

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

The First EVER Utah Alternative Education Association Conference On Dropout Prevention

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Key words: **alternative education, professional learning, state association, increased graduation rates, systemic change, partnerships**

Funding Sources

This grassroots project was partially funded through in-kind donations including access to building for conference, materials, and local funds for professional learning.

An additional charge of \$12.00 per registration covered the cost of lunch for conference participants and purchasing a web host site.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

Planned, implemented and hosted a one day state-wide alternative education conference with the focus on improving graduation rates and decreasing dropout on March 27, 2017. Keynote presenter was Dr. Patty Norman, Associate Superintendent of the Utah Board of Education. Dr. Norman addressed the components of the Utah accountability system and ESSA requirement for school accountability, graduation rate, and dropout. An expert panel of mental health professionals discussed school-based mental health models to help struggling students stay connected to school and receive appropriate mental health services. Utah State University presented a research project based on literacy strategies for alternative education students who take the ACT test. Why Try, Inc. presented resiliency strategies. Teen-Act presented a successful mentoring program for at-risk students. Additionally, 18 breakout presentations from alternative schools from a broad spectrum of programs in Utah provided professional learning using exemplary practices and strategies to decrease and provide intervention for dropout and increase high school graduation rates in Utah.

Conference program/signage printing costs	\$300.00
Web Host Purchase 1 year	\$250.00
Lunch for 170	\$1,920.00
Total	\$2,470.00
In-Kind Donations	
Website Design	Mountain High CTE Coordinator
Logo Design	Mountain High Digital Media Instructor
Welcome Video	Mountain High Digital Media Class
Keynote	Utah Board of Education
Session Speakers	19 school and partnership presenters
Conference Facility	Mountain High School & Davis School District
Breakfast	Utah State University

Scope and Setting

Alternative education is one of the *15 Effective Dropout Prevention Strategies* identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Alternative schools in Utah are designed as a dropout intervention for high school students. Utah doesn't have a consortium or association for alternative education. Professional learning for alternative educators and partners to reduce dropout and increase graduation rates is non-existent in the state of Utah. The project is to:

- 1) Create an association for Utah alternative educators and their stakeholders;
- 2) To provide an annual conference for networking, advocacy, and professional learning.

Staffing Pattern

The staffing pattern of the conference committee consisted of 1 alternative high school principal, 1 digital medial teacher, 1 web design teacher, 1 assistant principal, 2 Utah State University partners, 2 secretarial support positions for registration and payment.

A small group of alternative educators and partners met by invitation at Mountain High School to discuss the possibilities of organizing the alternative education providers and partners in the state of Utah. Minutes from the initial meeting:

Minutes of the December 2, 2016 meeting of Utah Alternative Education Leaders held at Mountain High School at 11:00.

Attending:

- Kathleen Chronister, Principal, Mountain High, Davis District kchronister@dsmail.net
- Loretta Nielson, Assistant Principal, Mountain High, Davis District lknielson@dsmail.net
- Lynn Gerratt, Principal, Summit, Alpine District lgerratt@alpinedistrict.org
- Lori Thorn, Principal, Polaris High, Alpine District lthorne@alpinedistrict.org
- Jacob Griffin, Assistant Principal, Independence High, Provo District, JacobG@provo.edu
- Mary James, Dean of Students, Independent High, Provo District Marya@provo.edu
- Nicole Pyle, Assistant Professor of Adolescent Literacy, Utah State University
Nicole.py6@usu.edu
- Sally Brown, PhD student, Utah State University

Agenda:

Welcome and introductions.

- Lunch provided by Utah State University
- Report of USU research project from Nicole Pyle and Sally Brown
- Discussion of organizing a Utah Association of NAEA.
- Lynn suggested working with Student Service conference
- Kathleen mentioned UASSP conference Special Purpose rep connection hasn't reached beyond Alternative Administrators
- Suggestion was made to host an initial conference on March 27th at Mountain High School with the purpose to provide an opportunity for teachers, administrators, and other alternative education partners to share best practice and collaborate.
- Conference will be chaired by Kathleen Chronister.
- Loretta Nielson will send a survey to potential participants and ask about topics for the conference.
- Kathleen will send nomination forms for creating a Utah NAEA board. Nominations will be accepted through March 24th and voting for the board members will take place on March 27, 2017 with the conference attendees as the first members of Utah chapter of NAEA.

Meeting adjourned with follow-up through email to coordinate the March 27, 2017 conference and board member nominations.

- Cache District
- Canyon District
- Davis District
- Granite District
- Iron District
- Jordan District
- Ogden District
- Provo District
- Salt Lake District
- Uintah District
- Washington District
- Weber District
- Tooele District
- Fast Forward High Charter School

Partners working with at-risk students included:

- Utah State University
- Why Try, Inc.
- Teens Act
- Davis Behavioral Health
- Pearson Learning

Demographics

Job Position	Number of Participants by Job Position
School/District Administrators	29
Agency Directors	3
Associate University Professor	1
PhD Graduate Candidate	1
Associate State Superintendent	1
Assistant District Superintendents	2
Mental Health Professional/Social Workers	13
School Support Staff	19
Teachers	80
School Counselors	11

Project Origination

Alternative Education is one of the *15 Effective Strategies* identified by NDPC/N to reduce dropout. In December, 2016 a small group of alternative educators and partners from Utah State University met to determine the level of commitment to establish a Utah Alternative Education Association. The discussion focused on the lack of Utah Board of Education support or oversight of alternative education. Since there is no specific funding in Utah for alternative programs, the group determined that there was no one to provide specific professional learning, advocacy, or networking. The idea for a conference initiated and interest email invitations were sent to known alternative education programs and schools. The response was a resounding “YES, this is a needed opportunity.” Based on the positive response, I chose to use the organizing of alternative educators into an association beginning with a professional learning conference as my NDPS Field Project. The conference focus included dropout prevention, dropout intervention, professional learning for classroom teachers, advocacy needs and strategies, and professional networking.

Using the National Alternative Education Association as the model I organized a conference for professional learning and networking. I also organized an election process for a UAEA Board of Directors to be completed at the conference held on March 27, 2017.

Issues Addressed

The issues identified for the project:

1. No formal organization existed for alternative educators in Utah to network, review, and share best practice on dropout prevention/intervention for at-risk students.
2. No specific professional learning existed for alternative educators and their partners who work with at-risk students as providers of dropout intervention programs.
3. No oversight, budget, or accountability by any member of the Utah State Board of Education existed specific to alternative education to provide support for professional learning or advocacy for alternative education.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

1. Create a Utah association to support and provide professional learning and advocacy for alternative education professionals and their partners who work with at-risk students.
2. Host an alternative education conference for Utah alternative education professionals.
3. Form a Board of Directors for the Utah Alternative Education Association.

UAEA Mission and Vision

Mission: The UAEA provides advocacy and support for professionals who work on behalf of children and youth receiving alternative education services in Utah.

Vision:

- To provide opportunities for alternative education professionals their partners to network, collaborate, and participate in professional learning specific to research and best practices in alternative education and dropout prevention/intervention.
- To provide a unified voice of advocacy for students in alternative schools and programs in Utah to promote understanding and support from school districts, charters, Utah State Board of Education, and policymakers.

Strategies and/or Interventions

- Secured a site location and date for alternative conference
- Negotiated a food cost with Mountain High FCCLA to provide lunch
- Partnered with Utah State University to provide breakfast
- Created a list of potential attendees
- Sent an initial interest email
- Created a webpage with google forms for registration
- Created a flyer
- Sent flyer to email list of all Utah school districts with alternative programs
- Sent a request for proposals for breakout presentations
- Requested a Welcome from District Assistant Superintendent
- Requested a Keynote from State Associate Superintendent
- Monitored and encourage registration through multiple emails
- Organized the program and structure of the conference
- Organized the association elections and provided an application for board elections

Hosted the conference and elections

Project Timeline

1. Nov 9, 2017 Invitation extended to Utah alternative leaders to determine need for association and conference
2. Dec 2, 2016 planning meeting held at Mountain High School
3. Jan 9-20, 2017
 - Created webpage for Utah Alternative Education Association
 - Created flyer to advertise for First EVER Conference for Alternative Education
 - Created forms to capture registration
 - Created “call for presenters” application
4. Jan 31, 2017 sent initial email to Utah alternative education professional with flyer to “Save the Date” of March 27, 2017 for the First EVER Utah Alternative Education Conference
5. Feb 1 – March 24
 - Monitored conference registrations and send conformation emails to registrants

- Collected all “call for proposals” and responded with confirmations
 - Scheduled room assignments for presentation breakouts
 - Created the conference program breakout presenters schedule by topic, time, and logistics.
 - Designed and printed the conference program
6. March 27, 2017
- Hosted the First Ever Conference for Alternative Education professionals and partners
 - Conducted an election of board for UAEA
 - Formed an association for Utah alternative educators called Utah Alternative Education Association.

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

- **Conditions:** A void in Utah of support for professional learning and advocacy for alternative education. No oversight or budget from the Utah State Board of Education.
- **Expertise:** I serve on the National Alternative Education Association Board and recognized a need in the state of Utah for an association to represent the needs of alternative educators and their partners. This is a one of the *15 Effective Dropout Prevention Strategies*.

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

1. Created a Utah association to support and provide professional learning and advocacy for alternative education professionals and their partners who work with at-risk students.
 - Result: 160 members formed an association
2. Hosted an alternative education conference for Utah alternative education professionals.
 - Result: Held a conference for 160 registered alternative education professionals
3. Form a Board of Directors for the Utah Alternative Education Association
 - Result: Elected a board of 10 alternative education professionals and partners with President, President-elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and At-large board voting members

The conference featured 19 different presenters with focus on engaging alternative education students with specific intervention strategies for dropout prevention. Breakout Sessions included:

- A Systemic Approach to Increasing Graduation Rates
- Empowering Youth to Stop the Drama
- Student Success Curriculum through Youth Mentoring
- Teaching Resilience to At-risk Students
- Improving the Climate and Culture of Alternative Schools as a Dropout Intervention
- How to Teach Thinking Errors to Keep Students in School
- Literacy for Access to College and Texts for At-Risk Students
- Using Data to Graduate At-risk Students
- Using Archery for Focus

- High Expectations in the Classroom Lead to Positive Graduation Results
- School-Based Mental Health Models
- Mindfulness School Culture to Engage Students
- Administrative Interventions That Work to Help Students Graduate

Current Status Project

The project will continue as the newly formed board is planning a conference for next year.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

As a member of the National Board for Alternative Education, I felt it was my responsibility to create a Utah initiative to support alternative education and lead the way in dropout prevention strategies.

As I researched and questioned the lack of support in the state of Utah, I found no one at the state level had any assignment or oversight to provide networking, professional learning, or advocacy for alternative education.

Lessons Learned

I was overwhelmed with the positive response from alternative educators and partners in the state. It has truly been an experience that has filled a huge void in the state of Utah. The outpouring of expressions of gratitude from professionals has been outstanding. See the website for participant comments and photos. www.UAEAHOPE.org

The conference and formation of an association is just what was needed to further the important work of dropout prevention using alternative schooling as a research-based strategy.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

Just do it! If not you, then who? That's the question I asked myself as I began this project. If no one is guiding the ship, then take the wheel and make it happen. It's worth it.

1. Use your strengths.
 - a. I was able to use my school because it was a professional learning day in my district and my building was available.
 - b. I used my contacts in the district and the state for Keynote and Welcome speakers at no charge.
 - c. I used my contacts in the district to encourage regular education administrators and teachers to support the conference in addition to all of my alternative program faculty and staff.
 - d. Use your experts in your own building. I used my FCCLA students to prepare lunch as a fundraiser for their state and national events. I used my CTE coordinator to create a webpage. I used my digital media teacher and students to create the logo and Welcome video. I used my CTE secretary and coordinator to help print and staple the programs and make the signage for the rooms.
2. Use Google docs to create forms for registration
 - a. Google docs is very easy to create and maintain from a Gmail account.

3. Take a lot of pictures! Then post them on your newly created webpage to drive traffic and interest to joining the organization and participating in the next conference.