

# **NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report**

## **Academy Grade Level Measure**

Simon Youth Peabody Learning Academy  
Peabody, MA

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## Academy Grade Level Measure

### Funding Sources

Peabody Public School District/Simon Youth Foundation

### Project Cost and Budget Narrative

No additional cost was required for this project. The Use of Pearson's Gradpoint was used for Base level Testing. This is a curriculum product that the Academy uses on a regular basis. The total cost of the program is \$18,000.00.

### Scope and Setting

This project is designed to measure student grade level in the areas of math computation, math application, verbal vocabulary, verbal spelling, verbal language mechanics, and verbal reading comprehension. We will also determine if there is a correlation between academic growth in these areas and student attendance/motivation.

### Staffing Pattern

The staffing consists of two teachers. One teacher is certified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in English language art grades 9-12, as well as history 8-12. One teacher is certified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in mathematics 9-12, as well as chemistry 9-12. The teachers will be under the direction of one administrator certified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a principal K-12.

### Population Served

- Number of students, subjects, or participants:  
This project will include 30 students that attend the Learning Academy.
- Description of project participants (ages, grades, demographics, etc.):  
The 30 students range in age from 16-20 and are labeled as "at risk" by the school district. Students have attended the district high school and were not successful academically.
- Participant selection criteria:  
Students were selected based on academic success at the district's high school. All 30 students have gained little to no academic credit towards high school graduation. Many of the students have attended high school for two years or more and yet are still taking freshman level classes.

### Project Origination

After developing and implementing our program for "at-risk" students for three years, we noticed that there were some learning trends with the students. The Academy is a program that uses small group learning and a web-based program as its primary source of curriculum. Most of our students have had great success with completing their academics using this class dynamic. As the director, my goal has been to encourage students to pursue a postsecondary education at either a college or trade program. The success rate of these students was not as good as what we had anticipated. The question became how much were we actually teaching the students? Was the retention rate at the postsecondary level due to lack of academic readiness or other factors (motivation, socio-economic, etc.). We developed this plan as a way to find students' baseline knowledge in the areas of math and English and if there was any student

academic growth. If so, how much or how little was the impact? Furthermore, did this achievement impact student motivation (increased attendance).

### **Issues Addressed**

The issues and needs this project was able to address were if the students that attend the Academy were learning the curriculum as well as showing growth in grade level abilities in reading and mathematics.

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

The outcome of this project was to see if there was any student academic growth in the areas of math computation, math application, verbal vocabulary, verbal spelling, verbal language mechanics, and verbal reading comprehension. This was measured by comparing pretest results given on the first day of school to posttest results that students took at a local community college.

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

All Academy students took a pretest using Gradpoint's Basic Achievement Skills Inventory exam. The exam is timed and produced a standard score, percentile, and grade level equivalence in the areas of math computation, math application, verbal vocabulary, verbal spelling, verbal language mechanics, and verbal reading comprehension. Once data was collected, teachers analyzed and grouped students based on grade level equivalence results. Teachers then created weekly workshops that focused on areas of improvement in the targeted areas. Teachers also created spreadsheets that tracked academic progress in their core classes (English, history, science, mathematics).

### **Project Timeline**

The duration of this project was one full academic year. This project is done on a yearly basis at the Academy.

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

The project required educators to be very organized in and out of the classroom. It also required that the administrator make sure the school day was extremely organized. It was necessary to have an administrator who was proficient in collecting and properly analyzing/tracking student data on a regular basis.

### **Outcomes and Achievements**

The pretest was administered to the entire Academy on day 1 of school (September 2, 2014). In English language arts (verbal vocabulary, verbal spelling, verbal language mechanics, and verbal reading comprehension), the Academy students' grade level equivalency averaged 9.5. Data provided by the posttest (which was given to students on May 4, 2015) indicated substantial growth. Data showed that the students' grade level equivalency averaged 12.9. This was an increase of almost 3.5 grade levels. The pretest also indicated that Academy students' grade level equivalency in mathematics (math computation, math application) averaged 8.5. Again, the posttest indicated substantial student growth in this area. Academy students tested at a grade level equivalency average of 11.1. This was an increase of just over 2.5 grade levels.

### **Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates**

Student graduation rate at the Academy for the 2014-15 academic year was 100%. Furthermore, the average Academy student attended school at a rate of 94% (169 of 180 school days). Prior to attending

the Academy, Academy students averaged an attendance rate of 60% (108 of 180 school days attended). Postsecondary school enrollment of graduates was also very substantial. Of the Academy's 17 graduates, 11 (65%) applied and are currently attending college.

### **Current Status of Project**

The Academy is in year two of this project. Currently, the director meets with staff weekly and helps to evaluate and implement workshops as well as other academic interventions.

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

As the director of the Academy, I was the driving force behind the implementation of this project. I organized and led teacher meetings, signed off on all curriculum that was being taught to our students, all while making sure the school day was structured and organized. I met with students individually on a weekly basis to discuss academic performance and their overall well-being. As the director, I also collected and analyzed all student data and used the results to drive curriculum.

### **Lessons Learned**

The educators at the Academy learned a great deal from participating in the project. According to the data provided from the pretest, student baseline was well below grade level. This piece of information alone may explain why students were not successful at the district's traditional high school. Secondly, students showed drastic academic improvement once Academy educators were able to strengthen the students' areas of weakness using the pretest data. Lastly, student attendance noticeably improved throughout the academic year. We believe that there is a strong correlation between improved academic success and student attendance rate.

### **Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project**

I think that these projects are a way to help improve the culture of your program. As educators, any time we can find ways to improve the academic success of our students we can create a climate of success.