

## **NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report**

### **Program Title:**

Diploma Planning Institute-A Plan for Ninth Graders At-Risk

### **Contact Information:**

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### *Key words to best describe program:*

Retention prevention, dropout prevention, mentoring, family engagement, academic success, and student engagement

## **Funding Sources**

No additional funding was required for positions within the school. Current positions within school were utilized, which included: the Graduation Coach, 2 content area teachers from math and ELA, and 1 additional teacher who was certified in Special Education. Three of the four teachers involved in this program were Special Education certified and one was ESL certified. Involved teachers and the principal provided additional funds for food, ticket prices, and special events as needed.

## **Project Cost and Budget Narrative**

- Kick-Off Dinner-\$450 for 75 people
- Tutoring: Instructional Extension funds \$900
- Donations: food, tickets, gifts, etc.

The biggest expense was the Kick-Off dinner for the students and their families. Many donations were received from the school, principal, and involved teachers.

## **Project Description**

The middle school provided us with a list of students who they felt needed this type of support upon entering high school. It was decided that the list provided was too numerous for the needs of the students to be met. A new list was created using the original list, test data from previous years and newly released scores, high absenteeism, family history of dropouts, and poor academic performance. Once the students were selected, the students and their families were invited to a “Kick-Off” dinner. It was held in the school’s athletic field house. 75 people attended including the administration team, DPI teachers, and their families. Games were played by everyone to set the tone for the year which allowed for everyone to talk and move around the room. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire describing their child’s strengths and weaknesses, their dreams and fears for their children, and the best way for DPI staff to contact them. An example of the best way to contact a parent was a visually impaired parent who needed notes to be typed and printed for her scanner to read the notes to her. This information was helpful for the teachers to know.

The coordinator worked with the assistant principal to adjust each students’ schedules to reflect the best choice of teachers for their needs, learning styles, etc. The DPI academic courses were set into the master schedule. Students took English Language Arts, Social Studies, 2 math courses, and at least 1 science course, which could have included a CTAE science course. This would allow for each student to potentially earn 5 academic credits. With the intensive support and monitoring, it was believed that students could achieve these goals.

Initial contact was made with each parent within the first week of school. A positive contact was preferred to help establish better relationships with parents.

Grades were assessed every 2 weeks. Students were required to work during the school day or during an optional Saturday school to complete all missing assignments. Students could work before school, the assigned lunch period, or a Physical Education course. Students were provided with supplies for classes, projects, etc. in order to increase completion of the assignments.

Guest speakers from the community were brought in to talk about careers, soft skills, education, and advice on life. Students determined the careers of interest and guest speakers were selected based on the designated careers. Relevance of their diploma and career guidance were shared through the monthly speakers.

Due to the nature of the flexibility involved with the cohort group, it was decided that blocked math courses would be beneficial to the students. If students could earn at least 2 math courses, more doors of opportunity would be opened for the students. Currently, in the state of Georgia, students can take Foundations of Algebra as a core math credit. Students are required to have 4 math credits in order to graduate. However, this math course is not recognized by the Board of Regents. Earning 2 credits in one school year and taking Foundations of Algebra, does not exclude any student from a 4-year university. Students will have the ability to take a higher-level course by the graduation date.

Because of the blocked schedule, teachers were able to see each student every day. If behavioral concerns were raised, emails or phone calls were sent to open lines of communication between teachers, administration, counselor, and students. Preventive action took place to avoid any issues throughout the day.

Attendance was checked every day and if students were not in attendance, a phone call was placed within the first 15-30 minutes of first period. Parents could bring students to school, or a ride could be arranged for students.

Students were encouraged to attend after-school events. The school, principal, or teachers provided tickets or a discounted ticket for the students in need.

### **Staffing Pattern**

- **Coordinator:** This person was heavily involved in the planning process, teacher selection, cohort course offerings, master schedule planning, student selection, implementation of the plan and goals, documentation of the result, and organization of all events: field trips, college visits, guest speakers, home visits, parent contacts.
- **Math teacher:** Provide instruction and support of the students involved in the program, assisted coordinator as needed
- **English teacher:** Provide instruction and support of the students involved in the program, assisted coordinator as needed
- **Additional teacher:** Provide instruction and support of the students involved in the program, assisted coordinator as needed
- **Administration:** Supported both the staff and the students as individual needs were addressed
- **Counselor:** Emotional interventions, career planning and testing

### **Population Served**

- Number of students, subjects, or participants:
  - 22 ninth grade students

- Description of project participants: (ages, grades, demographics, etc.)
  - 10 boys/12 girls
  - 6 Hispanic/16 non-Hispanic
  - 13 ED
  - Age ranges 14-15
- Participant selection criteria:
 

Students were selected using a team approach. We partnered with the middle school staff and utilized test scores, family background information, poor academic performance, and poor school attendance to choose the participants in the program. Students were selected based upon 2 years or more of failing standardized test scores, high absenteeism, poor academic performance, history of family dropouts, and teacher opinions based on relationships developed over 3 years of enrollment at the middle school.

### **Project Origination**

The school system arranged for the National Dropout Prevention Center to present the Diploma Planning Institute material at a conference in February 2016. The school team members attended and developed a plan to help ninth graders be more successful in their transition into high school. We developed 3 goals to focus on for the 2016-2017 school year. Teachers were selected based upon their work ethic and desire to help and work with students who need additional support. Each teacher knew the additional efforts and time that would be invested into this group of students. No additional planning periods or funds were extended to the teachers who participated in this program.

### **Issues Addressed**

- Attendance
- Academic Performance
- Engagement

### **Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives**

- Attendance-Each student will miss no more than 15 days of school.
- Academic Performance-Each student will pass 5 out of 7 courses.
- Engagement-Each student will attend at least 4 extra-curricular activities.

### **Results (Outcomes and Achievements)**

- Three students were withdrawn from the program due to circumstances beyond his/her control. One student was tribunaled out of school due to a behavioral incident, one student moved to another school, and another was removed per DFACS and taken to another school.
- 14 students passed 7 out of 7, four students passed 6 out of 7, and one student passed 5 out of 7 courses. The student who passed 5 out of 7 courses experienced a personal tragedy during the school year. We provided additional interventions to assist her.
- Three students had  $\geq 25$  days absent, eight students had between  $16 \leq$  and  $\geq 23$  days absent, and eight students had fewer than  $15 \leq$  absences from school.
- 16 students attended at least 4 after-school activities. Three students attended at least 2 extra-curricular activities.

- Strong relationships were built with the parents and the students.
- Engagement goal results- 84.2%
- Attendance goal results- 42.1%
- Academic goal results- 100%

### **Strategies and/or Interventions**

**Family Engagement-** “Kick-Off” picnic right before school starts. The student and their family members are invited to attend. The teachers, administrators, and their families attended also. We wanted to allow the parents to see us as parents and friends, not just teachers. We planned “get to know you games” to break the ice and to get people talking. We provided transportation to the event if someone needed it. We made over 120 parent contacts within the first semester of the school year. “Good” contacts were made first in order to establish the relationship with parents.

**Attendance Interventions-**Home visits made by the school staff, phone calls home, and using the established relationships built over the course of the school year to assist students and parents with attendance concerns.

### **Academic Interventions-**

- Saturday Workdays
- Current Saturday School program was utilized to assist students with tutoring and extra class time to work on projects and assignments. Technology was available to those who might not have it at their home.
- After school Workdays-Students were provided tutoring, extra class time to work on projects and assignments, reward time for those who were passing all his/her courses, a meal was provided, and an opportunity to participate in an extra-curricular event.

**Academic Success-**Staff provided tutoring to any student in need of assistance. Students’ grades were monitoring weekly to maintain passing course grades and to ensure academic success.

### **Project Timeline**

We conducted this program for one school year beginning in August 2016 and ending in May 2017.

### **Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project**

Special skills that are needed to carry out this project are an extensive knowledge of dropout prevention strategies, low student to teacher ratio, cohort status of the students involved, a desire to do more than what is required in a traditional school day, a supportive administration team who works as part of the team on both positive and negative issues, and a flexible schedule to allow participating teachers time to make home visits, phone calls, and meet with other staff members. Additional benefits, although not required for success, are special education backgrounds for the teachers involved.

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

These students have a better chance of graduating because the majority of the participants (73.6%) passed 7 out of 7 classes their first year of high school. Participants formed strong relationships

with adults in the building and established a connection to the high school by engaging in activities within the school.

Guest speakers provided relevance to a earning a high school diploma, the importance of soft skills, life guidance, and a focus on the future after high school.

### **Current Status Project**

The status of the program for the 2017-2018 school year is unknown as my employment has changed to another high school in the system.

### **Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant**

Coordinator of the DPI project

### **Lessons Learned**

Students responded with positive comments regarding keeping the program going for future generations, the caring they received, and how the outcome of their first year of high school would have been very different if the program did not exist. Word spread around the community and parents were requesting that their children be involved. The “Kick-Off” dinner was the most impactful event to allow the parents and students to meet and get to know the staff at a casual, non-academic event. The relationships built that evening were maintained throughout the year.

We were not able to fulfill our original guideline of keeping the classes exclusively “cohort” students due to students transferring into the school and the master schedule. The class size grew quite considerably to 28-30 students and was became a co-teaching course also. Both of these issues had a great impact on the behavior of the cohort students and the ability of the teachers to meet the individual needs of our cohort group. Keeping the numbers low and maintaining a cohort set up might benefit the students even more.

### **Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project**

Maintain low numbers within the program in order to allow for the individualized attention required for each student. With full teaching schedules throughout the day, group members put in a lot of extra hours outside the school day in order for this program to be successful. Keeping that in mind with additional duties and responsibilities for these group members should be considered when planning.