

**The B.A.G. (Behavior, Attendance & Grades) Project
at The Renaissance Academy (formerly Anderson County Alternative School)**

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***Key words:* Mentoring, Relationships, Dropout Prevention, Alternative Education, At-risk student population.**

Funding Sources:

The Behavior, Attendance, and Grades Project (hereinafter referred to as The BAG Project) is incorporated into other projects at the Renaissance Academy, whose standard primary focus is the encouragement to achieve educational goals and dropout prevention. The funding for the BAG Project is through the school's Student Activity Fund. While the number of students participating in the project fluctuates based on the recommendations of homeroom teachers, on average funds are allocated for the meals of 20 middle and high school students. In addition, lunch is provided for Anderson University college students along with one staff member attending the monthly Learn at Lunch.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The BAG Project is supported through the Student Activity Fund of the Renaissance Academy. \$200.00 per month is allotted for a catered lunch for the academy's selected students, Anderson University Public Relations club members, along with school & university staff attending the monthly event.

Project Description:

The Renaissance Academy primarily services the county of Anderson, South Carolina which is comprised of five individual school districts with separate governing bodies. Following several meetings with the school's director, student services manager, and social skills facilitator, it was agreed that the school's student body would benefit from an incentive program in which they are given the opportunity to engage actively with organizations from the collegiate community. The BAG Project's initial strategy was to establish on-going communication with the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter at Anderson University. The strategy was for members of the Public Relations Students Society of America to meet monthly with and actively engage in a "Learn at Lunch" formatted program with the Renaissance Academy's students that have had the least behavioral issues, best attendance records, and acceptable academic performances as determined by homeroom teachers. As stated, the lunch is presented in a Learn-at-Lunch format similar to that which many corporations conduct on a regular basis as an incentive for its employees. The school's Learn-at Lunch format consists of Anderson University students presenting information about college life from their prospective. The information presented to academy students is relevant to their personal development while promoting the BAG Project's Mission of creating incentives for higher achievement goals. Many of the students at the Renaissance Academy have been identified as "at-risk" based on attendance, behavior and/or academic performance.

Staffing Pattern:

- Sherwood Williams, BAG Project Coordinator, Renaissance Academy
- Robert Reeves, Chairman/Professor Communications Department, Anderson University

Population Served:

The Renaissance Academy services both middle (grades 6-8) and high (grades 9-12) school students ranging in age from 11-18; however, there are students attending the school who are older than 18 years of the age. At its maximum capacity the school can accommodate 135 middle and high school students. Primarily, the student population consists of students that have been expelled from their respective home/zone school for a myriad of reasons. The majority of

the academy's student body have been expelled from their home schools and have to attend due to issues related to maladaptive behavioral patterns that have occurred consistently and warrant expulsion. BAG Project participants are those students at the Renaissance Academy that have exhibited improvement at the school with regards to their overall behaviors, consistent attendance, and academic performance.

Project Origination:

Given the nature of the Renaissance Academy many of the issues dealt with on a daily basis consist of those related to maladaptive behaviors. In addition, other issues involve absenteeism, a lack of academic performance, and a lack of social skills. The BAG Project emanated from a meeting the school's social skills facilitator had with the school's director. He pointed out that given the close proximity of Anderson University's Main Campus to the Renaissance Academy, some sort of relationship should be established to create incentives for the school's student body. A dialogue was started between the Anderson University Communications Department Chairman and the Renaissance Academy's Social Skills Facilitator. Following several discussions between the Chairman and the Facilitator with approval and advice from the academy's director, the BAG Project was developed.

- The BAG Project was developed by seeing the need to recognize students for their improvements related to behavior, attendance, and grades.
- The BAG Project started as a way to expose the Renaissance Academy students to college students and a collegiate environment in an effort to promote a desire for higher learning and perhaps a desire to attend college.

Issues Addressed:

The BAG Project was developed to address the following issues:

- Dropout Prevention
- Academic Performance
- Absenteeism
- Prosocial Behavior
- College Life Exposure
- Mentorship

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

Concerning outcomes and objectives with regards to the BAG Project at the Renaissance Academy the following have occurred. Those students selected to participate in the BAG Project by their respective homeroom teachers:

- Students will display exemplary behaviors in an effort to attend the next monthly lunch with the college students from Anderson University.

- Provide middle and high school students with an opportunity to interact with college students from Anderson University because many of them have limited (if any) exposure to that population.
- Establish a community partnership with Anderson University given its close proximity to the Renaissance Academy.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

The BAG Project utilized five of the National Dropout Prevention Center's 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on reducing the dropout rate. One of the strategies utilized was to create school-community collaboration. This is evident when groups in a community provide collective support to the school and establishes a strong infrastructure which sustains a caring supportive environment in which youth can thrive and achieve. Relating this strategy to the BAG Project simply translates to the "buy in" on the part of Anderson University in supporting the Renaissance Academy. Since the project's inception the university has spent time with students on a monthly basis to present valuable information and encourage both middle and high school students to remain in school. In addition, the university has taken students on a comprehensive tour of the various academic departments and provided lunch following the tour. With regard to Basic Core Strategies related to the National Dropout Prevention Center there were four additional strategies applicable to the BAG Project. Those four consisted of Mentoring & Tutoring, Service Learning, Alternative Schooling and Professional Development.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

Several results have occurred due to the development of the BAG Project at the Renaissance Academy. Most notably, the following have been recognized since the project's inception:

- Staff and faculty at the Renaissance Academy have attested to the positive impact the BAG Project has had on students chosen to participate.
- Homeroom teachers have stated that behavioral incidents involving BAG Project participants is almost nonexistent when compared to students not involved in the project.
- BAG Project participants stated that, since attending the monthly lunches with Anderson University students, they think more about going to college.
- In the Spring of 2019 BAG Project students were taken on a field trip/tour of the Anderson University. They were exposed to different academic departments, taken to research laboratories, toured dormitory facilities at the school, and were allowed to interact and ask questions of the students on the main campus.

Project Timeline:

The BAG Project was established in the Fall of 2018 and continues at the Renaissance Academy. The Public Relations Student Society of America's (PRSSA) Anderson University Chapter now comes to the school monthly as a service project to meet with the BAG Project students. Lunch is provided while members of the club present information, interact with, and answer questions

asked by the academy students. The BAG Project has an indefinite timeline because of the need to recognize and incentivize prosocial positive behavior concerning at-risk youth at the school.

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

Concerning outcomes related to school completion, the BAG Project has no quantitative data at this time. Given the nature of the Renaissance Academy, its students often return to their home/zone schools following a consistent pattern of positive behavior, attendance, and academic achievement which takes place throughout the academic year. The BAG Project was initially designed in the Fall of 2018. Moving forward, a measuring tool will be put in place to track students involved in the project on a consistent basis after they leave the academy and return to their respective schools.

Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:

The special conditions required for students to participate in the BAG Project are that they be chosen by homeroom teachers based on their behavior, attendance, and grades. Expertise and skills in at-risk youth group facilitation is required. While many of the students that participate in the BAG Project are commended for their behavior, attendance records, and academic performance, facilitation is always required to promote interaction with the university students. The majority of the university's students were not considered at-risk youth while in grade level school and at times have difficulties interacting with the academy students; however, through effective facilitation on the part of staff during lunch, this is not a problem.

Current Status of Project:

Currently, the BAG Project is still in existence and thriving. The Chairman of the Communications Department at Anderson University has said the members of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) continue to display excitement with regards to the service project they had adopted (The BAG Project) and look forward to the monthly contact with the students selected to participate.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

As the developer of the BAG Project, I work directly with the Chairman of the Communications Department. I have attended PRSSA meetings at the university and talked to the members/students about the school, its history, its student body, and the importance of the BAG Project. In addition, my role involves coordinating room reservations and preparation as well as working with the academy's director and executive secretary for staff coverage during the actual monthly meetings between university and academy students.

Lessons Learned:

The development of the BAG Project came from a simple thought, to provide an incentive for the school's students to strive for higher achievement goals. The primary goal of the BAG Project is centered on mentoring and relationship building. The overriding lesson learned from the development of the project is that undertakings such as this do not require a great deal of funding. As stated the monthly budget consists of a \$200.00 monthly allotment. In addition, it became apparent to me that there is a multitude of potential community partners interested and passionate about outreach and helping at-risk youth in their respective communities.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

With regard to advising other individuals in professions that encompass dropout prevention, I would encourage openness and patience. I would advise other practitioners to understand the importance of establishing relationships with community agencies and businesses for possible partnerships. Many of these potential partners are not aware of the need or how they can help in reducing the dropout rate.