

Learning to be Agile by Scrumming Students

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Funding Sources:

This project does not cost anything other than time and effort. Its payoff is in the increased course completion rate, increased student retention rate, and ultimately a graduation rate increase. Blueprint Education and Hope High School Online does, however, receive funding in the form of scholarships, retreats and training from other Agile businesses that want to form partnerships with educational organizations to help students achieve their goals and prepare them for employment and real world problem solving post-graduation.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

This project does not cost anything to operate other than the willingness and “All In” systemic approach.

Project Description:

The initial need for this project stemmed from a need to increase our graduation rate. Hope High School Online and Blueprint Education is an online school and an Agile organization. Due to this, we wanted to find a way to use the Agile principle our staff operates under and assist students in completing their courses. We took the Agile scrum approach with an “All In” effort. Agile originated in the tech industry as a way to complete projects. It is a bottom up method rather than a top down method. Most schools and business operate in a top down method. For example, in a top down approach when Administration needs a task completed, they provide the orders on what to do to the staff and each person or small team is responsible for delivering that task by the deadline. Agile methodology tosses that concept out the window. Instead, our school operates bottom up, as an All In team. When administration needs a task done, we are told what the need is, in this case it was an increased course completion and graduation rate, and we, the team, decided how to complete this task and deliver the final numbers by the end of the iteration or sprint to the administration, as a team. This way, we are all responsible for the students in the is project. If a student needs to complete a course, it becomes not the sole responsibility of the teacher to see them to completion, but rather the entire team as a whole.

Students in online classes are often very difficult to move along with progression and that was hurting our graduation rate. So we wanted to effectively and consistently have students moving in their classes outside of the regular contact that they get from their teachers and coaches.

We operate the project in iterations, also called sprints, each month. Our scrum board is divided up according to progress in a class. Each team meets and writes down all students’ names on sticky notes. The list of students comes from students whose courses have expired by the previous month certain date. In July, for example, the students on the board have classes that have to be completed and finished by July 25. Students on the scrum board can fall into either a percentage they are along in the class, such as 0-10% complete, 11-25% complete and so forth. Once they are cued up and ready for their final, they are listed as exam only. Once the exam is taken and passed, they can be marked completed. If a student fails to take a final exam, they can fall into a few different categories such as withdrawn from course, withdrawn from the school, course restarted, or failing grade issued.

Staffing Pattern: The Scrumming Students Agile Project takes an “All In” systemic approach. The staff is divided into two scrum teams. Scrum teams meet on a daily basis for approximately 15 minutes, at the same time each day, namely 11:00am and 11:15am, to discuss the movement

of the project, tasks, completed tasks, goals and obstacles. This daily meeting is called a “Stand Up” meeting. The teams are named, Minions 2.0 and Guardians. Team members originally started off as one large team, however, we discovered that smaller teams of about five to eight, operate more efficiently than larger teams and falls more in line with Agile principles. Teams can also change as staff grows and changes.

Team Guardians consists of the following staff members:

Kevin Watson, teacher of history, government, and economics
Jeannette Schneider, Special Education teacher and coordinator
Christy Dawson Williams, Lead Teacher and teacher of ELA
Tawny Hallock, Academic Coach
Caitlen Savage, Growth to Graduate Advisor and Academic Coach
Robert Ortega, teacher of mathematics
Susan Hruby, Academic Coach
Bridget Svorinic, Program Liaison, Blueprint Education

Team Minions 2.0 consists of the following staff members:

Rosa Espinoza, Academic Coach
Christine Ruhl, ESS Director for Blueprint Education
Jillian Oetter, teacher of Electives and 504 coordinator
Jamie Casiglione, Marketing and Enrollment Coordinator
Jessica Barrios, Academic Coach
Joann Vega, Receptionist
Brenda Conrad, Enrollment Specialist
Myself (Kris Flaven), teacher of sciences

Present on both teams is:

Becca Searles, Coordinator and Scrummaster
Erin Horn, Principal

Population Served:

Alternative education high school students grades 9 thru 12, ages 14 thru 22, with a variety of ethnicities, backgrounds, and income levels.

Project Origination:

The idea of scrumming students came from the Agile scrum approach to operating as a team. Agile is a bottom up, team approach. We decided that students whose classes were expired needed the most attention so they became our focus on each iteration.

Issues Addressed:

This project addresses students whose classes have expired. The idea is to keep students progressing through their courses which will affect the graduation rate.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

Ultimately, we wanted to improve our course completion rate and graduation rate.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

In the 2017-2018 school year, our course completion rate was 1,167 courses completed. After scrumming students in the 2018-2019 school year, the course completion rate increased to 2,120

courses completed. That resulted in a difference of 953 courses completed. Our attrition rate, we found, also improved. The attrition rate in 2017-2018 school year was 8.39%, whereas it dropped to 3.7% in the 2018-2019 school year.

Project Timeline:

We do this project in 6 week iterations year round. The project can be adjusted and changed based on what works best for any particular staff or school community. It's completely adjustable and able to be customized to anyone's community.

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

Our graduation rates increased, as well as our course completion rates and our attrition rates.

Current Status of Project:

Our project is ongoing and we renew it every 6 weeks with a new round of students whose classes have expired by a certain date.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

My role as a program participant has been more of an advisor on certain issues that arise, specifically interventions and suggestions with certain students to help them completed courses. The role is going to be blended into the teams because it is such an All In systemic approach. If I swim, my team swims and so do our students. We do this together hand in hand, sink or swim. At times, my expertise weighs in with strategies that other team members might be less familiar with, but our goal is as one.

Lessons Learned:

Each iteration is different. Our scrum board is constantly changing and we are constantly updating and improving it. What worked for us last iteration, may need to be slightly modified for the next. We are constantly adding and changing the look of it to make it better.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

This has to be done as a team or in small teams. It is truly a systemic approach to completing classes. It is not necessary that a school or organization have to use Agile to make this work, although it will work much better if you have an All In and Agile approach.