

**Implementing Personal Competencies for Life-long Success
a.k.a. G.U.I.D.E. for Life**

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Key words: Personal Competencies, Research-based, Implementation, Social Emotional Learning, Life Skills, Personal Skills, Job Skills, Soft Skills

Funding Sources:

Arkansas Department of Education

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

State education funds were used to help teachers become more effective in reaching all students to become college, career and community engaged citizens. Initially the first three years the group developed materials, met with multiple cohorts of community members and state stakeholders. The true cost was spent after the full development of the information through an advertising agency to fully market the personal competencies. The complete development of personal competencies ended in a statewide implementation of resources, continuous development of additional lessons to help fulfil the Secretary of Education's goal three for the state of Arkansas.

Advertising agency costs were related to:

1. Transformation and generation of name: G.U. I. D. E for Life
2. Professional commercial type introduction video for G.U.I.D.E for Life
3. Creation of large and small posters representing each of the principles; Growth, Understanding, Interaction, Decision Making, and Empathy
4. T-Shirts
5. A rock wall was rented during the "kick-off" introduction at the state Summit from the Governor and Commissioner of Education along with a t-shirt cannon to randomly distribute logo t-shirts.
6. Various tangible items with the G.U. I. D. E for Life logo to help encourage reminders of the new available information and resources.
7. Classroom posters, booklets, flyers and water bottles were distributed during the AAAE (Arkansas Association of Alternative Educators) and ASCA (Arkansas School Counselors Association) summer conference.

An additional amount of state funding was devoted to the state PBS team that helped create short videos for use in districts.

Project Description:

To research and create a document to provide linear guidance to teachers and administrators on increasing personal competency skills in students grades K-12.

Staffing Pattern:

The Personal Competencies committee began with very few people. The director of counseling was involved in writing a minor (\$15,000) grant that was approved and received for this work. The committee grew annually to include primarily a strong nucleus of eight consistent participants from counseling, alternative education, licensure, and technology state leaders. The second and third year included a statewide survey, multiple meetings during conferences and other gatherings. The attendance at monthly meetings included fifteen to twenty-five people.

Population Served:

All K-12 students in Arkansas (479,432)
English Learners-8%
Low Income 65%
Student Eligible for Special Education 13%
Caucasian 60.4%
African American 19.8%
Hispanic/Latino 13.5%
Asian 1.7%
American Indian 0.6%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 0.9%
Two or More Races 3.1%

Project Origination:

The Arkansas Department of Education began to shift gears to better meet the fast-changing pace of education not only in Arkansas, but also across the nation. Part of this process was developing a new mission and monthly Strategic Planning Meetings (SPM) on the first Friday of every month. In order to hear from all different types of stakeholders, the Commissioner of Education in Arkansas conducted several public meetings across the state. One concern that the Commissioner heard repeatedly was that today's graduates were lacking in soft skills, life skills, communication skills, social awareness and making good decisions. At the beginning of the SPM process, Goal 3 was developed to address the issues. Goal 3 states, "Each Student Will Develop and Apply Personal Competencies that Will Promote Learning and Success in Life". Because we in the Alternative Education Unit could see the value of this goal not only creating life-long learners, but also giving our at-risk students the tools they need to be successful in school, we took on this challenge. A team was created involving not only all of the AE Unit, but experts from other units within ADE which include Coordinated School Health, School Counselors, Charter Schools, Public School Accountability and others. We also included input from other stakeholders such as career and technical educational institutions, businesses leaders and other community leaders.

After an exhaustive review of research, attending multiple CASEL trainings and listening to the stakeholders, the five guiding principles of personal competencies were created. We were tasked as being the lead in the marketing of and roll out of personal competencies in the state of Arkansas.

Issues Addressed:

Lack of personal competency skills in Arkansas graduates such as soft skills, life skills, communication skills, social awareness and good decision making.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The desired outcomes are for districts to ensure their faculty and staff are trained in personal competencies, include these competencies in each student's individual Student Success Plans, model and teach these competencies and use the developed toolkit for resources as needed. Ultimately, students will demonstrate these skills at each/every grade level.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

The AE Unit will develop training on personal competencies which will explain how effective teachers are using them already, make sure students are getting the instruction that they need, teach these skills to educators that don't exhibit them and develop a toolkit with resources for every grade level. These trainings will be conducted at the local education service centers, state conferences, regional meetings, and the local level when needed.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

It is believed that when these personal competencies are taught, modeled and addressed Kindergarten through graduation, our at-risk students will develop the personal competency skills needed to help them be successful in school by teaching them resiliency, grit, determination, and giving them a voice to self-advocate.

The five guiding principles of personal competencies include personal awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, relationship awareness and self-management. The competencies evolved into the G.U.I.D.E. for Life. The G.U.I.D.E. for Life is a collection of personal competencies that fall under one of the five categories following categories: Growth, Understanding, Interaction, Decision, and Empathy. Each category has the competencies expected for a student broken down into the grade-bands of K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Project Timeline:

The Personal Competencies project committee began in November 2016 and at this time are still continuing to develop daily lessons, resources and materials. The primary initial development of Personal Competencies lasted two years. The refining, renaming, marketing and roll-out began in 2018.

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

When students are introduced to the personal competency skills early, and are given the opportunity to build on these skills each year, they are more likely to see the relevance of completing their education, have the skills necessary to communicate their needs, see where they fit in in their community, and most importantly realize they have a voice in their education and learn how to use it. This will lead to more students staying in school and earning a diploma which will allow them to either successfully further their education or enter the workforce. It will allow them to be positive contributors to their community and have a feeling of self-worth.

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

Each of us have a special education background as well as a background in alternative education at the school and state department level. Our backgrounds, ongoing professional development and personal studies speaks to our knowledge base of social skills, student self-advocacy, and personal relationships with students and educators, community involvement, etc. We each have different areas in which we specialize. For example, Dr. Gardenhire excels at research and program development. Lori Lamb's expertise is in creativity, leadership, broad curriculum awareness and inspiration to motivate enthusiasm with the project. Deborah Bales' shines in the areas of community involvement and student perspective.

Current Status of Project:

The Arkansas Department of Education has hired an individual to continue implementation and

committee work on G.U.I.D.E for Life lessons for each competency.
<http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/divisions/learning-services/guide-for-life>

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

It was my role as researcher and developer that was highly instrumental in helping the committee progress. My prior experiences in therapeutic treatment environments, a large state school district, and community involvement allowed input during discussion to be valued, relevant and meaningful. Technology expertise encouraged growth and development allowing for the sharing of information and documents through use of various platforms during meetings and presentations.

Lessons Learned:

- Buy in from Stakeholders (business leaders, community members, educators, parents and students) who are ready for students to learn the necessary skills to be successful in life is necessary.
- In the beginning language used can make or break an initiative. In this case the term, “Social and Emotional Learning” could not be used if we wanted all stake holders to embrace it. By calling it, “Personal Competencies” and later “Guide for Life”, everyone has accepted it.
- Though accepted as something that should be taught, the difference of what personal competencies should and should not include among educators can vary.
- The project was not a “quick one”, it took much research, development and planning.
- The participation of committee members required multiple years of commitment.
- Now that it has been fully developed and is being implemented, the reaction of business leaders, administrators, parents, teachers, counselors and community members have been encouraging with the development of materials to help support growth in the areas of Personal Competencies.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

- Start small and remember it is a marathon and not a sprint.
- Keep core group of developers as small as possible but be willing to ask for help from others to support the work.
- If personal competencies are not already being taught from the youngest grades through high school, there are many opportunities being missed to capture at-risk youth before they drop-out.
- Collaboration and community involvement are extremely important.

