

Mentoring/Tutoring: Using “Data Chats” In Person

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Project funding sources:

Enterprise High School is a dropout prevention charter school. The funding is through the use of state and federal funds through the Pinellas County school district. We currently base our budget on 360 students. Our total anticipated funding for the 2018-2019 school year is \$2,293,375.

Project cost and brief budget narrative:

The project is supported by state and federal funding. Since there isn't an individual budget for the project, Enterprise High School administration needed to find a cost-efficient way to implement the dropout prevention strategies. All technical resources for project are currently already in use by the staff. For example, all teachers use binders to record the data chat information. This budget is approximately \$400.00.

Describe the scope and setting of the project:

In accordance with multiple studies, providing students with a positive and supporting adult role model increases the positive relationships of students. A successful mentoring program has led to academic and social success. A positive atmosphere in the school environment, improved teacher/staff and student relationships and increased student success has led to higher credit earning and graduation percentage. I noticed effective and smooth transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, training, or work. Data chats take place on weekly/biweekly or sometimes even a daily basis where teachers and staff as mentors share individual-level data privately with their students and set goals for student success based on graduation goals. Data chats focus on attendance, standardized test results, credit earning, graduation deadlines and any other factors that may be keeping the student from being successful. These interactions are usually very successful and produce very tight connections between students and staff leading to that positive atmosphere, making our school a "safe heaven" for a lot of students and also producing graduates with post-secondary study plans and/or training or work plans.

What was the staffing pattern of the project:

Enterprise High School employs 26 full-time and part-time staff members, each of which serve as a mentor. The nine full-time teachers are mentors to the students in their classrooms. The other 17 staff members are assigned mentees through the RTI process. Since these students have already been identified as struggling, they are assigned an additional mentor for more intense intervention through mentoring and relationship building.

Population served by the project (number of students, subjects, or participants; description of project participants, including ages, grades, demographics, etc.; and participation selection criteria):

Student population includes students ages 16 to 22. Over 70% of our students receive governmental assistance. The population consist of both male and female students. 30% of the population is African-American, 60% Caucasian, and 10% Hispanic/Latino. Approximately 30% of our students qualify for ESE (Exceptional Student Education/Special Education) services, either gifted or disabled.

How did the project originate and how was it developed?

Enterprise High School has had both formal and informal mentoring programs over the past five years. Recent research on and the evaluation of mentoring programs and building relationships and its impact on school attendance, academic performance (credit goals and graduation rate), improvements in self-esteem, the reduction of substance abuse, and other violent or risk

behaviors have prompted a look into a more structured approach. Under the umbrella of mentoring, the project incorporates data chats, face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring technology.

What were the issues and/or needs addressed by the project?

The issues addressed by the project are attendance, academic performance, and improvement in graduation percentage. The automated student attendance phone calls have proven to be ineffective in increasing student attendance due to student detachment. Also lack of academic performance and low graduation rates are signs of disengagement. Mentoring helps build connections to school through relationships to teachers and staff members.

What were the desired outcomes and measureable objectives of the project?

According to the U.S. Department of Education a successful dropout prevention program should seek to achieve the following outcomes: a) using data to help identify students who are at risk for dropping out; b) assigning mentors to targeted students; c) providing academic and social supports; and d) implementing strategies to address negative student behaviors. A solid mentoring program will assist in attaining those outcomes. Achieving those outcomes will help Enterprise obtain their measurable yearly objectives of 45% of students enrolled for both FTE (Full Time Equivalent) Surveys this year (October and February) will earn a minimum of 4 credits, achieve a four-year federal graduation rate to 39%, and a 4-year federal graduation rate among the African-American cohort to 34% and achieve a School Improvement Rating of Commendable.

What were the strategies and/or interventions of the project?

An effective mentor helps the mentee address problems both academically and socially. The meetings between mentor and mentee can occur on a daily or biweekly basis. The strategy mentors use with student is to offer encouragement and motivation using listening, support, and problem solving skills to set goals for graduation.

What was the timeline of the project?

The timeline of the project is indefinite and the program will be recurring annually.

What special conditions, expertise, and/or skills were required to carry out the project?

One of the benefits of a quality mentoring program is that it does not require that mentors have any special conditions, expertise or skills. The most important characteristic of any mentor is to accept the mentee where they currently are and set goals accordingly. That being stated, many Enterprise students have experienced trauma, either natural or human-caused, as a result mentors at Enterprise High School are trained in on trauma-informed practices.

What were the actual outcomes, results, and achievements of the project?

The project is new this 2018-2019 school year. No outcomes, results or achievements have been recorded yet.

What and how are/were the outcomes related to school completion, dropout prevention, and/or graduation rates?

Mentoring benefits not only the individual student, but also the school as a whole, with improvements in attendance, dropout ratings and on-time graduation rates. Our school is an alternative charter dropout prevention school that serves at risk population of students. Our

reputation of treating the students with care and mentoring/tutoring them throughout high school is preceding us and that is shown with a long waiting enrollment list during the entire school year.

What is the current status of the project?

We are currently implementing the program with anticipated review monthly by the leadership committee for modifications, if necessary.

As an NDPS certification program participant, what was your role or involvement with the project?

As a science/homeroom teacher my role is to contribute to a positive school atmosphere by making sure my classroom is welcoming and a place where students want to be and want to come back the next day. I am assigned a homeroom roll of students, and I am responsible to mentor and guide these students to meet their goals. During my work day I create possibilities to sit and talk to my students on a one-on-one basis. During these sessions we set academic and personal goals for their high school and post-secondary careers. Having positive relationships with my students has led to a more successful learning environment in my classroom due to almost nonexistent student misbehaviors. My job also entails being a science facilitator position which I perform daily by tutoring one-on-one and small groups at designated times.

What were the lessons learned from the project?

Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective way to address specific needs and competencies. The most important goal of mentoring is building connections and relationships. With every relationship there must be expectations. The expectations for the mentee are improved attendance, increased credits earned, and on-time graduation. The expectations for the mentor are consistency and availability. Lessons that were learned are as follows: 1) The process was gradual on both sides because the students that come to our school are the ones that “slipped through the cracks” in public education. This is a new approach and people do not always embrace change. Mentors sometimes fall into the “traditional way of doing things” and to see past the misbehavior, acting out or withdrawal to see a wounded person yelling for help can be difficult.

What advice would you give other dropout prevention practitioners about the project?

The advice that I would give to the other dropout prevention practitioners is to be patient, be flexible, be consistent, and most importantly be persistent. When implementing a dropout prevention strategy, practitioners need to realize that both mentors and mentees are diverse individuals so each mentor/mentee relationship will not be identical. Using guidelines, the mentor/mentee relationship can be established based on the individuals involved. Once the relationships are established the mentor must consistently keep in contact with the mentee. There should be some kind of formal or informal method of tracking and recording contact, performance and student achievement. Finally, a relationship based on mutual trust is key. Be genuine and true to who you are. These mentees/students crave the true caring adult and remember you might be the only consistency in their life. Sometimes people become successful “by chance”. Be that chance!