

**Office of College and Career Readiness**

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***Key words:* college-ready, career-ready, student activities, community involvement**

**Funding Sources:**

Salem City Public Schools

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

The Office of College and Career Readiness' project did not have an allocated budget. The project utilized the resources that were already available to the members of the Salem City School District. Project was designed with intention of creating a stable and cost-effective form of support that would be able to sustain without adding strain to the district's yearly budget.

**Project Description:**

The goal of the Office of College and Career Readiness (OCCR) was to increase the district's graduation rate, increase the number of college-ready students, increase the percentage of student activities (athletics, community service, employment, academic clubs, etc.), increase community involvement, and to reduce the district's dropout and truancy rates.

The main location of the Office of College and Career Readiness is housed in Salem High School. There are also satellite office spaces in the district's elementary and middle school. The staff members of the OCCR are required to complete bi-weekly home visits.

**Staffing Pattern:**

The Office of College and Career Readiness is co-directed by two employees; the district's Family Coach Specialist (FCS) and the district's Truancy Officer.

**Population Served:**

The qualifying factors to be categorized as an "at-risk" student are to have failed one or more courses, been retained, received ten or more disciplinary demerits, and experienced high absenteeism (15+ absences and 20+ tardy days). According to research completed by the Community In Schools organization, the characteristics of the student's family background and the family's commitment to education are the factors essential to the family decision to discontinue education. The study also suggests that students with the compounding factors of a low socioeconomic status, high mobility rate, and low educational expectations are more likely to drop out of high school. The Salem City School district is a Community Eligibility Provision district (CEP). The CEP is a meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. A key provision of The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA, Public Law 111-296; December 13, 2010), CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without the burden of collecting household applications. To qualify for the free lunch program a student's family must receive benefits from SNAP, TANF and have a household income within or below the state requirement.

All participants were registered members of the Salem City School District.

**Project Origination:**

OCCR was developed to increase the district's graduation rate, increase the number of college-ready students, increase the percentage of student activities, increase community involvement, and to reduce the district's dropout and truancy rates. OCCR is primarily aimed to assist the

students that were considered “at-risk”.

**Issues Addressed:**

The issues addressed were the district’s subpar graduation rate, exceedingly high dropout rate, and truancy rate.

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

The desired outcome of the OCCR project at time of implementation in July 2013 was to improve the district’s graduation rate to 92% and to reduce the dropout to below 8% over a four-year period.

**Strategies and/or Interventions:**

In July of 2013, OCCR completed a thorough review of the district’s enrollment process, a credit evaluation for each student attending Salem High School, and absorbed the registrar responsibilities (to reduce clerical errors), designated the office as the district’s homeless liaison, implemented a summer enrichment program, reorganized the district’s alternative school, and modified the district’s case management process.

Once a student is identified as at-risk, the family is considered for wraparound services that will support the student/family academically, behaviorally, and socially. A Family Coach Specialist and the family will work as a unit to create a graduation plan for the identified student. The student’s graduation plan will/may include an academic plan for success, behavioral plan, community service, and/or community provided supports. To ensure that the student’s needs are being met, the FCS is required to conduct a minimum of two face-to-face meetings per month with each student and a minimum of one monthly contact with the youth’s parent/guardian. During each meeting, the FCS provides students and parents with updated grades, a list of work needed to improve academically and a list of all missing materials.

The OCCR educational support program provides the opportunity for students to earn the credits necessary to remain on pace and ready to graduate in four years. The program offers students an additional 1.5 hours of instructional time in three required core courses. The FCS recruited students who have failed to earn more than 15 academic credits by passing three or more classes.

The Ram’s “Summer of Growth” Enrichment program will include 25 hours of educational enrichment workshops and team building activities that will enhance the educational, social, and personal development of 30 Salem High School at-risk and transitional students. The essential goal of the Ram’s Summer of Growth program is to provide children with the tools necessary to thrive in their individual environments and within their individual abilities. An additional objective is to promote an increase in diverse social relationships.

**Project Timeline:**

The OCCR project began in July 2013. The project will remain in place until it is deemed unbeneficial to the student population.

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

To properly support the project, the staff must have knowledge of the state's enrollment guidelines, requirements for graduation, knowledge of truancy laws, and dedication to the students who need additional support.

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

During review of our statistics we found that as our graduation rate improved and the dropout rate began to decrease.

**Current Status of Project:**

The project is sustaining and showing effectiveness with supporting the high performing students in the International Baccalaureate program.

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

I am the creator of the program's current case management guidelines. Currently I serve as one of the initial co-Directors of the Office of College and Career Readiness.

**Lessons Learned:**

I learned that every student is at risk of making a decision that can impact the trajectory of their lives and that it is up to the community to ensure that each student has the opportunity to be successful. Improving the community impact was one focus of the Family Coach Specialist with an intent to improve the involvement of the local, state, and county government agencies. The Family Coach and District Truancy Officer have maintained a working model of communications with the Salem County Juvenile Probation. SCYP provides the FCS/Truancy Officer with a current list of children who are court ordered to attend school on a regular basis. The Family Coach has also assisted with the coordination of "Back to School Nights" hosted at the both Salem Middle and Salem High School. With success, the FCS visited with and invited the local non-profits, *The Family Success Center, Salem County United Way, SODAT NJ, the John B. Campbell Center and Department of Child Protection and Permanency* to display and present the programs each offered.

In the 2015-2016 school year, OCCR created a partnership with the Mid-Atlantic States Career & Education Center to address the needs of our students outside of the school environment. This was accomplished by implementing a successful job placement program. The Mid-Atlantic organization now deploys job placement workers to Salem High School to work with our student population over the age of 16. Since the creation of the partnership, our office has assisted over 60 students in gaining employment since September 2015.

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

My advice would be to set realistic and measureable goals that will have more than one method of achieving. The amount of resources readily available to the members of today's society is overwhelming, and each resource should be utilized. Following this practice will reduce the cost of maintaining your program but more importantly utilizing the readily available resources will provide a high level of sustainability to your program.