

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Youth Empowerment Academy

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***Key words:* alternative to suspension, intervention, dropout prevention**

Funding Sources

Vance County Schools

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

Empowerment Academy Budget (Table 1) assumes serving 30 students.

Table 1: Budget

Expenditure Type	Annual Budget	One-Time	Comments
Salary and Benefits	\$235,000.00		Director, 2 FT Teachers, 1 PT Teacher
1-Time Fixed Costs		\$20,000.00	computers, workstations, etc.
Software	33,800.00		Educere SW, 10-wireless cards for work at home
Supplies/Materials	5,000.00		
Food Services	24,000.00		breakfast/lunch
Operations	13,363.00		custodian, maintenance, utilities-3,480 sq. ft. @ \$3.84/sf)
Enrichment Activities/Contracts	10,000.00		martial arts, other enrichment
Field Trips	4,500.00		college tours, museums, etc. @ 6 per year

Scope and Setting

The Empowerment Academy serves as an Alternative to Suspension program for long-term suspended middle school students for category IV and V offenses.

Example: New Hanover County Schools use (Rules) and not (Categories), California Schools use (Rules) rather than (Categories) to classify discipline infractions.

Example: State of Washington, office of Superintendent of Instructions
Gwinnett County Public Schools, 437 Old Peachtree Rd NW Suwanee, GA 30024-2978 uses (Rules Codes) to identify violations.

Staffing Pattern

The Academy is presently staffed with three fulltime employees; site administrator, math and language arts instructors and one part-time teacher. In addition, the following support staff is on site once/week:

School Social Worker
School Counselor
School Nurse

One additional instructor in Kung-Fu-Cise provides instruction two days/week and a math tutor volunteer is available, as needed.

Population Served

Number of students: The Empowerment Academy can serve a maximum of thirty students per day.

Subjects: The Empowerment Academy students enroll in online classes through Educere which delivers innovative virtual education opportunities to K-12 schools, students, and educators. Our customized technology-based education solutions are made available as an option to students and educators at public, private, and other schools, as well as directly to home school and other students. Through the unique relationships we arrange with university, college, and other education providers, Educere provides a single entry point for customers to access over 5,000 high-quality, cost-effective virtual education programs. Whether a student or educator needs a single course, or an individual or school requires a full curriculum, Educere has a virtual education program to fulfill these needs. (Educere, 2017)

Math	45 minutes	(8:45 am until 9:30 am)
English	45 minutes	(9:30 am until 10:15 am)
Social Studies	45 minutes	(10:15 am until 11:00 am)
Science	45 minutes	(11:00 am until 11:45 am)
Lunch	15 minutes	(11:45 am until 12:00 pm)

Participants: The Empowerment students are referred to the Academy by the Vance County Schools Superintendent after they have been recommended for long-term suspension by their middle school principal and have been given an opportunity to have an appeal hearing.

1. Vance County Schools have two middle schools and one STEM school.
2. Ages: Typically, students are of middle school age, 11-14 years old.
3. Some students have been retained and therefore are beyond their middle school ages.
4. Transportation to and from the Academy is provided by parents.
5. We have seven female students from (8:00 am until 11:45 am) and twelve male students from (11:45 till 3:45 pm).

Students arrive and sign in from 8:00 am until 8:30 am.

Breakfast is served from 8:30 am until 8:45 am.

During the breakfast time each day, students are also involved in group activities and are given an opportunity to express their personal concerns and actions related to what may or may not have transpired at home and/or with friends.

1. Each day students are required to write in their personal journals the “word of the week” and its meaning. The word of the week is from a list of words that are relative to character traits and behavior building blocks.
2. Students will also write about the things that were in their control as they learn how to apply the “word of the week” in their everyday lives.
3. Students also learn how to determine what people or action they already know that could have supported a more positive outcome such as; walking away, ignoring the comments, seeking professional advice, asking a teacher, counselor, etc.
4. Group introductions, preparation for the day and check in activities, narrative “re-write” of disciplinary incident; what was in my control, what factors around you support, what if you could do it again? (How often does this occur? When enrolled for the original disciplinary incident or with each subsequent disciplinary incident or in some other way?

Project Origination

During the 2014-15 academic school year the dropout rate was at 68 students and a rate of 3.22 and dropped in 2015-16 to a count of 59 students with a rate of 2.92. The data showed progress but there were several warning signs indicating a need to address the middle school student suspension rate. The district realized that something needed to be done to keep these students in school and from being future dropouts. After making this assessment and looking at what the data was indicating, we found that most of the students who were on the most recent dropout list were also on incident reports when they were in middle school. The district continued to address the issues but never seemed to find a way to keep suspended students from being suspended and ultimately repeating the same grade. Having a new superintendent at the school system, we met and came to the same conclusion concerning the rate of suspended middle school students and the impact those suspensions had on the graduation rate and dropout rate. During our meeting, I presented a proposal to implement an alternative to suspension program similar to one that was being used in Mecklenburg County, NC. After several months the Superintendent informed me of his decision to make available an alternative to suspension learning site to address the growing number of long-term suspensions among middle school students, which is now the Empowerment Academy.

Issues Addressed

1. The Empowerment Academy was created to address the need to provide an alternative learning opportunity for middle school students who received long-term suspensions.
2. The Empowerment Academy is also designed to address the behavioral needs of students by providing Life Skills Training and parental support.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

- 80% of students completing the program are not suspended again.
- 80% of all students will display short-term therapeutic outcomes after being enrolled in the Empowerment Academy.

At the end of program day, 80% of students can identify at least one aspect of the suspension incident under their control; develop at least one alternative action to

Strategies and/or Interventions

- Avoid suspension; and identify at least one adult from whom they can seek help on campus.
- Long-term therapeutic outcomes. A majority of students will report making decisions and having more supportive adults on campus.

Outcome Measures:

- Program attendance records
- Vance County Schools Power School database for tracking attendance, disciplinary incidents, short-term and long-term suspensions
- Student surveys at the end of the day
- Student work products during the day
- Surveys administered to program participants in last semester of school year
- Parent, Student, Teacher Connect: Exit Project Presentation
- Assigned school Counselors are required to visit with students weekly
- Assigned school social workers are required to visit with student weekly.

Project Timeline

North Carolina's Department of Public Instructions (DPI) defines long-term suspensions as any amount of time out of school beyond ten days. Empowerment Academy students are required to remain at the academy for at least a semester (90 days) during their long-term suspension.

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

Dr. Ralphel Holloman, Sr. serves as the Director of Empowerment Academy and teaches a much needed component for the intervention piece, Life Skills Training. His experience as a Dropout Prevention Coordinator and his 20 years with the Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils for both Franklin County and Vance County, NC and the knowledge he had gained as the district's Gang and Bullying Investigator.

Outcomes and Achievements

Completion of the first class of students for the Empowerment Academy was held May 30, 2016 with the following data:

1. Four students transitioned out of the Academy to high school
2. Two students transitioned out of 7th grade to the 8th grade and reassigned to their original school
3. One student transitioned from 6th grade to 7th grade and reassigned to their original school
4. Parent involvement through "Parent-Teacher-Student-Connect" allows students to give their two presentations to their parents, staff, and director. Students are graded

by their parents, and parents are given an opportunity to address where they feel their child needs improvements and assist their children in setting goals to address those needs.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates

Students attending the Empowerment Academy are given the opportunity to complete their grade level during their (long-term) suspension rather than being retained due to the number of instructional hours that would have been missed during the suspension.

Research shows that students who have been retained are more likely to become a future dropout.

Every effort is given to ensure that the students receive the necessary educational assistance to make better and more informed decisions in the future.

Current Status Project

The Empowerment Academy is presently operating in Vance County Schools, at 500 Rockspring Street, Henderson, NC 27536. The academy operates two schedules; 8:00am until noon is for the female population and from noon until 4:00pm is for the male population. The Academy is staffed with an administrator and three teachers. The Academy will, for the second time, plan and implement the “Transition to Middle School Summer Camp” This program will allow 5th graders being promoted to the 6th grade with five or more behavior incidents to attend a two week summer camp to address those behaviors and how to avoid roadblock and detours to their education.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

The Empowerment Academy has been under my direction since it began in March 2016. The Vance County Schools superintendent and I have worked together to ensure that the Academy was up and running to effectively address the need for an alternative to suspension learning program for long-term suspension middle school students.

Lessons Learned

1. That data should be used to assess the needs of a district. That assessment should be followed with a plan of action to address the needs for student academic success.
2. That data is available and should not be ignored.
3. District data will help teachers, counselors, and school social workers identify and address early warning signs and will alleviate dropout recovery and allow more emphasizes to be placed on prevention and intervention strategies.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

- Have your district data manager run several reports for your assessment such as attendance and incidents reports for all of your middle schools. These reports will indicate what students are missing valuable classroom time
- Your district data manager has the ability to download reports that will indicate the number of students across the district that are being suspended and for what violations

- Use your district attendance data to show what students are always late and what students have a tendency to leave early. The same data can be used to show what students are missing school the most and for what reasons.
- Your district discipline data will help the dropout prevention appointee to evaluate what students are getting written up the most and where these infractions are happening the most.
- The data of early warning signs should not be ignored and should be addressed as a means of dropout prevention and behavior interventions.

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