/expulsion

• Increased number of requests from around the district for services (elementary, middle, and high schools, and alternative schools)

• Growing number of Spanish speaking families

• Limited space

• Limited staff
“While we are concerned about all students in our district, we recognize that the population served by Intervention Services may be the hardest to reach. We have seen results of the efforts made with these students by bringing their families into the process and continue to be supportive of these services.....”

Dr. Stephanie Burgess, former School Board Chair
Hours of Service Provided By Graduate Student, Volunteer, and Extern Placements

Number of Hours

2005-2006: 1350
2006-2007: 7740
2007-2008: 6750
2008-2009: 12105
2009-2010: 10560
2010-2011: 11146
2011-2012: 10875

GRAND TOTAL: 60526

Academic School Year
Are family therapists /supervisors cost effective in the schools?

- 1 family therapist = 600 direct hours of service
- 1 family therapist + 1 trainee (600 direct hrs + 400 direct hrs) = 1,000 hours of service
- 1 family therapist = 600 + 4 trainees @ 400 or 1600 = 2,200 hours
- 1 family therapist ($54,000) costs = 1 yr of incarceration in a juvenile facility = the same
Growth of Intervention Services from 2005/06 - 2011/12

- Number of students referred
- Numbers of students/families who received intervention services
- Parents involved in session
- Siblings involved in session
<table>
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<th>Academic School Year</th>
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Recap: How did we do it?

- Looked for resources in the community & the district (funding & other)
- Used clinicians trained systemically to work with families (interns & externs)
- Committed to fostering the collaboration between the families, the schools, & the community
- Vigilant about analyzing our data
- Planning, assessing, revising, expanding
- Started small (1 FT: 1 intern)
Contact Information

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