

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Dropout Recovery Options Program/Academy

Clayton County Public Schools
Jonesboro, GA

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Key words: intervention program, recovery program, virtual learning, Advisory Council, social services, community agencies

Dropout Recovery Options Program/Academy

Funding Sources

The funding sources are Clayton County Public Schools and Workforce Investment Opportunities.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

The cost of the project is approximately \$830,000.00.

Budget Detail:

| Position | Amount | Funding Source |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Supervising Coordinator | \$70,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Counselor | \$10,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| School Social Worker | Current staff | Funding Neutral |
| School Psychologist | Current staff | Funding Neutral |
| Teachers (9) | \$640,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Digital Platform (Odysseyware) | \$30,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Student laptop computers | \$55,695.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Tutoring Service (Tutor.Com) | \$7,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Ancillary cost | \$25,000.00 | Clayton County P.S. |
| Chasers (3) | \$90,000.00 | Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act |
| Face-to-Face Tutoring | In-Kind | Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act |
| Face-to-Face-Tutoring | In-Kind | Nonprofit |

The grant budget reflects an allocation of approximately \$170,000.00 to support staffing for direct student services around tutoring, financial literacy, and job readiness. The following information provides staff to the Academy to ensure the model delivery has all the components of a model dropout recovery program. In order to ensure the inclusion of essential model dropout recovery program components, the following staffing positions will be provided:

A Coordinating Supervisor (\$70,000.00 salary and benefits) will be responsible for the oversight of the program. This person will have a leadership certificate and can evaluate staff. To minimize project expenditures while maximizing the use of existing staff, one of the counselors currently working at the Academy’s location will be paid a stipend of \$10,000.00 to assist students in developing and implementing Individual Graduation Plans, as well as setting educational and career goals. In addition, this stipend would support serving on the Academy Advisory Council, providing counseling services to the Academy students, and creating and implementing an advisor/advisee program based on best practices. Approximately \$640,000.00 will be allocated to support the salaries and benefits of nine teachers (CTAE, world language, English, social studies, science, and two special education teachers), who will be expected to collaborate regularly around the needs of the Academy’s students and provide ongoing support with the Odysseyware online learning platform. There will not be any additional cost for a School Social Worker and School Psychologist as the Academy can utilize the current allotment (in-kind cost) for the additional students enrolled at the location of the Academy. Approximately \$30,000.00 will be allocated towards the purchase of Odysseyware, which will be the digital platform used at the

Academy. Approximately \$55,695.00 will be allocated towards the purchase of laptop computers for the students, which will allow them to complete the online coursework at their own pace. Approximately \$7,000.00 will be allocated to provide 200 hours of tutoring services to the students, which is accessible 24 hours a day. Finally, \$25,000.00 will be allocated towards ancillary costs such as student supplies, printing expenses, and office supplies for the project.

We will also utilize tutoring services through existing community agencies. Students living in qualifying areas within the county will have access to behavioral health services through the School-Based Health Center, where a full-time Behavioral Health Specialist is on staff to address mental health issues.

Scope and Setting

This section details the district support proposal for dropout or nongraduate students returning to the district in earning a high school diploma. Dropout students are identified as students who exited Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) without meeting all course-based graduation requirements. The new D.R.O.P. utilizes a virtual learning platform, collaborative planning with community agencies; student support services; parental and community involvement; and the celebration of students' success to enable students to sustain progress within the program until graduation.

The virtual learning platform provides academic consistency for students while fostering and building their self-esteem through the recognition of their incremental successes. Directing overt, yet positive, attention to remediate students' specific skill gaps will not only improve their achievement and social development, but it will enable the district to earn Full-Time Equivalent, potentially increasing the district's graduation rate.

CCPS will implement a D.R.O.P. Academy that focuses on reenrolling former dropout or nongraduating students so they may earn a high school diploma. This structured and supportive learning environment will expand opportunities for these students to successfully pass classes while earning Carnegie unit credits that will ensure they are on track for graduation. Additionally, these students will participate in numerous job skills and social skills classes to develop their emotional well-being, as well as their readiness for potential job placement.

Another critical component of the D.R.O.P. Academy will be the curriculum and quality of instruction. The D.R.O.P. Academy will utilize a variety of instructional strategies and schedules to target students' deficit skills. In some cases, students may participate in a "double dose" program. That is, they may take two language arts courses in one semester, depending on the students' needs. Additionally, instructional methodologies will include the use of computer technologies, diagnostic and prescriptive evaluations, greater accessibility to Georgia curriculum through rigorous and meaningful curriculum via Odysseyware and a set of study tools designed for disengaged learners. Teachers who are members of the Academy will frequently participate in ongoing, specialized staff development to learn the best strategies to engage and support these learners.

The D.R.O.P. Academy will have a social service component that will focus on the social needs that are often overlooked or not given much consideration in high school such as students who need access to housing, trauma, and continual community concerns. By including a social support services in the Academy, we will be able to pay closer attention to students' basic needs that affect their well-being. Students will have more access to agencies that will support them in obtaining a job as well as extended academic supports outside of the school setting. Students will also have an opportunity to be exposed to career opportunities that are not traditionally considered in the high school setting.

The D.R.O.P. Academy will have an advisory council comprised of administrators, staff, parents, students, social service agency representatives, and community members. The Advisory Council will be led by the Program Administrator (Supervising Coordinator). The D.R.O.P. Council will give advice on critical issues that directly impact dropouts or nongraduates. It will develop broadly based communication systems to enable parents, students, community members, and school staff to work together and become advocates for dropouts or nongraduates and will evaluate the goals of the D.R.O.P. Academy to make

recommendations for improving. This may include text messaging, follow-up calls and home visits from the Chasers, pamphlets in the community, reminder calls, and emails.

Staffing Pattern of the Project

A comprehensive staffing plan, in conjunction with the staff available to all schools and programs, will allow the Academy to become systemic, pervasive, and long lasting.

The D.R.O.P. Academy will employ “Chasers,” or staff that figuratively chase students to school and follow their progress closely to ensure that they receive the necessary social and academic support to complete graduation requirements successfully. These “Chasers” are tasked with finding dropouts and then reengaging them in the school setting. D.R.O.P. Academy students have made the decision to obtain their high school diplomas, but they will need substantial support to overcome the obstacles that prevented them from succeeding before they dropped out of school. The D.R.O.P. Academy “Chasers” may even go as far as providing assistance in transporting students to outside services such as probation meetings, health service appointments, and/or any other meetings that will enable the students to achieve the goal of a high school diploma.

D.R.O.P. Academy Staff Roles

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Executive Director of the Perry Learning Center</i> |  Oversees the operation of the entire school, including the Academy |
| <i>Academy Administrator</i> |  Supervises Academy staff and students, assisting in the design and implementation of the Academy’s curriculum and the components  Provides supervision of Academy students and school activities, including disciplining, attendance, and scheduling  Evaluates staff and assists in the evaluation of the program  Enforces the Academy’s plan (academic/discipline) with the administrator’s assistance and oversees the day-to-day operation of the Academy  Facilitates marketing the program, coordinating business partnerships, garnering grants, and providing assistance where needed  Coordinates professional development, monitors the program and teachers, spearheads the Advisory Council, and evaluates the program  Reports directly to the Executive Director of the Perry Learning Center |
| <i>Chaser</i> |  Responsible for managing a caseload of students  Responsible for ensuring students attend assigned days  Monitors the student’s work and progress  Collaborates with employers to secure job placements for those students on their caseload  Makes home visits when students are absent and works with them to successfully reengage them in school  Serves as a mentor or recruit mentors for students on their caseload  Report to their perspective organizational leaders |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Counselor | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Has experience working with students in grades 9 through 12  Creates and implements an advisor/advisee program based on best practices in assisting students in setting and achieving educational and career goals  Serves on the Academy Advisory Council and provides appropriate counseling services to the Academy students  Assists students in developing and implementing Individual Graduation Plans |
| Social Worker | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Assists with the implementation and monitoring of district attendance and discipline policies |
| Academy Teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Content area specialists  Committed to assisting students in a nontraditional setting  Assist students in meeting academic goals |

Population Served

The students to be served by the project are students (high school age) residing in Clayton County who did not graduate from high school. The project will also serve students currently enrolled who are at risk of dropping out of high school based on academics, attendance, discipline, trauma, or other mitigating factors. Students must meet the eligibility criteria for enrollment in Clayton County Public Schools. Students must meet the age criteria for enrollment in the school district.

This project originated out of a quest to find instructional alternatives to prevent dropouts for students with disabilities. A comprehensive review of graduation trend data for Clayton County Public Schools indicated a dire need to keep students in school and recover those students who had dropped out of school. A subsequent review of the Graduate First Project in Georgia prompted a meeting with the staff at the National Dropout Prevention Network at Clemson University in South Carolina to discuss successful initiatives.

The presentation of the Pasadena Charter School in Pasadena, California, inspired one aspect of the project. A meeting was called with district personnel, community agencies, and potential funding agencies to discuss why students in Clayton County Public Schools drop out of school. The team discussed why and all agreed that we as a collective team wanted to decrease dropouts, increase graduation, and improve literacy in our community.

Project Origination

The project originated from an idea working with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in attempting to support students who needed to finish high school but also needed to work. The students expressed that the traditional high school did not appeal to them. I polled a couple of our community agencies and set up a meeting. We all had the same goal and high school graduation was our focus.

Issues Addressed

Clayton County Public Schools' dropout data for the period of 2011 through 2014 is listed in Table 1 for grades 9-12 and in Table 2 for grades 7-12. In grades 9-12, there was a 2.1% increase in the number of district student recorded as "Dropout" from the 2010-2011 school year. This was a direct result of the state's requirement to code all students without proper documentation (i.e., request for records from the receiving school) as "Unknown" instead of "Transfer." Prior to this time, all students leaving the system were coded as T, *Transfer*, with or without proper documentation. The number of students recorded as dropouts increased again by 0.5% from the 2011-2012 to the 2012-2014 school year.

There was a reduction in the number of students recorded as dropouts during the 2013-2014 school year for grades 7-12. This can be attributed to the school's substantial efforts to locate former students and code their withdrawal status correctly, to provide tutorial services for former students who failed one or

more sections of the GHSGT, and to provide assistance to students missing the coursework needed toward earning a high school diploma.

However, there is a collective agreement within Clayton County Public Schools and its collaborative partners that the district’s existing dropout rate is unacceptable and strongly speaks for a need for a Dropout Recovery Academy. The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network’s exhaustive research indicates that education is the foundation for multiple opportunities in life.

Table 1

Dropout Rate for Grades 9-12

| School System | 2010-2011 | | 2011-2012 | | 2012-2013 | | 2013-2014 | |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| CCPS | 841 | 5.3 | 1,180 | 7.4 | 1,266 | 7.9 | 1,107 | 6.7 |
| Georgia | 19,139 | 3.7 | 19,692 | 3.8 | 19,013 | 3.6 | 19,561 | 3.7 |

Table 2

Dropout Rate for Grades 7-12

| School System | 2010-2011 | | 2011-2012 | | 2012-2013 | | 2013-2014 | |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| CCPS | 986 | 4.0 | 1,377 | 5.5 | 1,501 | 5.9 | 1,336 | 5.1 |
| Georgia | 21,325 | 2.7 | 22,155 | 2.8 | 21,401 | 2.6 | 21,986 | 2.7 |

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

As a direct result of the DROP Academy:

- The percentage of students in grades 9-12 dropping out of school will decrease by at least 10%.
- The graduation rate of D.R.O.P. Academy participants will be 90%.
- One hundred percent of participating students will receive social and emotional support services that directly address social learning behaviors.
- One hundred percent of participating students will engage in programming that directly enhances job readiness skills; and
- One hundred percent of students will receive assistance in securing employment as the academic program is completed.

The D.R.O.P. Academy will provide an academic program for students who experience difficulty in the traditional school setting and who may have difficulty adjusting to the rigor of high school academics due to various reasons. The D.R.O.P. Academy will also focus on those students who are ready for graduation and simply need ongoing guidance encouragement, modeling, guidance, and advisement to help them make good educational and life choices.

Strategies and/or Interventions

D.R.O.P. Academy students will participate in a structured, blended learning environment that includes strengthening their academic skills, developing their study skills, and refining their job readiness skills.

D.R.O.P. Academy will:

- provide students additional outside learning experiences to make their education meaningful and relevant;
- provide students with additional assessments/inventories to create individualized career/learning plans;
- provide adult mentors and advisors to help prevent a second dropout and to further emphasize the need for education;
- enhance study skills of ninth graders via seminars and test-taking practice/tutorial sessions to improve students' performance on standardized tests, including college entrance exams; and
- develop parent and student sessions on topics such as effective communication, decision making, anger management, drug and alcohol awareness, and conflict resolution.

Project Timeline/Special Conditions/Outcomes and Achievements

The D.R.O.P. Academy can be implemented at the beginning of the school year as the recruitment process may be time consuming. The recruitment process may take place from the time the school year ends until the time the new school year begins. The length of time the student remains in the D.R.O.P. Academy is based on the number of courses the student must take to attain graduation as well as the ability to advance in the courses at a faster pace.

Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates

It is imperative that schools are places where every student has optimum learning opportunities. Optimizing resources and talents afford all students equal and comprehensive learning opportunities that meet the needs of the diverse student population. The district's expectations for students focus on the following areas:

- setting high expectations for all students;
- providing a quality college preparatory and/or vocational program to all students;
- providing a high-level academic program to all students;
- creating interdisciplinary teams of teachers to support students and one another;
- providing opportunities for students to catch up and recover failed grades;
- providing structure in a supportive environment;
- providing ongoing guidance to all students;
- providing ongoing guidance and support to teachers;
- providing extra assistance to students to ensure all students are successful;
- engaging students as active learners; and
- assessing programs to improve their quality.

Within the next three years and with appropriate financial resources, Clayton County Public Schools' D.R.O.P. Academy will extend the classroom to students' homes; prepare students for the global market; prepare students to be effective communicators; and use state-of-the-art technology and other capital equipment/resources to provide academic and vocational programs that prepare students to become lifelong learners and contributors to society.

Current Status of Project

- Clayton County Public Schools currently implements this initiative through a grant (Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act) that focuses on dropout recovery.
- Through a collaborative relationship with the GED Program in the school district, students receive employment services to further enhance the dropout initiative.
- Communication with counselors and other school staff teams are formed at each high school to address the dropout and graduation issues.
- Trainings for administrators and school teams are ongoing processes.
- Continuous collaboration with the alternative school option program is another way to utilize resources and supports for school completion.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

As the Project Director, I am tasked with keeping abreast of the dropout research and sharing the relevant information with the team. Communication with the collaborative partners and keeping them abreast of the status of the project is an ongoing process for the Project Director. Meeting with the grantor and ensuring the grant goals are met. Monthly meetings with the Department of Guidance and Counseling on the status of the initiatives and progress on the goals assist in determining any changes to the process. The Project Director continues to encourage the team to work on the strategies without the proposed project structure. Supporting the efforts is imperative in keeping dropout prevention and recovery in the forefront of conversations with the decision makers of the school district. The team continues to have collaborative conversations and training in the area of dropout prevention and recovery.

Lessons Learned

1. Involve the community from the conception of the idea.
2. Ensure that the team is diverse (i.e., teachers, administrators, community members) and that it includes people who are in direct contact with students on a daily basis.
3. Incorporate innovative strategies in the implementation.
4. Stress to the Teaching and Learning Team/Curriculum and Instruction team that every decision should be focused on assisting students to complete school.
5. Keep dropout prevention as a focus, ensuring that decisions are based on current research and best practices.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

1. Invite community partners to the table and make this a collaborative effort.
2. Ensure that principals and support personnel are a part of the process.
3. Be realistic with the budget and phase in of the project.
4. Know your district or organizations strengths and weaknesses in order to recruit people or organizations that can fill the gap.
5. Do not rush the process.
6. Know the needs of the students and the community.