

Peer Mentoring Program (Link Crew)

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***Key words:* Mentoring, Peer Mentoring, Ninth Grade Transition**

Funding Sources:

Proactive Attendance Recovery Funds/Canteen Funds

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The first year cost of Link Crew for White Knoll High School was approximately \$10,000. This included training for three people (administrator, teacher, Graduation Coach). The training conference cost was \$2,495 per person (for a total of \$7,485). We also purchased tee-shirts for the Link Leaders, 130 shirts at \$9.00 per shirt (for a total of \$1,170). There was also a transportation charge to attend the conference (approximately \$250). We then budgeted \$1,000 for program implementation.

Project Description:

The goal of the Peer Mentoring Program (Link Crew) is to, through strategic and intentional actions, give first time ninth graders the necessary support to have a successful transition from middle school to high school and to provide a positive experience for ninth graders. This strategic approach will, over a two-year period, result in a 10% decrease in discipline referrals of first time ninth graders, a 10% decrease in excessive unexcused absences, and will result in a 10% increase in passed classes for first time ninth graders. Excessive unexcused absences are defined as more than 5 unexcused absences in a 90 day class, more than three unexcused absences in a 45 day class, and more than 10 absences in a 180 day class.

During the 2018/19 school year, WKHS had 29 Link Crew “Impact” Groups. Impact Groups are given 38 minutes during the school day to meet. On each Friday, the Link Crew Impact groups met in a classroom which was staffed by a teacher. The Link leaders (juniors and seniors) would lead a lesson/discussion during the 38 minute time slot. Lessons include topics such as improving study habits to making good choices at school and in life.

Staffing Pattern:

Adam Russell, Assistant Principal
Chandler Boyer, Teacher
Heidi Shealy, Graduation Coach

Population Served:

Approximately 615 students which includes 533 first time ninth graders and 111 juniors/seniors.

The 2018/19 school year demographics for the 533 first time 9th graders are as follows:

- 6 Asian
- 110 black
- 1 American Indian
- 2 Hawaiian/Pacific Island
- 332 white
- 56 Hispanic/Latino
- 26 Multi-racial

Of the 111 juniors/seniors who are the Link Leaders, the demographics include the follows:

- 2 Asian
- 35 black
- 65 white
- 4 Hispanic/Latino
- 5 multi-race

Project Origination:

Peer Mentoring had been on the mind of one of our administrators who attended a district wide meeting where a middle school peer mentoring program was discussed. The administrator came back to White Knoll High School and discussed the program with the Graduation Coach. It was decided that the high school needed a strategic plan for incoming freshman to make the transition from middle school to high school as smooth as possible. The graduation coach researched the peer mentoring program, and the program was presented and approved by administration. Three White Knoll High School employees were sent to a three-day training (administrator, teacher, and Graduation Coach). The training, a three-day intensive training, was led by “The Boomerang Project”. The Boomerang Project is a company equally dedicated to both educators and students with a goal to help create schools that not only teach students, but reach them as well. At this training step by step instructions on how to implement the Link Crew program are presented. Throughout the three-days participants had fun, were challenged, learned a lot and returned to their school with the tools, strategies and energy to make Link Crew a vital part of their school.

Issues Addressed:

Freshmen who are the most at-risk population at White Knoll High School.

- More students fail 9th grade than any other grade. (National High School Center, 2007)
- Most high school dropouts fail at least 25% of their ninth grade courses, while 8% of high school completers experienced the same difficulty (Letgers & Kerr, 2001)
- Low attendance during the first 30 days of the ninth grade year is a stronger indicator that a student will drop out than any other 8th grade predictor, including test scores, other academic achievement, and age (Jerald, 2006).

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The desired outcomes are to have improved grades and attendance from first time ninth graders and to have less discipline referrals from first time ninth graders.

Strategies and/or Interventions:

Link Crew will focus on the first time ninth grade experience, pairing each 9th grader with an upperclassman mentor, the “Link Leader”. The Link Leader will check in with their group once a week, lead lessons, play games, and build relationships with the ninth graders in order to create a positive school culture.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

This program was implemented for the first time at the beginning of the 2017/18 school year. During this first year, the schedule did not allow for time during the school day for mentors to meet with students. We attempted to do several afterschool activities (tailgate, movie/popcorn, and study sessions) but we had poor ninth grade attendance.

The program is currently in its second year of implementation. The master schedule has been altered to incorporate 38 minutes every Friday for the Link Leaders to meet with their crews. Each crew consists of 10-13 ninth graders and 2 Link Leaders. The Leaders lead lessons, attend socials, play games, and most importantly, build relationships with the ninth graders during this time.

Project Timeline:

Training for Link Crew took place in the spring of 2017. Link Crew was implemented at White Knoll High School at the beginning of the 2017/18 school year and is a program that will run from year to year.

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

The outcomes would increase the number of classes “first-time” ninth graders passed during their first year of high school. It would also decrease the number of discipline referrals and unexcused absences of first time ninth graders. An additional outcome is that the Link Leaders (juniors and seniors) strengthen their leadership and organizational skills.

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

- The number of adult leaders in the program is connected to the size of the school
- Administration needs to be 100% on board
- Teachers must be educated about the program so that they can understand the benefits to them
- Duties need to be broken down at the onset of the program to ensure success of the program

Current Status of Project:

This project is ongoing and each year adds additional useful information to make the next year more successful.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

As a NDPS certification program participant, my role is to coordinate the Link Crew program. I am the lead person, and I work closely with administration and our Link Leaders. I communicate on a weekly basis with our leaders and teachers regarding the lessons leaders will facilitate during their Link Crew time. I plan the annual calendar for the program and update it, as needed. I facilitate the planning of the social events of Link Crew and purchase all materials needed for the program. I create and send evaluations of lessons to be filled out by the Link Leader classroom teachers (where they communicate how the leader(s) did with each lesson), and then I meet with individual leaders as needed to encourage them in their progress.

Lessons Learned:

- The lead person for this program must have the time in his/her daily schedule to adequately communicate with teachers/students
- The lead person must have the schedule flexibility to meet with students as needed
- Utilizing technology (such as videoing myself leading a lesson) is a great way to communicate with Link Leaders (as they need to be taught how to lead a lesson to a group of students).

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

The program is a process that takes three to five years to fully implement and begin seeing results.