

Positive School Engagement

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Key words:

Engagement, Student Success Plan, Health and Wellness, School Climate

Funding Sources:

General school state funds and wellness set-aside funds from the state

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The project cost is based on the number of students and the cost to pay outside providers to implement the programming. On average \$500–\$1000 was spent each month on activities, speakers, travel and/or incentive items.

Project Description:

The program is centered on providing health, wellness, and engagement activities that are aligned with the goals and mission of Invictus High School to achieve a positive school climate. The goal is to provide students with a safe, positive, and engaging school environment that promotes academic success and emotional well-being so that students feel empowered, supported, and able to achieve.

Providing activities that promote social-emotional wellness has consistently improved attendance, reduced negative school interactions, and increased credit completion as the activities positively engage students in their high school experience and increase their investment in graduation.

The overall strategies that were utilized included

- various assessment tools to rate the school climate and overall feel of the school, including formal and informal assessments,
- informal interest surveys, and
- small group discussion on students' needs, concerns, and interests.

Health and wellness activities were planned based on information gathered to enrich the students' high school experience. The activities addressed various topics, experiences, and activities to meet the wellness needs of our students. Some of the activities included a speaker series on relationships, CPR, art therapy, community volunteering, and many other building activities to celebrate and engage students.

Data Collection

Students who participated were tracked for attendance, participation, and academic credit completion. Students were also able to earn incentives for participating in group activities. In addition, students were able to earn hours toward elective credits for participating in activities and completing written feedback and/or other additional assignments. Additionally, the students were administered school climate surveys at the beginning and at the end of the school year to rate their overall feeling about the school climate.

Staffing Pattern:

The program is primarily staffed by current Invictus High School teachers and staff, family advocates, and community partners who provide programming.

Population Served:

High school students 16 to 21 years old in a credit recovery, dropout prevention high school. Many of the students have had two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Project Origination:

The project was developed out of the need to improve student engagement, to improve attendance, and to provide a culturally responsive environment for students who have a history of being disengaged from school, who have experienced school failure, and/or who have had life challenges which frequently interfered with their ability to attend and complete high school requirements.

To obtain an objective view of the school climate, we administered climate surveys to assess how students felt about school and safety at home, at school, and in the community. In addition, students were allowed to express themselves in small groups where they were able to have dialogue about school safety and attitudes toward school.

Issues Addressed:

Engagement, health and wellness information and education, school climate

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

A positive and engaging school climate can be measured in a comprehensive way utilizing student surveys, through on-site reviews, and by obtaining feedback from families, school leaders, and community partners.

In addition, the following measures were tracked

- incidents of disruptive behavior,
- rate of school attendance, and
- the rate of credit completion.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

The rate of attendance improved by 8–10% over the school year.

The rate of graduation improved by 20% over the one school year.

The number of suspensions remained the same over the school year; however, reports of disruptive behavior were reduced from classroom teachers.

Project Timeline:

This is an ongoing project that occurs throughout the school year and can be repeated each year. Small group activities are scheduled each week and large group activities occur once a month to promote a positive school climate.

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

Outcomes related to school completion, dropout prevention, and/or graduation rates include

- a decrease in disruptive behaviors with classroom teachers reporting fewer incidents of disruptions,
- improved overall school attendance rate as more students attended regularly, and
- increased number of graduates over the past year.

Current Status of Project:

Student engagement activities are an on-going part of our programming with weekly and monthly activities which include some of the following:

- State Trooper Talks
- Girl Talk
- Health Talks
- Rape Crisis - Healthy Relationships
- CPR/First Aid
- Expressive Art
- Speakers on emotional management/anger management/identity
- Community Resource Fair
- Breakfast for testing
- Career Fair
- Post-secondary college and technical school visits
- Community volunteer opportunities

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

Currently I am the Director of Student and Employee Engagement and the Campus Director/Principal. I support the school climate team in ensuring that each campus is scheduling weekly engagement activities that coincide with the school's mission and address the social-emotional well-being of our students. I conduct monthly meetings with the staff climate team in my building and quarterly meetings with the climate teams in the other two Invictus schools. At the meeting we review the data, set goals for the quarter, and develop on-going plans to engage students.

Lessons Learned:

- It is important to obtain input from students. Students are more likely to participate in

activities when they are involved in the planning process. Support from parents and family members can help reinforce the importance of positive student engagement and can reinforce learned skills.

- Planning is important. Take the time to thoughtfully plan out activities.
- Community partnerships are invaluable for providing resources and services for our students.
- It's imperative that all teachers and staff members are active participants in engaging students as students are more invested when everyone in the building is invested.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

Assessing the needs of the student population can be a valuable way to obtain information prior to planning engaging activities. Start small and build up your resources to engage students. Students learn better when they feel safe, supported, and valued, which is why positive school engagement can help build life skills.