

**Mountain Education Charter High School
Student Services Department
Comprehensive Staff Induction Program**

**Pam Smith
Director of Prevention & Intervention Services
Mountain Education Charter High School
1963 Tom Bell Road
Cleveland, GA 30528**

paige.swartz@mymec.org/pam.smith@mymec.org

706.781.7506/706.781.7334

Key words: at-risk students, at-risk staff development, new staff induction, building capacity, long-term planning, school culture

Funding Sources:

This project was funded through designated Student Services Personnel funds.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

A total of \$45,000 was budgeted for one year for all trainers.

Project Description:

Mountain Education Charter High School (MECHS) is a nontraditional, evening high school in north Georgia. Key features of the school include a self-paced curriculum with mastery-learning, a flexible enrollment/attendance policy, and individualized, prescriptive plans for each student. A hallmark of MECHS is an enduring commitment to the allocation of resources to support the academic, social, and emotional wellbeing of students. The Student Services Department has long been described as the “heart and soul” of MECHS.

From 2008, one Student Services Director had served the entire MECHS system, which was then comprised of 7 sites and fewer than 1000 students. From 2008 to 2017 MECHS more than doubled the number of sites and students, with 16 sites serving 3000+ students annually. A second Student Services Director position was created in 2017-18 in order to manage the rapidly growing department. At that time, the two Directors were responsible for the individual induction, training, and support of all site-level Student Services Department staff. It quickly became apparent that a structural change was needed in order to manage the sheer number of sites, staff, and students, as well as the expanded geographical area. It was simply more than two persons could accomplish.

Prior to the implementation of this project, the Student Services Department was comprised of the following:

- System Level
 - Full-time, Salaried Staff
 - Director of Student Engagement & Retention
 - Director of Prevention & Intervention Services
 - Administrative Assistant
- Site Level
 - Part-time, Hourly Staff; Majority either concurrently employed or retired
 - 2 Counselor(s) X 16 sites
 - 1 Social Worker X 16 sites
 - 2 Graduation Coach(es) X 16 sites
 - 1 TEAM Coordinator X 16 sites
 - 1 Career Specialist/BRIDGE X 16 sites
 - 1 Career Specialist/Dual Enrollment X 16 sites
 - Many Mentors (# dependent upon size of site)
 - 1 Grad Partner X 16 sites

The development of a comprehensive induction program started at the beginning of the 17-18 school year, after the sites were divided into three regions: East (Bowman, Habersham, Hall, Rabun, & Stephens), Central (Dawson, Forsyth, Hill Center, Lumpkin, & White), and West

(Bartow, Fannin, Gilmer, Murray, Pickens, & Union). Within each region and job description, exemplary Site Student Services Department Staff were identified and invited to become Region Trainers for that position. It is important to note that these Region Trainers remained in their site-based positions, as well. This change in the training structure served two vital purposes: 1) It provided the means for staff “in the trenches” to directly train and support new staff; and 2) It allowed the Student Services Department Directors to more effectively focus on “big picture” issues (program assessment, identification of needs of student population, determination of programs/initiatives, and corresponding staff training to meet needs of students).

The new Region Trainers and the two Department Directors met multiple times to establish the parameters of the program. These staff members collaborated to develop induction procedures, materials, and establish means of ongoing support. This process is ongoing. The following describes the process:

- Upon a new staff member’s hire (or transfer into a new position), the Region Trainer is notified.
- An initial meeting is scheduled and generally held at the trainer’s site. At that time, the new staff member is oriented to MECHS and job-specific training begins.
- The Region Trainer coordinates with individual Site Administrators and host Student Services Staff to schedule job shadowing, as needed.
- The Region Trainer schedules a follow-up visit at the new staff member’s site in order to answer questions and arrange for any further necessary training or job shadowing.
- The Region Trainer documents the completion of training.

On a quarterly basis, each Region Trainer schedules meetings for his/her region members. These meetings happen after collaboration with their counterpart Region Trainers as well as the two Department Directors. On an as-needed basis, Region Trainers are available to visit sites to provide support.

During the development of the induction program, it quickly became apparent that an “Expectation Framework” was needed in order to outline the parameters of each Student Services position to share with Trainers and Site Administration. For each Student Services Position, the following were identified: Primary Responsibilities, Initiatives/Tools, Hiring Considerations, Training Components, Performance Evaluations, Artifacts of Effectiveness, and Accountability Metrics. The development of this department Expectation Framework has been one of the most valuable outcomes of this process.

Staffing Pattern:

Since the implementation of this project, the Student Services Department is comprised of the following:

- System Level
 - Full-time, Salaried Staff
 - Director of Student Engagement & Retention
 - Director of Prevention & Intervention Services
 - Administrative Assistant
 - Part-time, Hourly Staff

- East, West, & Central Region Counselor Trainers
 - East, West, & Central Region Grad Coach Trainers
 - East, West, & Central Region Check & Connect Interventionist Trainers
 - East, West, & Central Region TEAM Coordinator Trainers
 - Site TEAM Coordinators train Mentors and Grad Partners
 - East, West, & Central Region Career Specialist/BRIDGE Trainers
 - East, West, & Central Region Career Specialist/Dual Enrollment
 - East, West, & Central Region Student Information Clerk Trainers
- Site Level
 - Part-time, Hourly Staff; Majority either concurrently employed or retired
 - Counselor(s) X 2
 - Social Worker X 1
 - Graduation Coach(es) X 2
 - Check & Connect Interventionist X 1
 - TEAM Coordinator X 1
 - Career Specialist/BRIDGE X 1
 - Career Specialist/Dual Enrollment X 1
 - Mentors (# dependent upon size of site)
 - Grad Partner X 1
 - Student Information Clerk X 1 or 2 (dependent upon size of site)

Population Served:

- Student Services Department Staff
- Site Administration
- All Students

Project Origination:

The explosive growth, covering a large geographic area, combined with historically high turnover associated with part-time staff coincided with a new leadership vision to expand the breadth of non-cognitive services for MECHS students. These circumstances necessitated the development of a comprehensive induction program. This program was envisioned as a means to provide job-specific ongoing induction, training, and on-site support on a regional basis.

Issues Addressed:

- Orientation to MECHS culture
- Consistency/Standardization of department processes and procedures
- Ability to continually assess needs of students
- Data collection/data driven decision-making
- Research and implementation of individualized programs, services, initiatives to address real-time needs of students
- Availability of timely training and ongoing site-based support of Student Services Staff

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

Unlike a traditional day school with full time employees, MECHS continually hires new personnel throughout the school year. In addition, staff often take on different responsibilities at

the site. The main goals of this project were:

- Standardization and continuity in processes and procedures
- Timely training and *on-site* support
- Provision of system-level development of new initiatives

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

- New staff are trained in a timely manner with consistent methodology.
- Region trainings provide opportunity for ongoing collaboration through job-alikes between the sites. This leads to improved processes system-wide.
- A system has been established that continually assesses, monitors, and improve processes in the department.
- Development of student Services Department Expectation Framework has increased common understanding of hiring, training, responsibilities, and accountability for all staff.

Project Timeline:

Fall SY17-18 to Current

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

Staff survey results indicate that Student Services Personnel feel supported at the System, Region, and Site level. The new Student Services Department Expectation Framework not only guides Student Services Staff in their performance of day to day activities, but directly informs Site Administrators in their hiring and supervision of these staff members.

Current Status of Project:

Ongoing

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

Co-Director, Student Services Department (Director Student Engagement & Retention)

Co-Director, Student Services Department (Director of Prevention & Intervention Services)

Lessons Learned/Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

Rapid growth is a great problem to have but it requires the ability to adjust resources to build capacity within the organization. A primary focus must become the standardization of processes and procedures in order to provide consistent services to students, support for staff, and ongoing assessment and development. Due to the unique culture and structure of MECHS, orientation is critical. While structured induction is important, nothing replaces time and experience.

Attachments: Student Services Department Expectation Framework, Induction Program Details