

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

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Funding Sources:

Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Learning Services, Professional Development, and a focused grant from Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

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. Two meetings a year were attended to collaborate with national experts and support systems through the planning of CASEL. CASEL provided one \$15,000 grant the first year and covered the expenses to attend national meetings. The funding was used to help provide training materials and resources during the development. It was also used during the roll-out helping to provide the tangible consumable materials with the logo. The third year, CASEL provided an additional grant to help with the development. 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:

- Transformation and generation of name: G.U. I. D. E for Life
- Professional commercial type introduction video for G.U.I.D.E for Life
- Creation of large and small posters representing each of the principles; Growth, Understanding, Interaction, Decision Making, and Empathy
- T-Shirts
- 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.
- Various tangible items with the G.U. I. D. E for Life logo to help encourage reminders of the new available information and resources were distributed.
- Classroom posters, booklets, flyers and water bottles were distributed during the ADE Summer Summit, AAAE (Arkansas Association of Alternative Educators) and ASCA (Arkansas School Counselors Association) summer conferences.

An additional amount of state funding was devoted to the state Public Broadcast Systems team to help create short videos for use in districts. This was in addition to the advertising videos created by the agency.

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 Plan,

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:

I shared the role of committee chairperson with Suzanne Knowles. I had many responsibilities that included: creating the meeting agenda, notifying committee members through email, creating meeting summaries, documenting progress in the state management system and helping develop initial presentations. I fielded questions and helped refine the work as it was created.

Lessons Learned:

I learned many lessons. The entire project began due to a need pointed out continuously from the business community concerning the graduates from Arkansas and successful gainful employment. The need for broad social skills, or social, emotional learning opportunities existed throughout every grade level. One focused goal of the Arkansas Department of Education is to make sure students who graduate are prepared for “college, career and community engagement.” The project was enormous. At the beginning there was much discussion concerning definitions and specific terminology. I became a cheerleader helping to maintain enthusiasm in the midst of “state government” transitions and direction. The project went through four different approaches before finally landing on the G.U.I.D.E for Life. There was a lot of focused effort to develop the primary components. Due to recidivism, new people would join and others would leave the work. I conducted many reviews concerning our progress at monthly meetings. It is difficult to maintain momentum for a multi-year project. The outline and plans were well developed by the primary team and each of us stayed through the roll-out. The ultimate goal of development was very successful. After the final work was created and ready to be distributed, people were coming from many different areas wanting to be involved with the “creation” and credit of the work. The team created an initial four-year plan and stuck to the areas closely. All individuals had monthly responsibilities to complete and then present their progress to the group. I scheduled meetings a year in advance. Time, date and location were consistently adhered to. Growth and development reviews were created quarterly to keep the casually involved people informed. The work is valuable, needed and has the potential of positively influencing career goals, business outcomes and state achievement for decades.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

Planning by design takes a lot of work. It is important to have short term and long-term goals that are measurable to help projects move along. The content of this project being “Personal Competencies” which are the ingredients of social emotional learning are the keys to dropout prevention. Everything begins with true relationships, trust, respect, opportunity and hope. These are the ingredients or recipe that have been the cornerstone of Alternative Education and National Dropout Prevention Center. Ideas remain as a discussion item until they are developed into tangible, measurable outcomes. This is a needed component of all intervention programs. It is also the “secret sauce” establishing a positive climate and culture in all schools. Social, emotional learning in Arkansas is now referenced using our G.U.I.D.E. for Life. Growth, Understanding, Interactions, Decision Making and Empathy engulf all relationships. Each “Personal Competency” described in the GUIDE for Life requires specific skills to develop, define and

demonstrate. I believe these personal competencies are ingredients in helping our lifelong learners to become positive contributing members of our communities. I see the benefits daily as I use these tools as a focal point in my classroom, self-confidence, attendance, grades, and plans for future direction have all improved. The office referrals, angst and agitation of “tween” and teenage emotional insecurities are much less now that new skills are being specifically taught. I believe this quote sums up my work on personal competencies: “They won’t care what you know until they know you care!” I highly recommend classrooms, programs, schools, districts and all groups that work with people to have a type of personal competencies structured social skills planned continuously. There are many developed to explore, ours in Arkansas is free and available on the state website. It is found by searching for G.U.I.D.E. for Life. I encourage you to reflect on the rich materials available and open the door of opportunity for those individuals looking for help and suppo

