

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Coordination for Katy ISD Texas Education Agency Designated Best Practices for Dropout Recovery Resources Katy Independent School District Katy, TX

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Funding Sources

Initially, the staffing (one person/myself) was under Compensatory Education, through the General Operating Funds (GOF) staffing budget. Later, a second staff person was added to equal the two current District Coordinators. These positions began as Specialists and were recently changed to Coordinators, year-round positions, and are under Campus Administrative Support. The four additional staff members (campus Dropout Prevention Facilitators placed at four high schools, serving even comprehensive schools) were added through the Texas Education Agency's High School Allotment Funding, earmarked with the charge to increase graduates/reduce dropouts.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

The project/program employs six staff members, two of whom are at coordinator salaries (238 days of contract) and four of whom are at facilitator salaries (same as teachers' daily rate) working 201 days per school year = five extra days prior to teachers/most staff returning to contract and five additional days at the end of the school year after teachers leave from duty. These additional days were approved and are necessary to assess which students graduated, which need to attend summer school, to sit for Exit testing during the summer, review Exits passed/failed, as well as credits earned prior to summer graduation, or school resuming in August. The 201-day schedule is the same as District Counselors. office space for the Coordinators is paid/provided at the District level Administration Education Support Complex (KISD ESC) with the four Facilitators' office spaces at their respective campuses provided by each campus principal's staffing space and are usually near a counseling suite. General office supplies, postage, inner-district travel, and staff development are provided through the Coordinators' annual shared budget of \$7,500, with the respective campuses absorbing the cost of computer, phone, printer, and other miscellaneous items.

Scope and Setting

The scope and setting of the project are to support, monitor, and advocate for students at seven comprehensive four-year (approximately 3,000 students each) Katy ISD high schools (and three smaller ones with approximately 100+ students each). These students are those who are at risk for not graduating (especially those overage and under credits). Through this project we hope to avert potential dropouts, recover current dropouts, reenroll beginning of the school year No Show students, and help address the personal/academic needs and barriers of these students in an effort to increase graduates and reduce dropouts.

The primary focus of this project and its goals are to recover, monitor, mentor, reengage, support, advocate, develop, and maintain appropriate staff to student relationships and to document in writing our one-on-one conversations/interventions for students at risk of not graduating, dropping (or dropped) out, and/or whom are recovered to education.

Staffing Pattern

Under the Department of Campus Administrative Support, the office of Dropout, Prevention and Intervention, the two Coordinators, along with four Facilitators serve as additional support to campus staff for students and parents. We work closely with campus staff, students, and parents/guardians in order to assess and share individual and collective needs of students in an effort to identify and remove barriers and coordinate appropriate interventions, specific services, and/or overall general and yet personalized support.

Population Served

- Number of students, subjects, or participants:
Unlike almost all other programs, our office has *no* caseload limit. Most programs or personnel hold caseloads of 80 to 100 students. Almost all of the students our office serves are at risk (whether officially designated or not), making our caseload numbers and student situations even more taxing. Any student referred to this office via staff, self-referral, parent/guardian, or by our own in-office monitor criteria for not graduating and/or dropping out, is met with, spoken to, and followed up with all in an effort to avert or recover a dropout and increase the likelihood of education/graduation.
- Description of project participants (ages, grades, demographics, etc.):
The Katy ISD Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Coordination Program serves high school students, grades 9 to 12, ages ranging from ages 14 to 21 years (regular ed) and to age 22 for special education students at risk for dropping out, previously dropped out, and/or not graduating on time (four years), or not graduating at all. The demographics for the students our office serves are 60-80% Hispanic and male. *No* high school student is refused service by our office because they may not meet criteria set by another program and no student/parent/staff are referred “away” to another office without our email documentation and follow-up of service suggested to be provided by the appropriate office. For example, we do not respond: “Your child is in a _____ situation? You would need to speak to the _____ Liaison. Please contact that office.” Instead, and what is very unique about this service, our response is: “Your child is in a _____ situation? I can refer you to the appropriate office. If you share your name, your child’s name, and contact information, we will forward (in writing) this call/request to that office and then follow up with you and the office to make certain you both have made contact with one another.” At that point, an email is drafted to the appropriate office, explaining the call, student need, and asking that our office be included in the action/service provided. We also look up the student in our District’s student database to determine if the student should be on our office’s radar. If we do not hear back from the particular office, we then reach out to the office directly asking for a student/parent status update (as per our written referral) and if our office’s intervention or advocacy is needed. Our personal and professional philosophy is that *we seek to advocate more, not be involved less*.
- Participant selection criteria:
As stressed, *no* high school student at risk for dropping out, not returning to an educational setting, and/or not graduating is refused service by our office once referred and/or identified. Students closely monitored, and thereby served, are any students who withdraw (or, withdrawn/leaves) from school anytime within the school year without enrollment; any students who leave with the stated intent of pursuit of the GED; any students who do not return to school between the 1st of school in August and the last Friday in September (Texas School Start Window Deadline); any students who meet credits, but not Exit TAKS; any students not on track to graduate due to overage and under credits; as well as those students who do not fall into the above categories but for whom our office is committed to serving/(re)directing appropriately toward the goal of academic success. Actually, *no* call is turned away from our service, even adults who may or may not have been a former KISD student. Therefore, our office provides service to adults age 22 to 52+ as they were a former student somewhere at some point in their lives and the personalized service we provide at this time serves our district/them either as parents to our students or citizens of our communities.

Project Origination

The program began with one person (current Coordinator and author of this Field Project Report) in 1992, with a commitment to one-on-one conversations (ultimately, service) with students who were dropping out of school to pursue their GED or, more troublesome, not following through with the GED and/or a return to a viable educational setting. The personalization at that time was simply taking the time to explain the follow-through for success on the GED either by testing individually and/or through the state's in-house GED program, or returning to school toward a recommitment to graduate. At that point, there was not an official awareness/understanding on my part of the students not testing/passing, their dropping out, and reporting as such in relationship to State Data Standards, Leaver Codes, and Accountability Ratings. I was the only teacher for the HSEP (in High School Equivalency Program) and served in that role half day. I was an English teacher (PreAP & Reg Ed) the other half of the day, as well as a Harris County Department of Education Adult Ed ESL instructor during the evenings. The three student groups may, at first, seem distinctly different, mutually exclusive, or even in direct contrast of relationship to one another. That said, I found the common denominator for successful follow-through of a GED; a return to education, and ultimately, graduation was the personalization of conversations, interventions, advocacy, and having such be unique and tailored to each student's particular personal and academic needs. I then moved from personalization to a process of relationship cultivation, with a systematic approach and commitment to protocols by sharing the documentation of options with the student, parent/guardian and most importantly, the campus staff—particularly, the counselor, grade level principal, campus attendance clerks, and registrars. Students, parents, and staff saw a personalized, written graduation action plan moving from: “I can’t” to “I can and this is how I will.”

Issues Addressed

With this office's creation of a centralized dropout recovery office/program, it evolved into taking personal and professional responsibility districtwide for identifying, tracking, and recovering students who dropped out; as well as initiating, assessing, coordinating, and monitoring academic and support services provided to recovered dropouts to facilitate their successful return, high school completion, and beyond. With the hire of a second person (current Coordinator), our office then began to include identifying, monitoring, suggesting interventions, and redirecting students who had not dropped out but were at risk for dropping out and/or not graduating on time or at all in an effort to be proactive vs. reactive.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

We are a Best Practices Teacher Education Agency (TEA) recognized resource for dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery coordination with our personalized strategies resulting in one of the lowest dropout rates in Texas. The desired outcomes and measurable objectives are to decrease the district (KISD) dropout rates as well as improve the graduation rate in relationship to our district's Region IV and the state's overall averages.

Strategies and/or Interventions

The interventions/strategies of this project and which make our program most unique are through a systematic approach and follow up process *each* contact/communication is written, personalized, and team reviewed by the District level Coordinator(s) and campus assigned Facilitator, with appropriate other staff inclusion. The strategies/interventions for students served are data driven yet, still personalized. Advocacy and involvement are based upon the type of referral/request (overage, under credit, high absenteeism, teen parent, homeless, discipline, personal/social issues, previous dropout) as well as this Office/District generated reports of dropouts, leaver codes, and campus withdrawals. Our program's service and students' needs are supported with the requirement (by the Coordinators to the Facilitators) of daily email documentation (and their monthly spreadsheets) of student/parent/staff

conversation updates as well as the Coordinators' once monthly and yearly dropout recovery data reports. This documentation shares identified, prevented, tracked, leaver code updates, recovered dropouts, academic and support services provided, TAKS Exit retesting assistance, and high school graduation or GED passes to campus staff. Our Office sets the standard for involvement and personalized documentation of service with each email, a collective average of 25 to 30 students served/attempted to be contacted for dropout recovery (cleared only by/with TEA acceptable paperwork proof), return to education, and student support per day.

Project Timeline

The timeline of the program are one school year and monthly dropout rosters/recovery attempts, 4 year graduation cohort, 5 and 6 year graduates, as well as dropout/No Show recovery from the first day of school in August to the last Friday each September – Texas School Start Window Deadline in addition to Data Submission to the State each school year in October and finalized in January. See also an in house “24-hr rule” discussed under Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners below.

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project

Collaboration is key with a willingness to share in person *and* in writing (via email documentation) every contact, recovery attempt(s), intervention strategy, and viable student options with students, parents, staff, and to this office. Strong verbal and written skills are a must with at least one person on the team being a Spanish speaker/writer, given our Hispanic student population is 34.7% with Caucasian at 37.9%. Not every staff person is a fit for this level of involvement, documentation, and type of program. This type of centralized, documented monitoring can be overwhelming, especially for staff members who may be more process driven.

Clear, concise, honest dialogue with stakeholders holds the key to the students' academic and personal history and therefore, the students' input, challenges, options and hopefully, buy in. It is relatively “easy” to bring a student back from dropout or truancy status in contrast to the crux of this work and, therefore, the real difficulty is to have the student welcomed back to their home campus and once there, to thrive (earn credits) toward graduation. Our office responsibility does not end with a student's return to one of our high school campuses. It continues with our follow-up, motivation, and redirection toward being in successful daily attendance and with the ultimate goal of graduation. Having the Facilitators placed on the campuses as the “welcome wagon” and to monitor, interact, support students' return from dropout status, and stay through to graduation make this program possible, successful, and its results measurable. They provide both tangible suggestions and intangible role modeling. This program could not sustain at its current level of commitment without them.

We provide the same service for students who have never dropped out but may not be on track to graduate. A reclassified student, perhaps rarely absent or not a discipline problem, will be identified via our beginning of the school year and semester Reclassified/Failure Report generated from District records and then assigned for visits and follow-up with our Facilitators.

There is *not one* email/contact/communication which is not shared/reviewed from the campus Facilitators to the District level Coordinators, which results in an immeasurable commitment to time, review, and consultation for decision making and suggestion of interventions for change and shared solutions at student, parent, campus, and District levels. There is no other office that commits to and has sustained such a system, documentation, and service numbers. Students' academic history/stories are told via our notes/email shares and updates, but equally important is that their voices are heard as to their direct involvement and (re)commitment to their own acceptance of interventions, redirection, and ultimate, educational success.

Outcomes and Achievements

Annually, nearly 2,000 students are met with, talked to in person, via phone, email, US Postal Service and each contact/communication is reviewed with the team to determine the best course of action and/or redirection. Daily contacts and communications are counted only once per day even if the student (or parent) is met with/called/emailed several times in that day. Those contacts/updates are shared with the District level Coordinators for individual, daily review, and placement in the students' files, housed at their District level office as well as with the Facilitator's matching, respective campus files.

With the over 2,000 students served per year and calculating each contact a minimum of only two communications (dramatically undercounted) per student per day, the total of 4,000–5,000 communications/contacts/reach out attempts does not adequately portray the numbers regarding the level of commitment, attempts for recovery, and involvement of our office/this program for students' success. For each student name and communication, a folder is created and maintained. Each daily contact is placed in sequential date and time order to capture the students' academic and appropriate personal history, as well as what interventions were successful, which were not, and an advocacy graduation plan, again, moving from: "I can't" to: "This is how I can and will." With each student visit, it is standard protocol for us to ask the student/parent (guardian) for the best way to reach them via phone number, email, and address given that information changes frequently and is not always given to the campus. Our personalized, authentic relationships with the students/families lend themselves to a level of trust to share contact information, return our calls, visit our offices, and meet with our staff.

Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates

The Katy ISD Dropout Rate is 1.2 % (for the past two years) as calculated by the Texas Education Agency and the Graduation Rate is 92% in contrast to the Region 4 (our assigned area by TEA) Graduation Rate of 88%. It should also be noted that the dropout rate could be even lower; however, if the documentation seen/received by this office does not adhere to State PEIMS Standards for Leaver Codes, we do not clear the dropout; though, we continue to try to obtain acceptable (per TEA requirement) documentation.

Current Status of Project

The current status of the Katy ISD Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Coordination Project continues to operate at its high level of personalized service, documentation, and success with low dropout and high graduation rates, despite the District's continued student population growth with over 73,000 students and dropouts served/rates calculated from grades 7-12. Our growth rate is 4+% with a 2016-17 expectation of 75,931.

High school #8 is set to open in August of 2017; therefore, there will be a discussion of adding another Facilitator or having our current Facilitator who is housed at one high school (and serving three other high schools as well) adding the new high school to her caseload since the new high school will initially open with only 9th and 10th grades and the Facilitator has the lower caseload (four schools combined) as compared to the other three Facilitators' individual caseloads with one campus each. Of course, this will require discussions with the District, Campus #8 Principal, our Department Head, as well as the Finance Department. The Facilitators were initially assigned to and have remained housed at their respective campuses based upon number of dropouts and/or referrals; therefore, three of the Facilitators were each assigned one campus, with the fourth Facilitator serving four of our South side campuses collectively; she is housed out of one campus traveling to the other 3 campuses upon request/need/assignment.

The District has entered into a new initiative within Katy ISD with the Simon Youth Foundation (SYF) and its Dropout Recovery Schools created at Mills Malls across the United States. This office's current second Coordinator will head the SYF Dropout Recovery Program to serve our office, current campus District dropouts, as well as the local Katy community, as malls across the U.S. often find dropouts roaming their businesses without diplomas.

The Coordinator position replacement has been hired and at this time, we are putting a collaborative process to paper regarding our current identification of dropouts (the only office serving the entire District to identify, attempt recovery, and provide support upon a return) and initiating conversations of possible interest/fit with students/parents/staff and SYF. Once SYF is open (August 2016), it will be an additional option to share with current dropouts, their parent/guardian, and with the Facilitators, Counselors, and Campus Principals. Of course, our personalized conversations and graduation plans will still include present options of: return to their home campus, campus/District interventions of support, District school of choice application (Raines HS), credit restoration, summer school, or Katy Virtual courses. Even more so is the value of each of our personalized student discussions as to the best fit for engagement and success.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

As Coordinator, I am *actively* involved on a daily basis. I read, review, and consult on every one of the yearly 2,000 students' files and nearly 5, 000+ emails in order to model collaboration and sustain this unique personalized program in an effort to prevent, intervene, and/or recover dropouts or those students at risk for not graduating. Each Facilitator was personally on-boarded and shared an office with me for one to three months, listening to each phone call with students, parents, and staff, as well reading their respective campus documentation from this office to stakeholders before being placed at that/their assigned campus. For several months and once on their campus, each email write-up was reviewed/proofread by me before a staff sent out given the Facilitators had never been a part of such write-ups, documentation, and level of service prior to their current positions with this program. Two of the Facilitators have probation experience; one has a Counseling background, and one is a former social worker. Certainly, they all bring their strengths and skill sets to the role; however, as repeatedly stressed, this exact model is not duplicated elsewhere in the State to the best of my knowledge. I am often asked, "After 10-11 years, do you really still want/need to read and review each write-up?" My response, "How can we say we are a systematic approach to personalizing dropout recovery unless we follow through on that promise and frankly, that need?"

With Coordinators' involvement we demonstrate from the top down that we are personally aware of any student our office serves and their status whether in school or out. This detailed case management approach builds institutional memory, professional documentation, and the expectation that our personalization and services are not negotiable. You can't do this work unless you do this work this way in this program. This process then becomes apparent to any current or new staff member that our monitoring, follow-up, and documentation of service/recovery will be consistent over time and personnel change.

The replacement Coordinator will be on-boarded the same way as the Coordinator she is replacing and as the Facilitators were, especially from July 1, 2016, through to the last day of the School Start Window of September 30, 2016. After that point, she will move to her own office, understanding that we will both equally be included and involved in each other's and the Facilitators' referrals, recovery attempts, and follow-up. My commitment to daily involvement in this program and to the degree that it continues, is not to encumber staff, but rather to have them see that working in concert on behalf of students allows all to move forward positively, productively, and proudly with a plan/process/program for graduation. This is how we maintain and frankly, sustain.

Lessons Learned

This program, work, and its success would fall short without the Facilitators and their strategic placement at their respective campuses to encourage students to remain in school, return to school, and support student success upon a return to an educational setting. They have become a part of the campus staff and are seen as in addition to, not in place of. Staff members are accustomed and accepting of our office being included in every email.

Detailed job/program descriptions are vital to hiring well and therefore, running the program at this level of personalized involvement, documentation, and collaboration. The ability to clarify points or show written examples during an interview (while maintaining HR standards) would allow for the interviewing applicant to understand what a different role/concept/program this is as compared to most other dropout recovery programs especially with our high level of involvement, numbers, written documentation, and daily consultations which are integral and unique to this program's philosophy and recognized Best Practices. Most district level Coordinators are not involved to the extent that we are; such involvement speaks volumes to the Facilitators, students, parents, and staff that we are willing to join them on each case to not only say we will, but to show that we do and to support and encourage a sense of school belonging and success.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

Beginning with the program's Coordinators, recovery staff must truly believe that *every* child deserves a second chance. They must believe that "There is no expiration date on helping kids." Recovery staff should always set an example for other staff about how recovered students should be treated, using prompt, frequent, and, respectful shared communication, updates, and options. Treating recovered students professionally and courteously sends others the message that these kids are worthwhile and deserve another chance at an education. Being treated respectfully, in turn, motivates students to give school another try. Recovery staff must understand the policies and procedures of multiple departments within the school district from transcript credits, grad plans, exit testing, attendance, accountability formulas, parental communications, and mentoring, to name a few. Staff members sit on several districtwide/campus committees and join students and staff in events. Recovery staff must also be skilled, professional communicators. Frequently, recovered dropouts and their parents are angry, disappointed, and disillusioned because they feel that no one at the school/s or district has listened to them. In fact, this alienation is often part of the reason why students drop out. Therefore, recovery staff must be able to defuse that—in person and in writing—and demonstrate that we hear and understand parents' and students' frustrations/needs and often as a result communicate such to other staff on behalf of the student/family in hopes of facilitating a receptive school climate and therefore, successful reengagement. In addition, staff should be willing to be receptive to contact most times of day or even after work. Staff members check their email frequently and follow the unwritten, in-house "rule" of a response from our office within 24 hours or less. "What if the one time (a dropout) decides to call for help, and he/she believes we are yet another person (in their minds) who didn't respond/want them back?"

Not with our people, not on our watch, not with this program. This program cannot be simply "taught" to others without the understanding that the daily modeling (interaction/communication) among the Coordinators, Facilitators, students, parents, and staff is, in fact, the personalized process of this type of case management approach/program. We don't teach it and move on to the next Staff Development session. We continue to model it each day, each email, each recovery attempt for other staff outside of our office to hopefully build institutional expectation, service mentality, and District capacity.

**SAMPLE EMAIL/SERVICE FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION,
INTERVENTION, AND RECOVERY PROGRAM**

Dear Ms. Arasteh and _____ HS Counselor/Grade Level Principal,

I met with _____ this afternoon (May ____, 2016) at _____ HS and he was receptive to my follow up visit. Below is a recap:

- I commended _____ for being at school, on time yesterday and today and urged him to continue to demonstrate good daily attendance for the rest of the semester.
- _____ was excited to update me on his current status in English 4A-Credit Recovery. _____ said that he completed his English 4A essay today and he plans to turn it in on Monday. _____ said his essay topic was writing about something that he wants to do in the future and he wrote about joining the military. Way to go _____!
- _____ said that he spoke with his Algebra 1 teacher about clearing up his Incomplete for the 5th 6-week grading period and he is working to make up his missing quizzes by next week. In addition, _____ was happy to share that he scored an 80% on his test yesterday and said that he currently has a grade of 77% in the class for this grading period. Great job!
- _____ is working to submit his other missing work as well as his current assignments and said that it is his goal to bring up all of his grades this grading period to earn as many semester/year credits as possible, though he acknowledges that he let the assignments go neglected and now realizes such often results in no make-up opportunities.
- _____ is committed to work very hard and finish the semester strong. He is focusing on passing all of his classes and believes he will (reviewed averages) with the exception of English 4B and Speech, which he then plans to focus on taking and passing in Senior Summer School.
- _____ shared that he wants to earn his high school diploma and he is willing to push back his move date out of state if needed to finish his classes/earn his diploma over the summer to result in an August graduation.

I will continue to follow up and encourage _____ to finish the semester strong and send him (via U.S. Post) a Final Exam Schedule as well as test taking tips. I will also stress that with Senior Summer School, graduation is a likely possibility. He can.....if he will.

Sincerely,

_____, Dropout Prevention and Recovery Facilitator