

## **NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report**

### **Central High School Dropout Prevention Program**

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# Central High School Dropout Prevention Program

## Funding Sources

Bureau of Indian Education

## Project Cost and Budget Narrative

The project did not have an allocated budget initially. The project used funds allocated for teaching and learning in Choctaw Central High School. Instructional monies were rerouted toward dropout prevention efforts as an educational environment paradigm shift was attempted. Dollars previously used for consultants, and performance rewards and incentives, financed the Choctaw Central High School Dropout Prevention Program. In addition, funds were used to promote better understanding among key stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, and community members about the significance of dropout prevention.

## Scope and Setting

The project's scope was to reduce dropout rates at Mississippi's only secondary school for Native American students. We conducted all activities of this project using 5<sup>th</sup> period or "quasi" homerooms, regular class periods, and Carnegie days in the school building.

## Staffing Pattern

Extra staff or additional positions were not necessary for the project. Staff members were assigned duties during Student Advisory Group (SAG) activities which included SAG leader or proctor on advocacy days. Fifth period teachers were trained on how to interpret data and communicate these interpretations to students.

## Population Served

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians as well as other Indigenous people who sent their

### Number of students, subjects, or participants

1200 students have been served using this program since 2012.

### Description of project participants (ages, grades, demographics, etc.)

Our school serves Native American students with a minimum one quarter Indigenous blood as indicated by a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) in accordance to Bureau of Indian Education policy. Choctaw Central High School is a ninth through 12th grade school providing a quality secondary education to Indigenous children exclusively. Ages of the student range from 14 to 19 years old.

### Participant selection criteria

All enrolled students at Choctaw Central High School.

## Project Origination

Project originated in response to data reported when I began as principal. A high dropout rate and a low graduation rate as compared with the rates of the State of Mississippi. The project was created using best practices of Professional Learning Communities as explained by Alan Blankstein in his book *Failure is Not an Option* as well as having a theoretical framework developed from W. E. Deming's "Fourteen Points", along with Reuven Feuerstein's philosophy on education.

## Issues Addressed

The dropout rate exceeded state and national averages upon our arrival to the school. Graduation rate was also an issue we wished to enhance when beginning the program.

## Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

We measured dropout rates and graduation rates three years prior, compared to three years after the program's implementation. We desired to reduce dropout rates significantly while raising graduation rates.

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

Clean production and effectively sharing data with all stakeholders were the strategies used in this project. Teachers, students, administration, and parents' use of shared data made discussions about student progress more informed and clear. Another strategy used was goal setting. With 24 credits needed to graduate, students were encouraged to "collect credits" their freshman and sophomore years while concentrating on college and career readiness their 11th and 12th grade years. With seven periods, or opportunities, per year, students began their junior year with over half the credits they needed to graduate. These truths were explained to the students as they were instructed on their contribution to success. Our belief was to begin effective change from within the school. Therefore the focus of this dropout prevention program began in teachers classrooms, specifically fifth period, our quasi-"homeroom". We chose fifth period since we had our highest daily population during this time and it was lunch hour where we could stay in classes for longer periods of time. Initially we began data discussions, in which the teacher spoke individually with each student about what areas in school they were struggling in based on their grades or ACT/ACT Aspire Data. If the area in which the student struggled was out of the teacher's scope, they contacted our RTI coordinator for tutorial services. A SAG was formed in which all staff members mentor students bi-monthly in a structured program. The SAG addressed of issues students face on a daily basis, including but not limited to abstinence, alcohol, peer pressure, bullying, drugs, and social media.

We began "Bring A Parent to School Day" which allowed parents to come to classes with their children. Teachers prepared lessons for parents as they experienced school with students. Afterwards we provided an open-ended constructed response evaluation of the school. Parents were also informed they can come and speak to teachers at their convenience. Other staff would be assigned to those classes when parents requested an audience with teachers.

Students participated in community events as volunteers. Serving in government events, cultural programs, and holiday occasions, our students spooned dinners, sang Christmas carols and ushered seating at events. Our school serves eight different communities and our students remain active, projecting the efforts and images of a quality education.

### **Project Timeline**

This project began in June 2012 in correlation with our five year plan (see Appendix A). We will review our progress in June 2017 with the data collected.

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

A school understood as a learning environment with certified teachers and counselors dedicated to the students.

### **Outcomes and Achievements**

Outcomes include, but are not limited to, a reduction of dropout rates at this high school by 50 percent. In addition graduation rate increased by 35 percent. A positive perception about the high school was measured as indicated by surveys completed by parents at different events.

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

There was a positive correlation between lowering dropout rates and raising graduation rates.

**Current Status Project**

Thriving! We have added an American College Test (ACT) component to the original plan. Students are attending school to make sure they miss nothing to help them score higher on the ACT. A “20 Plus Club” highlighting individuals who score twenty or higher on the ACT has produce fierce competition between students to maximize their production in school.

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

I am the architect, implementer and administrator of the project. The ideas I proposed in 2012 in a five year plan have come to fruition.

**Lessons Learned**

I could not have completed this task alone. Many staff members were instrumental in the success of this project.

The Choctaw students and Choctaw People are serious about education. Every program I have presented with evidence-based data to improve learning at Choctaw Central High School has been vehemently supported. After students were effectively instructed on the school’s dropout prevention project, they worked hard, achieving success. Community members, Tribal government, parents and the Tribal Elderly have all demanded high levels of education from the schools. The dropout prevention program has been accepted by all of these stakeholders which helped ensure its continual progress.

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

Develop plans using evidence-based best practices. Make your plan collectively with contributions from a sample of all stakeholders. Keep a focused timeline and create progress check points to determine the health of your project.

## Appendix A

Submitted August 12, 2012

By Frederick L. Hickmon

A Five-Year Plan to Reach the Goal of Academic Success in the Choctaw Tribal Schools System  
The target of “Academic Success” will be measured by an 80% graduation rate, 100% passing of Mississippi standards core content tests, and average final ACT score of 25. Evaluation of progress toward this target will be monitored with assessments made by CCHS administrative staff on a yearly basis. Periodic evaluation of progress and improvement of the plan based on measurable data will be an integral part of the plan, requiring input from the feeder campuses and approval of the Division of Schools. Progress toward these goals is expected to be attained in 20% yearly improvements, not slowly at first with a “balloon-payment” dividend at the end of the five years. This plan is designed to show measureable success from the beginning, and rejects methods and methodologies designed to buy time, to kick the can down the road, to provide glitter, window dressing, and fancy packaging to bad product.

The plan is based on getting staff, one by one, at CCHS first and eventually the feeder campuses, to understand, appreciate, and buy into “doing education” under a different paradigm based on Deming’s Fourteen Points and Feuerstein’s philosophy of education.<sup>1</sup> This is being attempted statewide in Iowa and by district-wide pilot progress in Wisconsin. These are two states that have accepted the premise that public education as we know it will not survive long in the 21st century without major overhaul. The workplace, policy and procedures of our profession has been tweaked, restructured and politicized beyond recognition as an instrument for determining truth, wherever that leads. The goal of education itself has been lost. For us at Choctaw Central High School it shall be: to equip the next generation (and the current work force) with the tools of learning first and, at the same time, with the know-how and desire to make learning a life-long process.