

## **Student Engagement and Retention of Athletes**

**Wendall Garth  
Osborne Gardner  
Dean Manke  
Kevin Minor  
James Hudson**

**Invictus High School  
3122 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44115**

<https://www.invictushighschool.org/>

***Key words:* Males, Attendance, At-Risk, Engagement, Athletics**

**Funding Sources:**

General Fund

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

Budget Explanation

Transportation (Fuel/Drivers)	\$150.00
Gym Rental Fee	\$200.00
Uniforms	\$2,500.00

Total \$2,850.00

**Project Description:**

A basketball league was created to provide high school males between the ages of 16-21 with an opportunity to engage in sports at a dropout recovery school. The league itself was at no cost to students or the school. Funding was used to cover uniform costs, transportation, and gym rental for practice.

**Staffing Pattern:**

5 Adult Members: (1) Attendance Specialist (1) Family Advocate (1) Student Engagement Specialist (1) Senior Director of Academics, (1) Director of Operations.

**Population Served/Description of Project Participants:**

- Number of students served: 20
- All students were in grades 9-12
- All participants were male
- The student age range was 16-21
- The student demographics included
  - 95% males of color
  - 3% Caucasian males
  - 2% Hispanic/Latino

**Selection Criteria for Participants**

The primary selection criterion included low-income students. Students volunteered and their grades varied.

**Project Origination:**

The students at Invictus High School frequently inquired about sports, so the operations team decided to develop a basketball team. The project originated from student interest.

**Issues Addressed:**

The goal was to give students the opportunity to become more active and engaged in school activities, academics, and assignment completion, as well as positive behavior and attendance.

Issues addressed included:

- Number of students with chronic absences
- Number of assignments completed per grading period

- Number of behavior infractions resulting in out of school suspension
- Number of students near graduation

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

The desired outcome was to increase the student attendance rate, student performance rate, and student engagement, with the ultimate goal of increasing the graduation rate.

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

Students had multiple opportunities to participate in tutoring, mentoring, and skills development. Skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication were identified as the critical skills necessary for student engagement, student performance, and attendance. Academic and behavioral requirements were in place, which included minimum grade requirements, number of assignment completion rates, and number of days present.

**Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

The following results were recorded for participants:

- Higher attendance rates (comparison graph below)
- Increased number of assignment completions
- More frequent cases of responsible behavior
- 90% retention of student athletics
- 3 graduates
- Higher academic gains on MAP testing data compared to the general student body (comparison graph below)

**Project Timeline:**

The study was conducted throughout the duration of basketball season. Practice was facilitated 2-3 times a week.

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

Students had to complete at least 90 percent of their assignments, miss no more than 2 days out of the semester, and maintain proper behavior in school which included no office referrals.

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

It was necessary to create and maintain significant progress-monitoring for the students involved. Several strategies were used across our three campuses including exit slips and a check-in/check-out procedure.

**Current Status of Project:**

The project is currently ongoing and there are plans to sustain the program if budget allows.

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

*Wendall Garth*, Director of Operations & IHS West: facilitated the logistics, rentals, and obtaining uniforms.

*Dean Manke*, Sr. Director of Academics & IHS Downtown: developed and monitored academic standards and goals.

**Kevin Minor**, Family Advocate: served as coach and mentor to the team members.  
**Osborne Gardner**, Attendance Specialist: served as coach and mentor to the team members.  
**James Hudson**, Student Engagement Specialist: served as coach and mentor to the team members.

**Lessons Learned:**

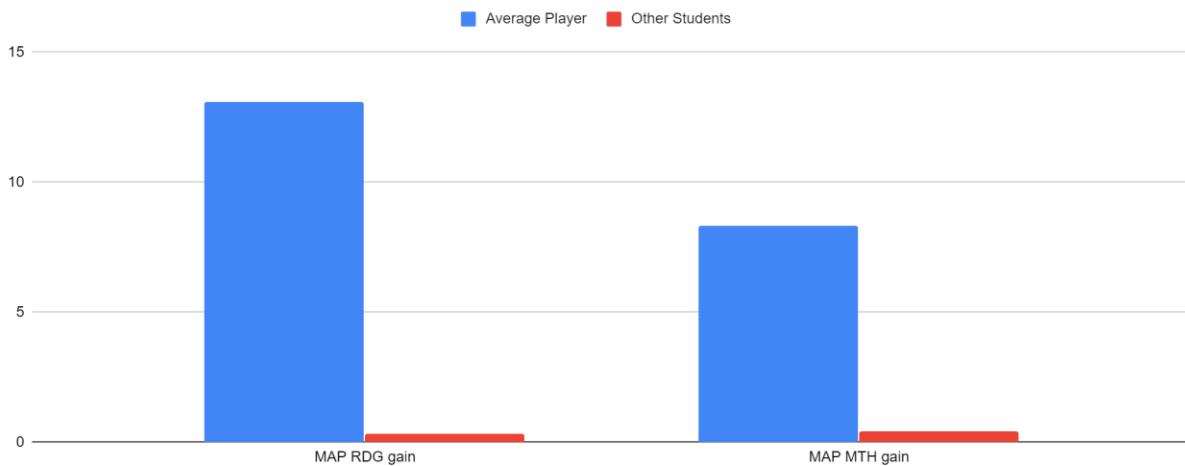
A significant and notable point learned is that engaging activities promote and encourage student behavior. As a result of stronger student and teacher relationships, attendance rates of students who participated are higher.

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

Find the root cause of an issue within your school environment and consider an innovative program that will attract student interests. Consider bringing athletics and sports because it provides students with opportunities to engage in other school and academic related activities. Address the needs of the students and there will be an improvement in student positive behavior and an increase in student assignment completion.

Connecting high-interest activities directly with academics has an immediate impact on participation and engagement. It also deepens the relationships with the student and the coach and the student and their teachers.

MAP Gains Comparison



## Attendance Comparison

