

Re-engaging in an Alternative Setting

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Key words: alternative education, disadvantaged students, reengage, virtual learning, individualized learning, credit recovery, at risk students

Funding Sources:

The project utilized district funding through Fayette County Public Schools

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The school where the project was based, received \$6,000 for approximately 60 students. The funds were spent for

- supplies needed for students.
- Transportation.
- Hot Spots.

Project Description:

Fayette County Public School tracks the progress of students through Infinite Campus (IC). Infinite Campus identifies students' attendance, behavior, academic success, and failure(s). The Infinite Campus (IC) Early Warning Tool provides a measure of a student's persistence toward graduation (successful completion of high school), and the likelihood of being promoted to the next grade level (<https://kb.infinitecampus.com/help/early-warning>). It assigns an allGRAD score of 50 to 150, with 50 being the highest risk and 150, the lowest. An August 2020 report indicated that 95% of the current students enrolled in the program had an allGRAD score below 59 with 5% scoring between 60% and 76%. These students are considered to have the highest risk of not being promoted to the next grade level.

This re-engagement project was used to increase the graduation rate of disconnected students by expanding and enhancing re-engagement services. The re-engagement project will expand educational experiences, work experiences, and comprehensive services that will be sustainable once established. All students will continue to receive a holistic educational experience that is specifically designed to fit their lives. College/career readiness will increase and benefit the community through the service-learning components of project-based learning.

Staffing Pattern:

- 1 Program Director
- 1 Assistant Director
- 1 Counselor
- 5 Teachers
- 1 Curriculum Coach
- 1 Nurse
- 1 Administrative Assistant

Population Served:

Middle and high school students who apply to the program that are over-age and under-credited (OA/UC) students (defined as those 16 and older who have earned five or fewer high school credits) The project also serves other students who have been identified as at risk for dropping out of school and not on track to graduate who apply and are accepted.

Project Origination:

After evaluating the data for student drop-out-rate, Fayette County District decided in 2018, to open an alternative learning environment to help students at risk for dropping out. The Success

Academy is an alternative school for students that show a danger of not graduating or if they have identified areas of need that makes graduating from a traditional school impossible,

Success Academy is a stand-alone, district-wide alternative education program. Staff are interviewed and hired specifically for the program, from the program director/principal to the faculty to the custodians. Because it is a project-based learning school, all staff members are involved and are charged with the responsibility of assisting with programming that will re-engage and accelerate the over-age and under credited student to persist to graduation and to be college/career/community ready.

Students who attend the Success Academy receive both online and in person learning opportunities. Students also receive scheduling that includes class-meetings, office hours and tutoring. Online learning utilizes the Odysseyware Curriculum, that is self-paced for each student.

Issues Addressed:

As stated, the increasing number of students that are identified as being at risk for dropping out of school or that are overaged is increasing yearly, due to various reasons such as:

- retention/failure/drop out
- lack of motivation/mental health
- excessive absence/truancy/tardy
- extreme behavior/ juvenile detention
- lack of parent involvement

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

- increase enrollment by expanding the size of the program.
- increase the career readiness of participating students.
- increase the college readiness of participating students.
- increase the community readiness of participating students.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

Strategies include:

- Magnify Learning Project-Based Learning model, the Danielson Framework, and all Promising Program elements.
- I-5 Alternative Curriculum Framework that uses individualized, intervening, intensive, immediate, and intentional strategies to deliver instruction and services.

Interventions include:

- flexible scheduling, individualized coursework. experienced educators, and contextual learning.
- work experiences feature work-based learning opportunities for students, professional development opportunities for faculty/staff, and access to training courses.

- comprehensive services include mental and physical health services, basic needs services, and case management.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

The Success Academy is a performance-based school and does not track attendance. The intense interventions, case management through success coaching, and all services provided by the transition team eliminate truancy issues and attendance concerns most of the time. However, student performance still hinders immediate success for all students.

It is the belief that all students' degree of risk decreases based on their commitment and consistent attendance as resources are available or sought out to meet need.

After analysis of the data collected, out of the 30 students striving to graduate, 20 students were successful. The students who were not successful were further behind due to life circumstances such as child-care, legal issues and lack of attendance after receiving special permission to work solely online.

Project Timeline:

The project is ongoing.

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

The design of the Success Academy is to provide students with resources and strategies to help them graduate and be college and career ready. The added resources and specialized staff have allowed students to find success and graduate.

Graduation rates have increased, the number of students enrolled has increased, and students' scores show that they are better prepared for college and career readiness.

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

Fayette County School District has 5,267 students with allGRAD scores below 76. Of these students, only 582 are being served in the district's multiple alternative education programs. IC data indicate the district has 239 over-age and under-credited (OA/UC) students (defined as those 16 and older who have earned five or fewer high school credits), with only 40 of these students enrolled in alternative education programs. This leaves 199 OA/US students who need the re-engagement services available through our program in order to graduate high school college/career ready. The need to expand is clear.

Mobility is an issue for students in our program. Seven percent of students enrolled in our program have attended five or more schools in the last two years. Two percent have attended 10 or more schools in the last five years.

Students who fail to complete high school have a negative impact on the economy; each one costs their community more than \$300,000 on average. These disengaged youths place a burden on society and the individual taxpayer, from higher rates of incarceration to increased health costs (from *Helping Over- Aged, Under Credited Youth Succeed: Making the Case for Innovative Education Strategies, Our Piece of the Pie*, 2012, <https://opp.org/>). Our program is

dedicated to providing “Webs of Support” as illustrated in *Creating Sustainable Career Pathways for Disconnected Youth* at 5 (<https://www.americaspromise.org/report/creating-sustainable-career-pathways-disconnected-youth>)

Current Status of Project: ongoing

The project is ongoing.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

Drop-out Prevention Liaison for Fayette County School District

Lessons Learned:

- I've learned that many, inclusive of academic colleagues, view Success Academy/ other similar credit recovery program/ initiatives as simply a last-ditch effort to graduate students and it is vital to communicate to all stakeholders with clarity, the nature of the program.
- I've learned that many students will continue to drop out even with credit recovery programs as life has already taken its toll and matters outside of education are just as prevalent; students must be provided wraparound services in addition to academics.
- I've learned that even with the best intentions and effort, it will always be impossible to save all students, but we must remain vigilant.
- I've learned that we as educators must focus on and be intentional in understanding the difference between equal and equitable as no two students, situations, or experiences are ever the same.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

- Initiatives must be approached with open-minded thinking, views, and ideas from outside of the normal box.
- We must be true advocates and unwavering in commitment to assist students in finding individual successes along the way, to obtaining the goal of not only graduation, but life preparedness.
- We must recognize that students don't solely create their circumstances but are generally a product of their environments. I am reminded from counseling studies, the fact that generally the same time frame that it took to develop negativity, it will take just as long to unlearn and reteach. Much of the results of your efforts will not be seen by you but may be experienced and acknowledged by the students later in life.