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Intervention Programs Targeting High-School Retention Rates

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Abstract

Intervention programs greatly impact the retention rate of high school students. Characteristics of students who drop out of high school can be assessed and provide necessary information to assist in implementing intervention programs that target those same characteristics, improving retention rates of at-risk students. "A large body of research indicates that students from particular backgrounds or who possess particular characteristics are more likely to drop out than others." (Stanley & Plucker, 2008, 1) Students must feel like they belong, having solid relationships within their community, school, teachers, and peers. Students must feel that their education is relevant in one or more areas of their life, that their learning is connected to "something larger than the present time and place, and must be challenged intellectually." (Stanley & Plucker, 2008, 12) Students who indicate that they lack one or more of these 3 R's, relevance, relationships, and rigor, say that this plays a significant role in their decision to drop out or stay in high school.

Introduction to your Capstone Project

Alternative high school student quarterly retention numbers in the Jerome School District of South Central Idaho are significantly lower than the traditional Jerome high school. In contrast, the standard high school student retention rate continues to see an increase. As the high school mentor/advisor I implemented appropriate intervention programs that targeted the 3 R's, Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor, impacting Falls City Academy's retention rates and the social-emotional intelligence of students during the school year 2020-2021.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

Appropriate intervention programs will strengthen, improve, and enrich the students' self-awareness and social-emotional awareness while enhancing the 3 R's, relationships, rigor, and relevance. Thus, increasing quarterly retention rates within the alternative high school setting. A solution to the problem was successfully implementing a mentoring program at Falls City Academy in conjunction with Project-Based Learning and Core project curriculum. At-risk high school students have a greater chance of leaving high school before graduation. Implementing a Project-Based Learning intervention program will target rigorous content relevant to students' education and current life goals. Increasing the retention rate in an alternative high school setting. According to Casy Creghan and Kathleen Adair-Creghan in The Positive Impact of Project-Based Learning on Attendance of an Economically Disadvantaged Student Population: A Multiyear Study, " Findings suggest when considering attendance rates, there is substantial evidence to support the use of PBL as making a positive impact on the school attendance of economically disadvantaged students." (Creghan & Adair-Creghan, 2015, 17)

LiFT Learning is a Project-based learning platform stating, "We're accomplishing this Learner-Centered System by providing schools with a day-to-day learning platform built around voice and choice, real-world experience, and authentic assessment of essential skills." (*PBL*, 2020) The LiFT platform has seen success in the rigor of Project-Based Learning and academics.

Students find information relevant to them while increasing success in content areas.

Using formative assessments for immediate feedback of the three R's provided the necessary information in solving such a significant problem. Stakeholders to benefit from such intervention programs are the faculty members, the students, and the overall culture of Falls City Academy. According to the Aspen Institute, "...emotionally safe and cognitively stimulating environments contribute to brain development; how brain development that supports learning depends on social experiences; and how sensitive periods in brain development align with learning opportunities and needed supports." (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018) Supports such as intervention programs that improve social-emotional learning and application into everyday life can improve the dropout rate of at-risk high school students. The Core Project is an evidence-informed Social-Emotional Learning program (The Core Project, 2021). As the students begin to apply the learned skills provided from the mentoring program, students will start to communicate more efficiently, understand their emotions, and how their social skills and emotional intelligence affects all those around them.

The most significant impact will be visible in the innovative/creative thinking process, leadership abilities, diverse ethical stances, and the student's efficiency in solving moral and social problems. Students' abilities to self-regulate and understand themselves will benefit the staff by reducing behaviors and increasing communication about their learning styles, abilities, and needs for assistance. All skills developed and executed while enhancing present and future education goals within academic institutions.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

Social and emotional intelligence was apparent in recognizing how staff and students viewed the problem and possible solutions, assisting me in finding the best solution for the stakeholders. This knowledge also provided awareness in understanding the problem and solution through others' perspectives. Having empathy during the process was vital in finding a

solution. My approach and recommendations in finding a solution were the effects of first

recognizing and considering the emotional intelligence of the stakeholders. Having students self-

analyze their strengths and weaknesses and what they lacked to stay in high school was a critical

factor in finding a solution. Without acknowledging the needs of others and their perspectives, I

would not have been able to find a solution that was right for the stakeholders.

Such a solution impacts the most critical resource of our future; our youth. The research

obtained from this project will assist educators in understanding the importance of appropriate

intervention programs and how they impact school retention. Intervention programs that provide

students with new skills such as increased awareness of self and others, the ability to have

empathy, looking at the world through others' perspectives, and improved academic

performance.

Section 3: Creative Thinking

Finding a solution to the problem began with identifying the stakeholders that required an

answer. Having empathy, understanding why and how a solution would impact the stakeholders

allowed for a better understanding of the problem, bringing forth a solution. The answer was a

combination of ideas and perspectives, all affected by the problem and the solution. There wasn't

a single solution but multiple solutions that broke down into the best possible solution. Once the

best possible solution became a concept, brainstorming could test the outcome and measure the

solution's success. There must be an understanding that there is no one solution to the problem.

It may take multiple attempts and multiple perspectives to find the best possible solution for the

stakeholders.

My approach to finding a solution is unique because the solution came from collaborating

with all stakeholders and expressing empathy for the problem while finding a solution. The use

of formative assessments for immediate feedback provided necessary information from those most impacted and allowed for adjustment of the perimeters used to gauge success as the project progressed.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

Characteristics of students who drop out of high school can be assessed and provide necessary information to assist in implementing intervention programs that target those same characteristics, improving retention rates of at-risk students. Students must feel like they belong, having solid relationships within their community, school, teachers, and peers. Students must feel that their education is relevant in one or more areas of their life, that their learning is connected to the present time and place while being challenged intellectually.

Students who indicate that they lack one or more of these 3 R's, relevance, relationships, and rigor, say that this plays a significant role in their decision to drop out or stay in high school. Supports such as intervention programs that improve social-emotional learning and application into everyday life can improve the dropout rate of at-risk high school students. The Core Project is an evidence-informed Social-Emotional Learning program that Falls City Academy is willing to implement in a holistic educational environment where students can learn and achieve goals, in and out of school.

Using pre and post formative assessments with stakeholders, I measured skills related to the 3 R's at the beginning of the project, throughout, and the results. Assessments provided weekly feedback that allowed for reflection on outcomes and changes in the process. The use of formative assessments such as the administrator's entrance and exit interviews measured the project's success. This insight was from the administrative point of view, which determined the project's longevity. Collection of data of student enrollment beginning second quarter and

retention of students throughout the quarter included a pre and post-survey showing what the student's plans were on retention and graduation. These formative assessments provided a snapshot of the project's outcome and tools necessary for growth in the intervention programs and continued student success.

The outcome of my capstone project measured the retention rate of students, positive relationships, and relevance in education from the second to the third quarter. Understanding what students were lacking and what was needed to fill the gaps within the 3 R's provided a map of what was necessary for students to build relationships, have rigorous content relevant to their present life, and increase emotional intelligence.

If I were to approach this problem differently, I would have adjusted how I measured the outcome. I found that students' confidence changes changed daily, and each student progressed at different rates. Although, due to the innovative strategy of seeking the input of all stakeholders in brainstorming a solution to the problem, I was able to target problem areas which allowed for adjustment in the implementation of the intervention programs.

Section 5: Results

Although relatively new, Falls City Academy Alternative school had shown steady student retention, no significant increase or decrease. In contrast, the traditional high school student retention rate continued to see the rise. As the mentoring teacher at Falls City Academy, I wanted to see an increase in retention rates, sense of belonging, increased positive relationships, and relevance in education after implementing appropriate intervention programs, targeting problem areas within the school culture. Problem areas include healthy relationships, rigorous content, and content relevant to the student's current and future life success. Studies show that intervention programs targeting such areas significantly increase student retention rates when

implemented correctly. Developing and administering appropriate intervention programs at Falls City Academy strengthened, improved, and enriched the students' self-awareness and social-emotional awareness while enhancing the 3 R's, relationships, rigor, and relevance. Although increasing quarterly retention rates within the alternative high school setting did not show a significant increase per student pre-and post-survey, it did show an increase compared to the previous quarter retention rate. The survey completed by the Core Project determined that only 20% of students felt confident that they had the resources and tools necessary to help them succeed academically at Falls City Academy. The post-survey revealed that after implementing the appropriate intervention programs, more than 40% of students felt they could succeed with tools provided by the program. Only 20% thought about their future and what it would take to get there; this increased to 72% after implementing the programs. Setting goals for their future rose from 20% to 62%, students found when developing a goal and mapping out their 5-year plan, their confidence in success increased. After implementing appropriate intervention programs at Falls City Academy, the most significant impact was students' social-emotional growth. Building relationships, self-confidence, and relevancy in their present time and place showed a considerable increase, impacting their decision to stay at Falls City Academy for another quarter. Pre survey, only 19% felt that they could achieve goals if they worked for it; this increased to 32%. 17% of students expressed that they could cope and calm down when feeling stressed, rising to 40%, and cooperating with others rose from 33% to 46%.

    Stakeholders that benefited from the implemented intervention programs were the students, the faculty members, and the overall culture of Falls City Academy. The most significant impact was the innovative/creative thinking process, leadership abilities, diverse ethical stances, and the student's efficiency in solving moral and social problems. All skills

showed increased understanding and execution while enhancing academic institutions' present and future education goals.

Section 6: Different Approaches

After long consideration, I found that if I had approached the problem from the perspective of increasing numbers only, rather than holistically impacting students, I would not have seen the desired outcome in which I had hoped. I would not have seen a significant increase in retention rate that determined the result as a successful project. The initial survey was intended to measure the retention rate of students before and after the implementation of intervention programs. The outcome showed a broader view of the overall impact within the student body.

I expected to see a significant increase in retention rates when meeting the needs of the 3 R's. The retention rate remained the same, with no substantial increase or decrease. Although, the holistic approach to student success showed a dramatic increase in student self-awareness and ability to plan for the future. I would have expected to see an increase in retention rates, although this may not be an immediate result and may take further research to measure the outcome.

Ideally, I would have liked to have measured students' retention rate after implementing the intervention programs, although I feel this was a failure. I did not foresee that I would not be able to have concrete evidence of retention rates and graduation rates within the time constraints.

Section 7: Conclusion

As I progressed through the steps of the project, I understood that although rigorous, the efforts and momentum of the project were in the best interest of myself and the stakeholders. I learned that each step was a milestone necessary to finding the best possible solution to the

problem I was attempting to solve. Having emotional intelligence and recognizing how the staff and students viewed me as a person and leader allowed me to find the best solution for the stakeholders. This knowledge also provided awareness of my strengths and weaknesses which guided me in viewing the problem through the stakeholders' perspectives. This knowledge also allowed empathy to guide me in understanding the situation to find the best possible solution through creative thinking.

Creative thinking began with identifying the individuals that needed a solution and understanding why and how a solution would impact the stakeholders. The answer was a combination of ideas and perspectives of all stakeholders and the understanding that no single solution to the problem would provide the desired outcome but that multiple attempts in finding the answer would bring forth the best possible solution. The retention rates at an alternative high school could only be solved by changing the process and adjusting the strategies as current students progressed and new students enrolled at Falls City academy. Implementing appropriate intervention programs would need adjusting each quarter to fit the needs of each student individually. The programs implemented allowed for adjustment and the informative assessments were the means of discovering the changes that would be implemented.

Those that benefited the most from this project were the students. The changes in confidence impacted them at school and affected how they viewed themselves as a valuable community member, allowing for student growth in content and future goals. Others who benefited were the staff at Falls City Academy and the community in which Falls City Academy operates.

The skills I acquired through the process were the ability to step outside the problem, look at it through the perspectives of others, and most importantly, view a solution from those who would be impacted the most.

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