Graduation Plan Advantage (GPA) Program

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Project Funding Sources

The project itself did not require funds beyond average, provided school supplies. However, the motivation students found from the Graduation Plan Advantage (GPA) program led them to achieve other school/progress goals which resulted in prizes including gift cards and clothing from the school store. Other items were from the community, or funded through school funds.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

No budget needed for the GPAs, unless prizes are desired for an incentive. Our incentive prizes were around $100 for school shirts, and gift cards were donated from local restaurants

Scope and Setting

Central High School is a "work-at-your-own-pace" dropout prevention school with an online curriculum through APEX Learning. Students come to Central, work independently, and are responsible for seeking help from instructors to work through tough curriculum. This configuration requires a large amount of responsibility, self-motivation, and a tough work ethic. Oftentimes, working with teens and young adults, these characteristics may be lacking or not quite sharpened.

Staffing Pattern

We used our entire staff to encourage students, go over their graduation plans, and remind them of their daily goals. This included:

- Jeremy Knapp (Principal)
- Martina Lucas (Assistant Principal)
- Chrissy Ward (Career Specialist)
- Deseree Barnes (Enrollment Specialist)
- Taylor Firman (Social Studies Teacher)
- Rebecca Herard (English Teacher)
- Kelly Johnson (Science/Math Teacher)
- Michael Cummings (Math Teacher)

I launched this idea and tasked myself with filling in the paperwork as well as meeting with students to plan graduation goals.

Population Served (see figure 1):

- 153 Total students at Central High School, ages 16-21
- 44% Male and 56% Female
- The majority of students are from low-income households
- 3% Hispanic/Latino students, 17% black students, 80% white students

Student Population
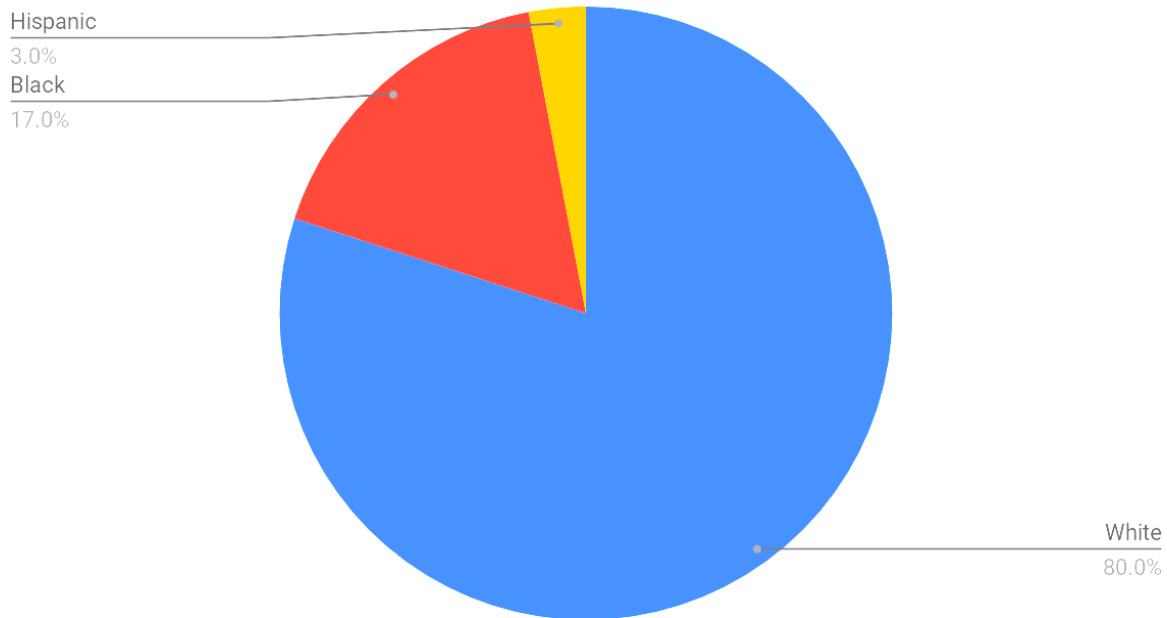
Project Origination
We found that when staff set requirements for how many assignments students should be completed each day, only a handful of students responded positively. Our students were communicating to us that they wanted to graduate as soon as possible, but were not being realistic about putting in the work daily to get there.

Issues Addressed
GPA program addressed the issues of attendance, day-to-day motivation, and an increase in how fast students can earn high school credits.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives
- Get students to write down exactly when they want to graduate as a measurable goal (e.g. June 2018, instead of "as soon as I can")
- Decide what is a doable number of assignments to complete daily
- Have students stick to that number and work towards their long-term goal of graduation
- The ultimate goal is to have students completing more assignments daily, and in the long-term, graduate on time or sooner than their original goal.

Strategies and Interventions
Students:
- Students are responsible for tracking their own progress and maintaining their "number".
- To ensure progress, students may contact a staff member to recalculate numbers after significant progress is made.
- Incentives are also used as a driving force for achievement (t-shirts, school "swag", gift cards, etc.)

Staff:
- Chart student progress data
- Conduct one-on-one progress meetings with students
- Celebrate small milestones/successes
- Recalculate goals according to real-world progress

Project Timeline
May 2017: Sticky note calculations for students close to graduating in June.*May-June 2017*: Meet with a few students who need a boost to get their motivation in check. More and more students are requesting their own GPA.
June-July 2017: Begin researching and calculating how many assignments each student needs in order to graduate.
August- September 2017: GPA's are ready, meet with students to discuss goals and ensure that students are keeping their number in mind each day.

Each month, we will hold academic progress challenges for predetermined groups of students. They have the opportunity to win prizes and raise their team's "total number".

The template below (*figure 2)* and a completed GPA (*figures 3 and 4)* is used to fill in student's information with their total number of assignments.

□

Figure 2: Palm Bay Education Group/Bay District Schools

Central HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT NAME:_____

Date of Calculation: _____

★**My Graduation Goal!**★
_____

MY SHORT-TERM GOALS

Class #1:

_____ Total Assignments ÷ _____ Assignments/Day = _____School Days to Finish the Class!

Class #2:

_____ Total Assignments ÷ _____ Assignments/Day = _____School Days to Finish the Class!

Other Notes:

MY LONG-TERM GOALS (See Chart on Back)

Total # of Assignments I Need to Graduate: _____ Assignments

÷ _____ School Days

100% attendance = 96/Semester   191/School Year

80% attendance = 77/Semester   153/School Year

= _____ Assignments/Day to Graduate!

Attendance is **very** important and any days that you are absent will affect your number and goals

UPDATED LONG-TERM GOALS

Date of Recalculation				
Total # of Assignments				
School Days	÷	÷	÷	÷

Central
HIGH SCHOOL

Date of Calculation: _6/9/2017_

★My Graduation Goal!★ _Jan 2019_

MY SHORT-TERM GOALS

Class #1: Art

_36_ Total Assignments ÷ _8_ Assignments/Day = _4.5_ School Days to Finish the Class!

Class #2:

_____ Total Assignments ÷ _____ Assignments/Day = _____ School Days to Finish the Class!

Other Notes:

MY LONG-TERM GOALS (See Chart on Back)

Total # of Assignments I Need to Graduate: _1,957_ Assignments

÷ _230_ School Days

100% attendance = 96/Semester   191/School Year

80% attendance = (77/Semester)   (153/School Year)

= _8.5_ Assignments/Day to Graduate!

Attendance is **very** important and any days that you are absent will affect your number and goals

UPDATED LONG-TERM GOALS

Date of Recalculation				
Total # of Assignments				
School Days	÷	÷	÷	÷
Assignments/Day	=	=	=	=

6/9/2017

Name of Class I Still Need	#	Name of Class I Still Need	#
★ Eng. 10 sem1	51/62	Sem 2	63
Eng 11 sem1	61	Sem 2	63
Eng 12 sem1	62	Sem 2	63
Biology sem1	65	Sem 2	67
Earth Sci sem1	48	Sem 2	43
Env. Sci sem1	49	Sem 2	57
US History sem1	106	Sem 2	103
Gov	89	Econ	63
★Art. Appr. sem 1	36/51	music Appr. sem 2	31
Alg 1A sem1	95	Sem 2	75
Alg 1B sem1	62	Sem 2	73
Geometry sem1	81	Sem 2	64
mcR sem1	85	Sem 2	80
Electives:			
Reading	RP	Int. Reading	RP
College + Career Prep 1	45	Sem 2	49
PE	61	Personal Fitness	67
TOTAL ASSIGNMENTS COLUMN 1	996	TOTAL ASSIGNMENTS COLUMN 2	961

Total # of Assignments Needed for Graduation = __1,957__

Special Conditions and Expertise Required to Carry Out Project

Our staff remained well-informed on the graduation requirements for our students according to the 18-credit track per the state of Florida. Our teachers maintained a great relationship with students to understand outside factors that affected their attendance, and thus their progress each week.

Our staff did an excellent job of remembering and reminding students of their daily "number" (the number of assignments that they need to accomplish each day) in order to reach their desired graduation goal. We met with students regularly and kept a keen eye on students who were at risk of damaging their progress.

This process requires that students take ownership of their "number" and to hold themselves to that, daily.

Desired Outcomes
- Increase the percent of students who graduate from high school
- Improve overall numbers of assignments completed per day and per week
- Increase number of graduates

Results (Outcomes and Achievements)
- Staff saw an improvement in behavior issues, and more optimistic attitudes
- Students became active and engaged by taking control of their own goals for graduation
- Students who may have previously only completed a handful of assignments daily, are now sticking to their goal and completing more assignments than ever, even if it means assigning themselves homework.

How are these outcomes related to Dropout Prevention/Graduation Rates?
We are motivating our students to set parameters in order to reach their graduation goal and keep them focused so as not to stray from that achievement and/or drop out of school.

Current Status of Project
We started the school year with GPA's calculated and ready for meetings with all returning students. Currently, we are in the process of meeting with all students and setting goals for the school year.

Role in Project as NDPS Certification Program Participant
As graduation neared, I attempted to find a way to break down the assignments that each student needed to complete in order to finish before the June graduation date. On sticky notes and scrap paper, I began dividing the number of assignments each potential-graduate needed by the number of school days remaining before graduation. This gave our students a concrete number of assignments to keep in mind each day they walked through our doors. This inspired me to also do this for a few students who needed a push in order to graduate by the following year, which led to almost every student asking for me to "write up" a GPA to help them visualize their goals.

Lessons Learned
Start early - planning would have been more effective had it been implemented sooner (I didn't think to do this until about a month before graduation).

It is important but difficult to find enough time to meet with all students to plan their goals. Most of our students have spotty attendance, at best.

Relationships matter!

Ownership of data (students need to know where they stand!)

Real-time, accurate student progress tracking is key!

Recruit other staff members to assist in these goal meetings and calculations - This is a big job for one person!)

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about this Project:
Have GPAs ready for all students.
Try to divide students up among the staff (Again, 150 students is a large load for 1 person).
Find small incentives for students who reach their weekly or bi-weekly goal.
Leave space on your Graduation Plans for updates, so they can see their number shrink!