

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery: The Benefits of a Comprehensive School-Wide Initiative to Build Social Emotional Comprehension and Interventions among Middle School Students

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Funding Sources

The funding sources included, but were not limited to, money provided by the school and our various school-based organizations, as well as from sources such as, Donors Choose, Toyota, and out-of-pocket money. We also utilize the free services of several social work interns provided by various colleges.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

The project utilized all members of the staff, including four social work interns from various colleges. The interns were used in various ways throughout the project to work individually and in groups with students and their families and helped to monitor and track the attendance as well as follow through when students returned to their home school. I and several other employees tracked student attendance, and kept track of parent outreach, and recidivism. General supplies were provided by the school and were part of the school budget. Travel for home visits and other related expenses were usually out-of-pocket, while incentives such as gift cards, games, etc. were provided by school-based organizations such as Wediko and Partnership With Children. Services and trainings were provided by the New York Department of Education, among others. Services and trainings were provided by the Department of education. They include, Restorative Circles, through Morning side, enACT, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Services (TCIS.), and Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI.), provided through the NYC Department of education. Also, a grant was provided through Toyota which allowed several members of our organization to attend a National Dropout Prevention Network conference.

Scope and Setting

This is a significant endeavor in promoting a great academic environment and intervention services. This is also intended to benefit students, parents and teachers in ways that will promote a more collegial atmosphere throughout the school. These practices help decrease student discipline referrals, decrease absenteeism and increase parent and teacher satisfaction.

The scope and setting of the project is to support, monitor and advocate for students who, for whatever reason, are suspended from their regular setting. Brooklyn West Alternate Learning Center bridges the gaps in their academics and enables every student to feel successful. Many of these students are at risk of not graduating. Many are in and out of various alternate settings and overage and under-credited.

Through this project it is our hope that potential dropouts are averted by addressing and hopefully eliminating potential barriers to the students' academic success. We model appropriate behavior, mentor students and their families, reengage and inspire every student, support and advocate for students and their families, monitor individual students, teach appropriate behaviors and skills, and develop and maintain relationships with students and their families even after they leave us.

Staffing Pattern

The staffing includes four content teachers, one special education teacher, and a paraprofessional. Most, if not all, are trained in various strategies relating to redirecting and deescalating at-risk behaviors. One social worker and four interns serve as additional support for staff, students, agencies, home schools, and parents. Our school aide is also instrumental in

parental outreach and assures that students attend regularly, while also providing essential information to families, schools, and various organizations that work with our organization. The assistant principal oversees the program, offers guidance and support, and helps eliminate any barriers in our efforts to coordinate appropriate intervention strategies, specific outreach, and related services.

Outside agencies are also included in the staffing pattern as they regularly work with groups and individual students and facilitate activities that provide opportunities for the students to learn new coping skills and behavior strategies.

Population Served

The purpose of the project is to determine how implementing services strong in social emotional comprehension and interventions, outreach, and parent engagement can affect the overall climate of the school, specifically a decrease in resuspensions and behavior referrals while increasing attendance.

Student discipline records Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) reports and attendance (Automate The System -ATS) reports were analyzed and previous years were compared. The study included five content teachers, one special education teacher, one paraprofessional, the school Assistant Principal, and various support staff.

Description of project participants (ages, grades, demographics, etc.):

Demographics of respondents included the student population at the Alternate New York City School and consist of approximately 66% black students and 33% Hispanic with the remaining being a mixture of white, Asian, and other. Male students account for approximately 80% of the population and 20% are female. One-hundred percent of the students receive free lunch. 75% of the students have Individualized Education Plans with the remaining students needing some type of supports (documented or not). All students are in the program as a result of disciplinary and attendance problems. Many parents do not feel their children are safe at school. They did however, feel that their child would benefit from an environment strong in social emotional and behavioral supports. All of our students are at risk of not graduating and are treated as such. All of our outreach is dedicated to averting a dropout and increasing attendance, and thus the likelihood of academic success and graduation.

It is important to note that some parents do not send their students to school because it is too far for them to travel alone and report that they are afraid of the students that are in attendance due to the stigma that exists with suspended students. These parents receive additional supports. Regardless of the situation we advocate for all students and families.

Students enrolled in this program have been referred due to disciplinary and attendance issues. Once in the program we assume that each student is at risk of dropping out and no student is refused interventions. There are students and families however, that need a great deal more attention and services. Services also continue after the student returns to his or her home school and once a student has been with us we continue to monitor and support success.

Project Origination

Our project has evolved over time and continues to do so. We always look at ways we can improve and support all constituents. We survey students, parents, and staff with the hope of gaining insight into their needs, as they are constantly changing. New programs and services also become available that enable us to maintain the most effective level of interventions and services.

During our collaborative sessions we began to discuss our students, our families, and our services and wondered whether or not we were doing all we could to help meet the needs of our population and bridge those gaps. We also wondered how the families were adapting to all the changes and whether they were in need of any additional supports. We wondered why our students were returning and if there were additional preventative measures we could take.

During this time, I was enrolled in a master's program and was required to conduct a research project. I decided to research the effects of a sound social emotional curriculum and its effect on behavior and student attendance. That led me to various organizations including to The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

I began discussing the strategies I had learned with my assistant principal and some of the staff and sought ways to improve on what we were already doing in order to enhance our program. As stated earlier what we do is challenging and always changing with the diagnosis of each child and his or her family. It is our job to listen to their frustrations and help them communicate correctly and effectively what it is they need, and find the best, most effective course of action.

Issues Addressed

With the initial research and the teams' collaborative efforts, this has evolved into a more individualized approach for identifying needs, diagnosing problems, and providing interventions. In addition, it includes tracking data, initiating services, assessing and monitoring progress, coordinating services and efforts, and facilitating a successful return to the home school. We have also begun to track the recidivism of each student but it's proving tougher than anticipated. We are currently considering ways to obtain this information more easily.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate strategies and interventions useful in preventing future dropouts.

The results are presented in regard to the quantitative impact on attendance and referrals for disciplinary outreach. Attendance and referrals did indicate that there was a relationship between these measures and the implementation of the social emotional piece, related services, and intervention programs.

Attendance data were analyzed in order to identify if the implementation of these supports and interventions had an impact on attendance. The theory behind this analysis is that these intervention and support programs will improve the students' security and enjoyment in school and, therefore, attendance will improve.

The results suggest that attendance has improved since the implementation of the strategies into the program. It is also a significant factor that most students are traveling far and some are dependent on their parents to bring them.

Attendance and behavior records from the students were also pulled from grades 6-8, with an overall attendance rate of 73%. The student participants were analyzed equally from all four grades with the outcome being 100% of the students registered at the school. Students were also interviewed in order to identify their feelings about the services available at the school and what specifically they thought was helpful and what was not.

Parents were also interviewed in person or via phone and most of them were willing participants in the process. They were also informed about the research and how it would benefit their child.

The administration, instructional, and support staff were also informed of the ways in which a strong social emotional literacy and intervention program with support services would impact the school climate and culture and consequently improve the overall functioning of the school, as well as the success of the student. The staff was also aware that this would impact the number of discipline referrals and increase attendance.

Another significant factor to note is that our population changes daily, increasing the probability of inconsistencies in data.

Strategies and/or Interventions

The strategies and/or interventions of this project include a variety of approaches. Each day several of us meet to discuss new students. Orientations are conducted daily. The school aide reaches out to families notifying them as to where they need to report. When they arrive, they meet with the social worker, and the interns, who interview the parent, obtain information, and notify them and the student of the expectations of the school. They further discuss any concerns and related services including, but not limited to, the survey questions. The parents are taken on a tour of the school and introduced to staff. Proper staff is notified and students begin to acclimate. Weekly reviews of students' records are held and staff is informed of any important or relevant information. Parents are called to receive updates on their child. We receive trainings every Monday and meet to discuss the students, the day, etc. We meet weekly to discuss student data and strategize about ways in which we can improve attendance, parent outreach, and related services. School programs and services also meet with students, counselors, social workers, interns, and teachers. Monthly curriculum meetings help to ensure we are meeting the academic standards and provide a forum to discuss interventions and strategies. Everything we do is continuous and we routinely have conversations about what is happening and documenting everything that we do. Most of the strategies and interventions are individualized and personal.

Invitations and flyers are sent out to invite families to celebrations, and field trips and to inform them of important information. We make sure the home is well informed by also providing daily attendance calls. Our Positive Behavior Intervention System program, PBIS, also offers incentives for students to earn points for good behavior and trade them in for merchandise at the end of their time with us.

Project Timeline

The project took place in an alternate middle school during school hours over a two-year period. The research was conducted using a qualitative as well as some quantitative methodology by direct observation and note-taking, and by asking questions via surveys. The subjects consisted of students and their families and instructional staff including administration and support staff. All data were collected over the course of two years. Questions were asked (see Appendix A), such as: *What type of professional development is made available to the staff to support students' success? What strategies have proven successful in promoting students' social and emotional competencies?*

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

There are no specific conditions and or expertise required to carry out the project. However, I believe it is imperative to note that with any major undertaking there must be a shared vision. All constituents must be willing participants and believe that nothing is impossible. They must have the dedication and determination to follow through with each and every child, and the willingness to take risks. They must understand the importance of what they are doing and the significance their efforts will have. They must love and believe that all children regardless of their situation deserve a chance. They must be flexible, lifelong learners, and possess the capacity to forgive and the wherewithal to accept failure, and carry on knowing that even in the eye of defeat significant learning still occurred.

Outcomes and Achievements

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

Attendance data were analyzed in order to identify if the implementation of the interventions had any impact on attendance. The theory behind this analysis is that the interventions will improve the students' security and enjoyment in school and, will, therefore, improve attendance.

The results suggest that attendance has improved since the implementation of the program.

Also, a result of the interventions there were 40% less behavioral referrals and 25% fewer absences. Teachers state that their classrooms are easier to manage. They and the students state that they are happier and more successful, with fewer behavioral incidents and higher attendance.

Professional development consisted of workshops and meetings at regular intervals set throughout the year. Meetings and subsequent trainings took place every first Monday of the month. Teachers mentioned that the professional development is enjoyable and they love implementing new strategies. Parents state that they are seeing a difference at home as well as school and many don't want to leave us because, for the first time, they feel that they are not alone.

All participants look forward to sharing and continuing the important work they are doing in the years to come.

Current Status Project

The current status of our efforts continues to take place and is always evolving and changing. The results of this project reveal how important it is to have sound social emotional and

intervention services in school. We continuously research alternative ideas and programs which drive us forward.

It is current practice that all school personnel receive yearly trainings to enhance their skill set and stay refreshed. Materials, information, and trainings continue to be made available to all parents. Effective strategies are modeled and implemented in all classrooms.

Currently we continue to find ways to better monitor students after they leave our program but we must keep in mind that the implementation process, in a review of similar programs, has been found to be an important factor in terms of positive outcomes (Durlak, 2008). Therefore, we need to continue despite any challenges we may face.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

As coordinator, and administrative intern I played a major role in the implementation of this project. I share in many of the responsibilities and set and coordinate meetings, as well as conduct professional development. I am usually the contact and go-to person, although we all share in the responsibilities. I held weekly meetings, and met with students, teachers and parents.

I contacted community members and sent out flyers and invitations.

I also collected and analyzed all data.

Lessons Learned

The results of this project revealed how important it is to the prevention of dropouts to have a sound social and emotional literacy, intervention and outreach program in the school. Schools need to offer high quality continuing professional development for the teachers and offer support for families in the school and refer sound professional support through related social emotional services outside of the school. It is recommended that all school personnel receive yearly trainings to learn new strategies and remain up to date and refreshed on these strategies. Materials should be available to all parents and trainings made available to them as well. Effective strategies should be modeled and implemented in all classrooms and throughout the building.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

Educators face many challenges in their schools. Many of these problems include but are not limited to, school policy, school reform, health, safety, and child development. This project examined the effects of implementing a school-wide approach to integrating parent outreach and engagement strategies, behavioral and social emotional interventions, and related strategies in middle school aged children in an alternate setting. These interventions, if implemented well, are beneficial to students, their parents, and the support staff in any environment. The problem is that while many are talking about teaching intervention strategies, because, as they say, "It's crucial to one's success", not everyone is using it in concise, consistent ways.

Building a program that integrates parent engagement, outreach, and student supports in schools makes the most sense to help to restore balance. Students and staff can adopt new attitudes and

beliefs which enhance school culture and reshape learning while giving that child the best possible chance to find success (Elias, M., & Haynes, N., 2008, p. 477).

It is the belief that parent engagement and student supports are the missing piece in most of our schools. Researchers, such as, Cohen, Durlak, Wissberg, and Dymnicki, agree that these supports and services are vital to student achievement. All children need to be taught behavioral and social strategies, embedded in the curriculum for each content area. Behavioral delays are the same as any other developmental delay. Therefore, interventions and strategies should be provided for students and their families who present deficits in any area, just like academic interventions and supports strategies are provided for children struggling academically. Research has shown that social emotional skills are capable of being learned. However, the research also suggests that the quality and culture of the environment matter. As James Comer said, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (Cohen, J. 2006). An environment that fosters relationships and coping skills along with self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and social awareness can have a positive effect on both student behavior and attendance rates.

This is an effort that must include all stakeholders: school staff and administrators, parents, and community partners. The shared investment in your students will signify that everyone is committed to learning new strategies and developing innovative practices that will support and inspire school improvement goals and advances in the academic success of all.

The staff must truly believe that every child deserves a chance and that it’s never too late. Everyone needs to believe that, even when it seems hopeless, there is still hope and that it truly does take a village. If dropouts were looked at as a terminal illness like cancer, would you not look for any possible cure? Would you not exhaust all available resources and try any cure you could find? Wouldn’t you try to prevent it in the first place? That’s how this should be viewed and treated. Like a cancer, but one that’s easy to prevent and cure if only we don’t give up trying.

Through providing students, parents, and school staff with skills aligned with specific strategies, educators have the opportunity to not only teach the minds, but the hearts of all students. By design, this concentrated focus will enable students to be college and/or career ready with the capacity to proactively engage the world around them. If we believe that we need to teach the whole child, then we need to teach the social and emotional part, too (Cohen, J., 2006, p. 237).

It is crucial to the success of all students that any and all adults set positive examples for our children at all times (especially those at risk). You wouldn’t think of smoking in the presence of a cancer patient, so why would you exhibit behavior that influences negatively on vulnerable children? It is imperative that students and parents are treated with the utmost respect and dignity. It is important to remember that if they knew better they would do better. They love and want the best for their child and they deserve to have the best care by the best professionals out there and not settle for less. Behavior is a symptom, often times, masking the underlining problem. It is the task of the staff to help ensure that their “patient” is diagnosed correctly, that the family is informed properly and trained on how to provide appropriate care for them at home, and to maintain the best, safest environment for him to recover as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, a motivated caring, professional, and an innovative staff is not always the case.

Proceed slowly at first, adding services and trainings as you go. Choose staff of the highest quality that LOVE children and stay the course. It's a tough job but if not you, then who will?

The results of this project revealed how important it is to the prevention of dropouts to have a sound social and emotional literacy, and intervention and outreach program in the school. Schools need to offer high quality continuing professional development for the teachers, offer support for families in the school, and refer sound professional support through related social emotional services outside of the school. It is recommended that all school personnel receive yearly trainings to learn new strategies and remain up-to-date and refreshed on these strategies. Materials should be available to all parents and trainings made available to them as well. Effective strategies should be modeled and implemented in all classrooms and throughout the building.

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(<http://sociology.about.com/od/Research/a/Participant-Observation.htm>)(also Patton, 1990)(Maykut &Morehouse, 1194, p.72).

Appendix A

Survey Sample Questions

Students:

What might keep you from attending school on a regular basis? Please explain.

Do you feel that you contribute to the school in a positive way? Explain how. If not, explain what you could do to make it better.

What supports do you think you would need in order to attend regularly?

What would you like to see in the school that would contribute to your success?

Who are you most likely to talk to if you have a problem at this school? At your home school?

What supports do you feel you need in place to ensure that you transition back and achieve success?

Parents:

What might keep you from sending your child to the ALC?

What supports would you need in order for you to make sure that your child attends school regularly?

How do you feel about the overall atmosphere of the school?

What suggestions do you have that if implemented would enhance the educational environment for your child?

Do you feel that you and or your child have adequate support while attending the ALC / returning to the home school?

What do you like about the school?

What programs, if added, do you think would help improve your child's behavior and attendance?

What supports can we give to ensure that your child's transition back to his or her home school and achieves success?

Teachers:

How do you think the services we have in place improve student absenteeism and behavior?

What would you change and why?

Have you had any training that deal with the dropout prevention? If so, what? Explain your satisfaction with the strategies/program. Why you like specific strategies or why you don't.

What professional development would you like to see to improve student attendance and absenteeism?

What supports do you think the school needs in order to deal with behavior and absenteeism and help to implement a more successful program?

Do you feel that you are adequately trained in implementing the strategies currently used and taught? Explain.

Please add additional concerns or comments below: