NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Mentoring: Using "Data Chats" In Person and Through E-mentoring

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Project funding sources:
The project is integrated into other projects at Enterprise High School which is a dropout prevention charter school. The funding is through the use of state and federal funds through the Pinellas County school district. We currently base our budget on 360 students. Our total anticipated funding for the 2018-2019 school year is $2,293,375.

Project cost and brief budget narrative:
The project is supported by state and federal funding. Since there isn't an individual budget for the project, Enterprise High School administration needed to find a cost-efficient way to implement the dropout prevention strategies. All technical resources for project are current already in use by the staff. For example, Google voice is being used for student/teacher contact and will be used as a e-mentoring means for mentor/mentee contact. Email is also a technological strategy used by teachers to contact students and will be used as a resource for mentoring as well. The only outlay of funds is the binders to record the data chat information. This is approximately $400.00.

Describe the scope and setting of the project:
According to the US Department of Education, providing students with an adult role model increases the positive relationships of students.   A successful mentoring program can lead to both academic and social success, such as links to the school environment, improved teacher/staff and student relationships, and effective transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, training or work. Through weekly performance orientations or data chats teachers and staff as mentors share individual-level data privately with their students and set goals for student success based on past performance and graduation goals. Data chats focus on attendance, standardized test results, credit earning, graduation deadlines and any other factors that may be keeping the student from being successful. Some staff/student mentoring relations evolve through the RTI (Response to Intervention) process. These students have identified as "struggling learners" based on attendance, behavior or academic progress and require intense levels of intervention and additional mentor is assigned to these students. Data chats maybe administered through a hybrid of approaches in-person and online (e-mentoring).

What was the staffing pattern of the project:
Enterprise High School employs 26 full-time and part-time staff. Each staff member is a mentor. The nine full-time teachers are mentors to the students in their classrooms. The other seventeen staff members are assigned mentees through the RTI process. Since these students have already been identified as struggling, they are assigned an additional mentor for more intense intervention through mentoring and relationship building.

Population served by the project (number of students, subjects, or participants; description of project participants, including ages, grades, demographics, etc.; and participation selection criteria):
Student population includes students ages 16 to 22. Over 70% of our students receive governmental assistance. The population consist of both male and female students. 30% of the population is African-American, 60% Caucasian, and 10% Hispanic/Latino. Approximately 30% of our students qualify for ESE (Exceptional Student Education/Special Education) services, either gifted or disabled.

How did the project originate and how was it developed?
Enterprise High School has had both formal and informal mentoring programs over the past five years. Recent research on and the evaluation of mentoring programs and building relationships and its impact on school attendance, academic performance (credit goals and graduation rate), improvements in self-esteem, the reduction of substance abuse, and other violent or risk behaviors has prompted a look into a more structured approach. Under the umbrella of mentoring, the project incorporates, data chats, face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring technology.

What were the issues and/or needs addressed by the project?
The issues addressed by the project are absenteeism, lack of academic performance, and improvement in graduation rates. Daily automated student absentee notifications have proven to be ineffective in combatting absenteeism due to student detachment. Similarly lack of academic performance and low graduation rates are also signs of disengagement. Mentoring helps build connections to school through relationships to teachers and staff members.

What were the desired outcomes and measureable objectives of the project?
According to the U.S. Department of Education a successful dropout prevention program should seek to achieve the following outcomes: a) using data to help identify students who are at risk for dropping out; b) assigning mentors to targeted students; c) providing academic and social supports; and d) implementing strategies to address negative student behaviors. A solid mentoring program will assist in attaining these outcomes. If Enterprise High School can attain these mentoring outcomes it will facilitate obtaining their measurable yearly objectives of, an average of 45% student enrollment, a minimum of 4 credits yearly earn by each student, four-year federal graduation rate to 39%, four-year federal graduation rate among the African-American cohort of 34% and a School Improvement Rating of Commendable.

What were the strategies and/or interventions of the project?
An effective mentor helps the mentee address problems both academically and socially. The strategy mentors will use is performance orientations with student data to offer encouragement and motivation using listening, support, and problem solving skills to set goals for graduation.

What was the timeline of the project?
The timeline of the project is indefinite and the program will be recurring annually. In anticipation the annual evaluation by the district and the state the Enterprise administration meets bi-weekly with mentors to discuss student progress and the effects of mentoring system.

What special conditions, expertise, and/or skills were required to carry out the project?
One of the benefits of a quality mentoring program is that it does not require the mentors have any special conditions, expertise or skills. The most important characteristic of any mentor is to accept the mentee where they currently are and set goals accordingly. That being stated, many Enterprise students have experienced trauma, either natural or human-caused, as a result mentors at Enterprise High School are trained in on trauma informed practices.

What were the actual outcomes, results, and achievements of the project?
The project is new this 2018-2019 school year. No outcomes, results or achievements have been recorded.

What and how are/were the outcomes related to school completion, dropout prevention, and/or graduation rates?
Research has shown a quality school-based mentoring program results in student success. Mentoring benefit not only the individual, but also the school as a whole with improvements in attendance, dropout ratings and on-time graduation rates.

What is the current status of the project?
We are currently implementing the program with anticipated review monthly by the leadership committee for modifications if necessary.

As a NDPS certification program participant, what was your role or involvement with the project?
As technology coordinator at Enterprise my goal is to find different methods that mentors could use to communicate with their mentees. E-mentoring provided new avenues to the new mentoring program, while maintaining structure. Each mentor was given a telephone number through google voice to keep in touch with their mentees by texting or voice. Since students are always texting this is a convenient, efficient and simple way to communicate with them especially if a student has been absent from school. Mentors were also reminded that using email is also a conducive way to communicate because each student that has a cell phone also has an email account. Using email also contributes to enhancing student technology skills. Using each of these mentoring gives teachers a method to keep track of any correspondence with the mentees. Other options are being investigated but the lack of a budget limits the possibilities.

What were the lessons learned from the project?
The primary goal of mentoring is relationship building. With every relationship there must be expectations. The expectations for the mentee are improved attendance, increased credits earned, and on-time graduation. Consistency and availability are expectations for the mentor. Lessons that have already been learned are the following: 1) Both mentors and mentees were resistant to the process. This is a new project with different approaches and people do not always embrace change; and 2) Data will echo the consistency and commitment to the project as well as student achievement.

What advice would you give other dropout prevention practitioners about the project?
Advice for other dropout prevention practitioners include flexibility, consistency, and patience. When implementing a program, practitioners must realize that both mentors and mentees are diverse individuals so each mentor/mentee relationship will not be identical. Using guidelines, the mentor/mentee relationship can be established based on the individuals involved. Once the relationships are established the mentor must consistently keep in contact with the mentee. The relationship is the key. There should be a formalized method of tracking and recording contact, performance orientation information discussions and student achievement. Finally, patience is important. Patience for the process as well as patience with the mentors and mentees.

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