

# **Wakulla Institute**

**Victoria Benton  
Program Specialist, Instructional Services  
26 High Drive  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327**

**Phone: 850-926-0100  
Fax: 850-926-3572**

[victoria.benton@wcsb.us](mailto:victoria.benton@wcsb.us)

*Key words:*       **consistency, patience, trust, understanding, intervention and caring**

## **Funding Sources:**

Funding sources are generated through student full-time equivalent (FTE). These sources come from reporting FTE to the State of Florida during two separate survey periods. Then, the Department of Education determines the base student allocation (BSA) for the state and distributes the funding based on student enrollment in the program. Each call center is given an MSID number and a budget is created through collaboration between the finance department and the Superintendent. This budget goes before the school board and from there is moved to the school or program sites. One of which is ours that is presented in this narrative.

District General Budget/Current 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance Budget

## **Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

Our budget consists of the following categories:

- Teacher training
- Textbooks/Computer software
- Positive Behavior Support
- General funds

The cost of this program is rolled into the overall district budget and is set up similar to the schools in our district. We have an internal budget of approximately \$5,000 for the school year. However, salaries, textbooks, computer software programs, and miscellaneous items that are always needed come from the budget set for the school district.

The budget must be signed off by the principal of the school for checks and balances between teacher needs and student needs. Instruction and curriculum along with character development is the first and foremost priority of working towards students' future to merge back into either their zoned school or to continue through our program and benefit from unique rewards associated with being enrolled with us.

## **Project Description:**

Wakulla Institute is designed for both academic achievement and character building. Our student population consists of students who were placed in our program by a committee based on the need for intense credit recovering, behavior, zero-tolerance offenses or if the committee with input from sending schools feels the student is a threat to be on their campus. We are tasked with working with at-risk students to help promote them through their academic setting as well as try to support them emotionally with intense counseling and positive behavior incentives. Small group setting helps our students make personnel connections with our staff members while also allowing one on one academic assistance. Having an intervention period every day enables time for each student's needs to be met through a variety of ways.

Making sure that every student has the individual support needed to rebuild their own self-worth is a key component. Once they believe in themselves again all things seem possible.

The Response to Intervention process and our Intervention Support Teams at each school are used to track data and determine the best course for each student. Once these team determine that

a student may be at risk, they are referred to the District Placement and Review Committee. Some of our students have just fallen so far behind academically that they are recommended to do intense credit recovery with our program. Having that smaller group setting with assistance is all some need to get back on the right path and then they are able to head back to their zone school not feeling so overwhelmed.

### **Staffing Pattern:**

We have five teachers with various certifications, Florida State College counseling interns as well as a counselor from a partnership with a local mental health agency, one Student Resource Officer, three para-professionals, and one administrator. In addition, we have a variety of support from our district office, depending on the unique needs of our variable student population.

This year we added an art certified instructor to allow the students an outlet for their creativity. After careful evaluation of the strategy, we find that students enjoy the ability to generate beauty in their work. Sometimes it is not an academic strength they have, but the strength to think differently and that strength needs to be recognized and celebrated.

### **Population Served:**

#### Number of students:

74 students for the 2017-2018 school year

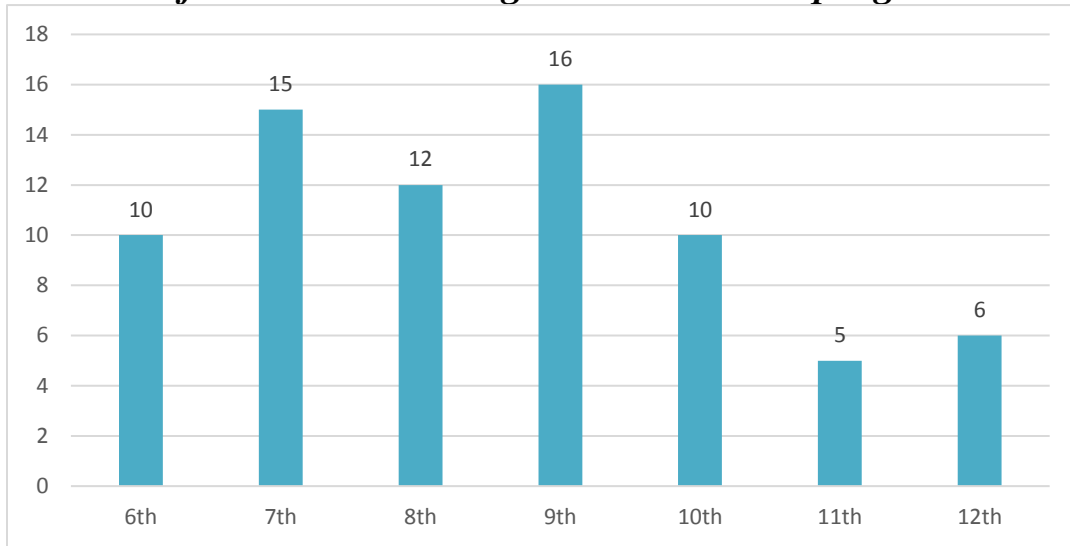
#### Description of project participants:

We serve students in grades 6-12. During the 2017-2018 school year we had 74 students enrolled. The goal of the program is to work with the students and eventually move them back to their zoned school so they can successfully incorporate back into the general student population. Many of Wakulla Institute students come from low social economic and single parent homes. Life can be a daily struggle for these students. With this in mind teaching daily life skills is a large factor to ensuring that students are able to cope with any given situation upon their return. Additionally, the program works with students that are academically deficient. During the 2017-2018 school year 19 students successfully returned to their zone school.

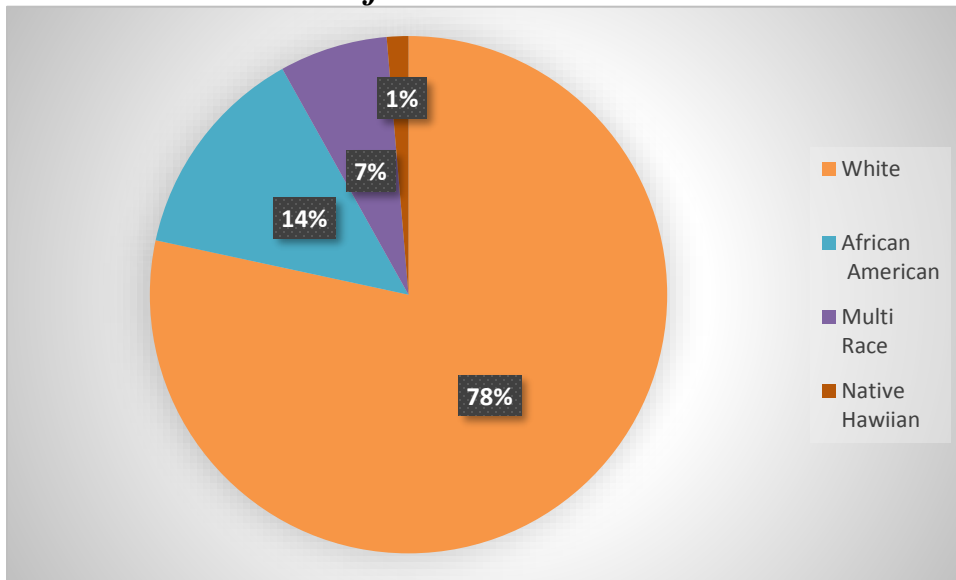
#### Participant selection criteria:

The ages of Wakulla Institute student range from 12 years of age to 18 years of age. Looking at the graphs below you will be able to see the varying ages, ethnic breakdown, number of students with a disability, as well as the social economic status for our student. As you can see from the information below our students covers a large spectrum from our community. All of this information is taken from the students enrolled during 2017-2018 school year. Our student population is constantly changing as to meet the needs of all students in our district will supporting all the school sites.

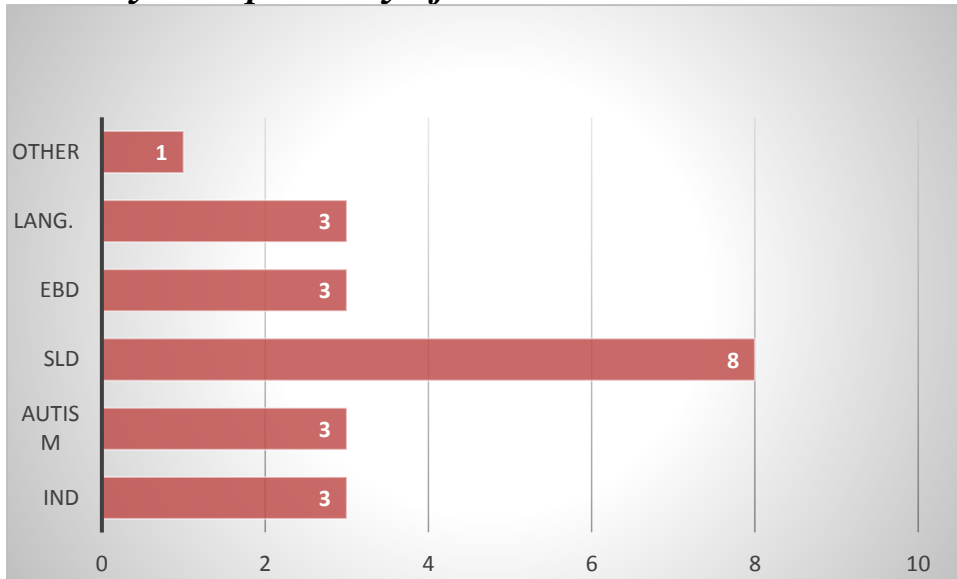
***Number of students in each grade level in the program***



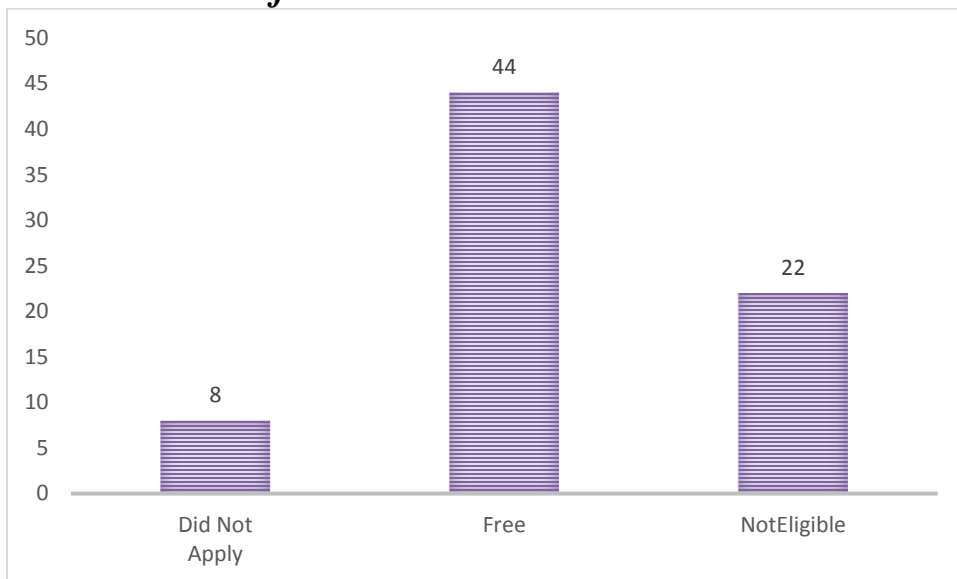
***Ethnic Breakdown of all students enrolled***



### ***Primary Exceptionally of all students enrolled***



### ***Lunch Status of all students enrolled***



### **Project Origination:**

Our district had a second chance program that was not being successful. Therefore, with some training and networking with other districts we developed our new program. This program includes positive behavior support which is based on restorative discipline practices, small group intensive instruction, credit recovery, character development courses, individual mentors for each student and goal setting. With this revamping of the program set in place we have seen encouraging results with our students. Teacher and staff members have an open mind, think outside the box and are always ready to go the extra mile is another reason for our success.

### **Issues Addressed:**

Most of our students were behind in credits due to attendance issues and/or poor performance on benchmarks. We started to plant the seed of how students look at school. We wanted school to be something they invested in as a goal and a place they saw to be able to achieve their future. Making them understand that at this time, school is your job. Having students keep their Accountability Notebooks to track their own progress with attendance, grades, and referrals also builds awareness which is much needed with these youths. Mentors and role models who understand the needs of our students has made a positive impact on decision making and leadership shown while in our program.

### **Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

The objective of this program is to help our students turn the corner to become well adjusted, academically successful students who can return to their zoned school. This is measured each semester at review time with the number of students that are able to return. Three main measurements are looked at; grades, behavior and attendance. Helping these at risk student to improve in these area is certainly felt at our one high school. Our graduation rate has increased from 78.1% in the 2014/2015 school year to 86.7% in the 2016/2017 school year. While this program along is not the sole reason for the improvement, it is a large contributing factor.

### **Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

During the 2016-2017 school year Wakulla Institute had 11 students return to their zone school and in the 2017-2018 school year there were 19 students that were able to return. These numbers may not seem like much, but when you consider where the students began and where they are now (without returning), they have succeeded. We track our students when they depart from our program and make regular contact with them as they enter either post-secondary school or the workforce.

The pride they have as they complete our program and move towards their future is contagious and to even help one, is more than we could ever hope for and why the program itself was put into place.

### **Strategies and/or Interventions:**

Wakulla Institute has started a positive behavior program “All about the Benjamins”, which focuses on good behavior and appropriate reactions. We teach our students that they must be responsible for all of their actions and take charge of their own lives. Students receive paper hundred dollar Benjamins for demonstrating appropriate actions or reactions to situations. These Benjamins can be placed into a bucket at the end of the week for a gift card drawing or students may choose to keep them until they collect enough to purchase something from the privileges board. Students are encouraged to also help their peers to make the best choice as well. Once per nine weeks, students who have received a certain amount of Benjamins along have met the attendance requirement can attend the positive behavior party.

### **Project Timeline:**

The project is on-going. The initial startup occurred August, 2016, however we will continue to provide interventions and come up with strategies to move students forward. We are always learning as we going, adjusting when needed, to make improvements for our students.

As we move into the new school year, we spend the summer analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data to make adjustments for students and teachers. Status quo is not a phrase we spend a lot of time on. The importance of creating new goals and reflecting on the previous year's successes and failures has a place in this process.

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

Wakulla Institute has a quality educational staff who cares for student's growth in and outside the classroom. Our staff was selected due to their passion and specialty for working with at-risk students. They are out of the box thinkers who can and will adapt to every situation rapidly. This caring, supportive group of educators and adults have and will continue to nurture our students.

We are constantly looking for professional development opportunities. The larger your tool kit, the greater rate of success you can have. Professional development includes instructional methodologies and curriculum and content specialties. We are focusing on mental health awareness and student safety as priorities due to our unique location and make-up.

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

Wakulla Institute main focus is reuniting the spark for academic success as well as developing much needed life management skills in our students. Having these youths productively return to their zone school with newly achieved skills and a determination to change their lives, has and will certainly help improve our graduation rate. We are a new program; however, we are very pleased that four of our former students walked across the stage this year at our Wakulla High School graduation ceremony. We also had six seniors graduate from Wakulla Institute. Our district's 2016-2017 graduation rate was 86.7% with the state graduation rate being 82.3%. With this rate we were ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the state of Florida. We plan to continue improving our program and have confidence that our number will increase.

### **Current Status of Project:**

Our program is and will be ongoing. Our student population will change based on which students return to their zoned school, which students remain enrolled in our program and new students that will come to us for their placement. Through hands-on experiences and trial and error, we will be persistent to find the interventions that work well with each student. Being able to reflect at the end of each school year on needed improvements with staff is always a continuous project, and we will forge ahead to work with kids to make changes in their life.

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

I am one of the very few individuals who have been with the project from the very beginning. One of my responsibilities is being the point person for Response to Intervention in our district as well as the chairperson of the Placement and Review Committee. This is the committee which will take an in-depth look at each student to determine the optimal intervention or placement. This puts me in touch with the youth and his/her parents who we have determined may be at risk. Being able to be that helping hand is always a roller coaster ride of ups and downs, but with steady consistent support we always aspire for the best.

## **Lessons Learned:**

- There is no question that students in a drop-out prevention program need a lot of attention and patience.
- All students can learn, and all students deserve an advocate.
- There will be set backs and frustrations, however, do not give up.
- Students are looking to adults to see how they react to all of life's situations. These students especially.
- This work is not for the fragile.
- Teachers, staff and administration need to be consistent, kind and have thick skin.
- It may take longer than expected to make a change, hold steady earn trust and change will happen.

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

- Earning an at-risk students' trust, showing them that someone is there and cares about them is a necessity. Trust is one of the most essential elements.
- Staying power, knowing that you will take four steps forward one day only to find that the next day you are taking five steps backward with the same student.
- You will never know when the light bulb will come on and stay brightly lit.
- Consistency with these students is also key. They need to know that you will not throw in the towel for any reason.