

**ALO (Accountability, Leadership, Opportunity) Student Group**

**Janessa Walters, M.A.  
Student Assistance Counselor  
Linn-Mar High School  
3111 N 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Marion, IA 52302**

**This student group can be followed online on  
Instagram (@aloyoungleaders) as well as Facebook (Linn-Mar ALO)**

***Key words:* Accountability, Leadership, Opportunity, Support, and Prevention**

**Funding Sources:**

We have been given a grant by the Linn-Mar Community Foundation, the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, the Linn-Mar Booster Club, the Daybreak Rotary, and the John A. & Elise M. Nelson Fund. We also get \$1,000 from at-risk district funds each year.

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

To successfully run and maintain this program it costs anywhere from \$2500-\$5,000/year depending on the amount of activities planned. Our budget consists of our club t-shirts, info binders, traveling fees, award incentives for meeting our attendance and expectation guidelines, our newsletter that goes out twice per year, community service projects, youth conference, binders, food for our meetings, our annual banquet and marketing materials.

**Project Description:**

This project gives students an opportunity to positively engage and connect with their high school to increase consistent attendance, increase high school graduation rates, and increase the number of minority students leaving high school with post-graduation plans.

**Staffing Pattern:**

There is one primary staff who fulfills and manages this project. Students consistently interact with the same adult within this project. This adult is a long-term staff member in the building that this project takes place in.

**Population Served:**

50 students have signed up so far and are currently being served by this project. This project serves students in grades 9-12 and ages 14-18. We have not compiled all the demographic statistics for the current school year because our enrollment period is still open, and our school year does not end until June 2018. Last year we served a total of 40 students. This group included 36 black or biracial (half black/half white) students, 3 Latino students, and 1 Asian student. I will include our view book that includes an entire page with statistics and the final impact of our program in just its very first year. Participation selection criteria can be through staff, administrative, self, or parent referral.

**Project Origination:**

This project originated out of a great need to engage minority students and their parents in the education process to increase the success rates of these students. This project is just in its 2<sup>nd</sup> year officially and continues to develop. This development of this project included a lot of student input, research of current models within the school, and research of local, state, and national drop-out rates in comparison to the demographic this project serves.

**Issues Addressed:**

Feelings of isolation by minority students, lack of participation in school sports and activities by minority students, lack of post-high school plans, low minority student engagement, parental lack of knowledge of general resources to aid students in the education process and lack of strong community amongst the minority students.

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

An increase in feelings of connectedness to their high school, an increase in extracurricular activity engagement, an increase in the number of students who have been on a college visit while in high school, an increase in college acceptance rates, a lower average OSS (out of school suspension) rate of ALO minority students compared to minority students who do not participate in ALO. A 100% high school graduation rate is an objective that we will strive to maintain each year as well.

**Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:**

Strategies and interventions used included weekly study hours with members of ALO. Study hour took place Tuesdays from 3:30-4:30 at the school. During this time grade checks would take place as well. One on one weekly sessions were scheduled for students who had below a 2.0 grade GPA. Individual weekly sessions were scheduled for seniors to make sure that they were on track for graduation and putting a post-graduation plan in place. For juniors they would meet every other week during the spring of their junior year to begin searching online for various colleges that they are interested in. Students were given opportunities to hold leadership positions. These leadership positions include a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, social activities coordinator, fundraising coordinator, and community services coordinator. This year we are adding 2 class representatives per grade as well. We are taking students who have never had leadership positions and who typically would not be given a leadership role and molding and teaching them leadership skills.

**Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

I have attached my data sheet that summarizes all of my program outcomes.

**Project Timeline:**

This is a timeline that does not have an end date in mind. We plan to continue it every single school year as long as we are able to sustain funding for fieldtrips and projects that we do. Beginning Fall 2018 this project will expand to both middle schools in our school district.

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

The outcomes related to school completion because 100% of our seniors graduated from high school and went on to pursue post-secondary institutions for their future. While enrolled in my program all students were expected to work towards a post high school plan. These post high school plans consisted of college, full/part-time work, tech program, internship, or service to our country.

**Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:**

In order to carry out this project, excellent organizational skills are required. There is a lot of planning that goes into overseeing a student group of this size (on top of the full-time position that you would already hold in your building). There are a lot of students to keep data on and to keep track of so a basic understanding of Microsoft Excel is important. A person must also have an understanding of the cultural dynamics of African-American students and their families.

Understanding this helps to build relationships with the students and their families. A consistent meeting space is necessary as well. The ability to build relationships and connect with community partners who also are invested and committed to youth is important. Doing this has helped to build bridges and connect students to community resources and opportunities that they would not have had before. One of the major goals of this group is to see students leave high school with plans for college, full time work, or training for a non-traditional tech school so there needs to be thorough knowledge of the process of transitioning from high school to post high school.

**Current Status of Project:**

This project is now on its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operating at the high school level and is now expanding to both of the middle schools within the district in which I work. I am assisting the middle school in implementing the program for the 1<sup>st</sup> year and then they will secure a staff sponsor at the middle school level to continue to work of this program.

**Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:**

I created and directed the project, which is now an official program in our district. I am currently the Director of the Program.

**Lessons Learned:**

I have learned so many lessons from this project. I have learned to always remember WHY I got into this work and it will always be and has always been to help students succeed. I have learned to go back to the drawing board when things don't work out as planned and try again. I have learned that being willing to think and do things outside of the "box" or "norm" will always give you an advantage in this field. The issues that students are facing do change with each generation and you have to be willing to try new interventions and approach things differently. I have learned that all students need the same thing: at least one stable adult to be there for them, and not give up on them. This project started with just an idea and I am forever grateful for finding this program and being challenged and encouraged at the conferences that I attended. So many people go into this thinking of only academic interventions in regards to dropout prevention. What I've learned is that if you get a student to feel engaged and apart of the school in which they attend, that academics can then become a priority. Providing leadership and extra-curricular opportunities for at risk students has proven to truly change the culture in my school and the way that we approach helping and engaging these populations. I am so thankful for the many lessons learned through this project and I hope that it continues for many years to come.

**Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:**

I would tell other practitioners to be creative and to think outside the box. I would tell them to have a growth mindset and to focus on the possibilities and opportunities that you can create for young people with what you have rather than focusing on what you don't have to make those things happen.

