Communication in a Virtual World - Best Staff Practices for Generating the Greatest Student Engagement in Virtual Learning

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Who are we and what do we do?

Why: To be the one person today who provides hope to my students

Vision: To be a place where every student, regardless of their past, feels 100% accepted and cared for
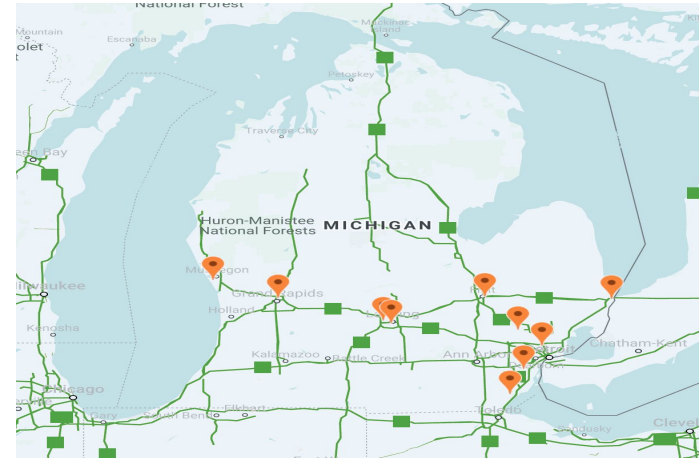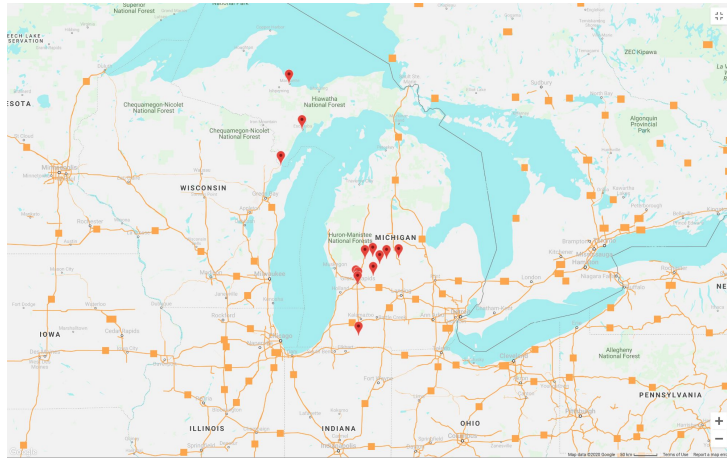
Mission: To provide a safe and positive place for students by listening to their stories, connecting through authentic relationships, and building personalized plans to help each student succeed

Serving students is what we do

What have we learned since 2012?

First….the dashboards are critical - tell us where we are at any time

Second...student *behavior* will make or break virtual success

1. Virtual learning is behavioral conditioning
2. Lack of engagement/motivation are the issue
3. Relationships are key
4. Teachers and mentors have a significant influence on relationships

How do we create relationships when students are not in front of you everyday?

A little about our analytics systems first….

www.Edgenuity.com

www.accountabilitypulse.com

Staff/School Weekly Summary Dashboards

Learning Management System - This system provides the *academic* tools and structure necessary for teachers to support student learning.
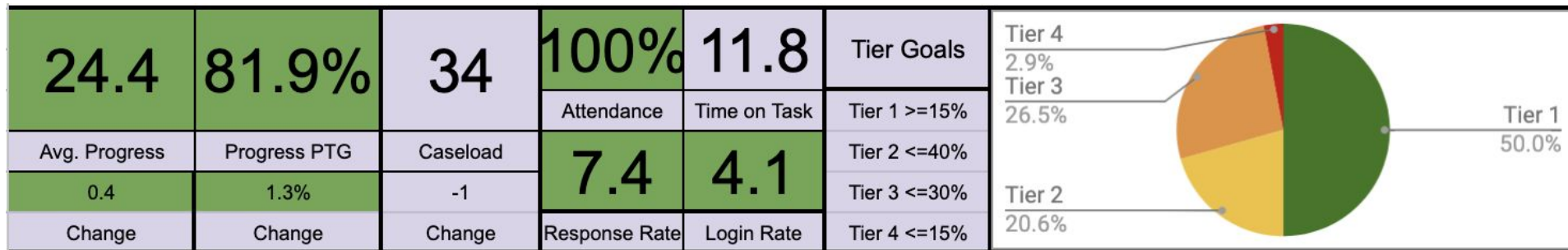
Student Support System - This system, designed by our educators, pulls live data from the LMS and combines the data with staff engagement and support stats to give a live dashboard of staff/student engagement results for staff and administrators to monitor. It provides the *behavioral* tracking system necessary for staff to monitor activity and support students effectively.

The Dashboards - built and automated in Google Sheets - summarize the engagement and academic data from Edgenuity and Pulse on a weekly basis and compare them to the benchmarks set for the year. Color coding helps staff know whether they are on track or behind the benchmarks.

The story of two caseload managers.......

					Tier Goals	
24.4	**81.9%**	**34**	**100%**	**11.8**		
			Attendance	Time on Task	Tier 1 >=15%	
Avg. Progress	Progress PTG	Caseload	**7.4**	**4.1**	Tier 2 <=40%	
0.4	1.3%	-1			Tier 3 <=30%	
Change	Change	Change	Response Rate	Login Rate	Tier 4 <=15%	

Pie chart: Tier 4 2.9%, Tier 3 26.5%, Tier 2 20.6%, Tier 1 50.0%

Summarized measures of staff relational input

Student engagement resulting from staff input

The "autopilot syndrome"

					Tier Goals	
5.4	**27.6%**	**24**	**38%**	**2.9**		
			Attendance	Time on Task	Tier 1 >=15%	
Avg. Progress	Progress PTG	Caseload	**0.8**	**1.4**	Tier 2 <=40%	
-3.6	-0.8%	-1			Tier 3 <=30%	
Change	Change	Change	Response Rate	Login Rate	Tier 4 <=15%	

Pie chart: Tier 1 12.5%, Tier 2 4.2%, Tier 3 20.8%, Tier 4 62.5%

But we knew there was more behind the data!

- Some staff had relatively high communication frequency stats, but low student engagement stats - their attempt to connect was not resulting in positive student engagement results!
- We decided that it was time to study actual conversational practice - comparing staff effective at increasing student engagement to those failing in it.
- **Solution:** Pulse has message center and communications app - auto records student/parent/staff text-based conversations in teacher logs - developed a research study using this data. It's good to have data 😁

The Ranking and Selection Process

- Gathered staff level dashboard data for all weeks in **March 2020**
- Sorted staff by **Student Engagement Stats** - Average Progress, Response Rate, Time on Task.
- **Top 8** performing staff members and **bottom 4** performing staff members were selected
- Communication logs were consolidated for each selected member **(8,000+ messages!)**
- **Quality Assurance Team** read conversation logs and began interpreting the results.
- Invited top selected staff members to **review findings and provide insight**.
- **Here's what we found:**

Communications Rubric

Communication Rubric

Message Preparation
1. Positive
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
2. Relational
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
3. Intentional
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
4. Reflective
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3

Message Practice
1. Reliable
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
2. Consistent
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
3. Balanced
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3

Message Outcomes
1. Connective
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3
2. Effective
   - a. 0
   - b. 1
   - c. 2
   - d. 3

SUCCESS

Message Preparation(1)

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
1. <u>Positive</u> - language is honest and uplifting in nature. It is important to identify and celebrate student actions that get them closer to achieving their goals. Does the language demonstrate a 'with' approach that shows the educator as a partner in the learning process?	Uses **negative** tone. Language uses **fear, shame, and/or threats** to attempt to get the student to complete work. When negative consequences of a student's lack of engagement occur, the staff member uses **negative reinforcement.**	Uses **encouraging, warm** tones and words consistently. Language is consistently **clear and direct,** with a focus on positive reinforcement and a message of belief in the abilities of students. The staff member engages students when negative consequences from a lack of student engagement exist, but consistently with a **positive expectation** of the students abilities.
2. <u>Relational</u> - language should reflect a relational context - does it appear that the staff member is authentic and showing a personal and individual interest in each student? Does the log content demonstrate a depth of knowledge of the student's life situation, and a caring attitude?	No follow-up communication is happening on **personal items** of interest or concern to the student. Communication appears to be '**all business'** and primarily one sided. The majority of messages appear to be template messages and there is **no sign of personalizing** communication or response from students.	Conversations reflect a **continuing personal knowledge** of students' life situations, and a sensitivity of the challenges students are experiencing individually. These conversations are consistently **individualized** and happen frequently and naturally. Mass messages are only used for informational purposes.

Message Preparation(2)

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
3. Intentional - Does the language demonstrate an educational intent? When the staff member reaches a student and has a conversation, does it eventually result in reconnection to an educational goal or purpose? Does the staff member create scaffolding goals for the student in time-on-task, log-in-rates, activities, or other student-centric measurements?	**Mass progress messages** are the primary means of establishing expectations with students, which show a total lack of individualized goal setting. Responses **do not relate** to a previous statement and demonstrate listening. No specific goal setting has been done with students. There is little to no communication about student weekly schedule or any direction given on what is expected of students and how they are doing. Parents/Guardians are totally disregarded as a viable support.	Uses very specific language with students that is **individualized.** Responses **relate** to a previous statement and demonstrate listening. **Goals are identified** and specific steps are shared to reach that individualized goal. Staff intentionally ask about **student schedules** so they can create a plan together to be successful that week. If the student is not responding then staff intentionally implore the help of **parents/**guardians.
4. Reflective - Does the language demonstrate an encouragement for the student to reflect on efforts, outcomes, and benchmarks established from prior conversations and goals established with the staff member?	The staff member does not encourage students to reflect on students' contributions to either positive or negative outcomes. Outcomes are not in reference to previously established expectations, and they do not discuss goals, set achievements, and determine next steps.	Staff member **encourages the student to reflect** on how they contributed to either positive or negative outcomes regularly. **Outcomes are in reference to previously established expectations, and they regularly discuss goals, set achievements, and next steps on a daily basis.**

Message Practice

Description	Ineffective	Highly Effective
5. <u>Reliable</u> - When the staff member communicates with the student about goals, plans, and timeframes, does the staff member demonstrate reliability with regular connection, follow through, and availability?	Student messages are not acknowledged and/or **go unanswered.** If the staff member establishes a benchmark goal with the student, it seems forgotten in the next conversation. The staff member may commit to an action, but does not follow through.	Responds to messages daily, many times **within minutes,** and consistently closes conversations with the student. Staff member c**onsistently follows through** with action items or requests from students. There is **always follow-up** - that day or the next - on goals set with the student.
6. <u>Consistent</u> - Does the staff member attempt to use a consistent method and timeframe for communicating with the student based on the students' availability, setting schedules and establishing a standard method for communicating in order to increase stability and predictability for the student?	Staff member uses **several ways to communicate** with students causing confusion on how to reach students or for students to respond back. Staff member **'chases'** the student to find them virtually, and does not establish one predictable and expected line of communication.	Staff member uses the s**ame line of communication** each time so there is never a question of how to reach a student or how a student is to respond to the staff member. Staff member is aware of the **best times to reach out** to individual students and does so accordingly. When a student stops communicating, the staff member redirects the student back to the primary communication channel.
7. <u>Balanced</u> - Are there too many informational messages being sent out, with no student response? Most of a staff member's messages should result in a conversation with the student.	Messages appear to be all informational and/or commanding, and **do not request a reply** from students. Staff member **does not reach out to parents** when students do not reply. Communication from the staff member is t**oo long** and filled with many topics (3+), potentially overwhelming the student.	The staff member regularly attempts to draw students into conversation by **asking questions.** If the staff member does not get responses, **parents** are being reached out to for support to work as a partner in their child's education. Messages are very **short and to the point**, with no more than one topic in each message so students do not get overwhelmed with what is being asked of them.

Message Outcomes (Benchmarking Section)

8. <u>Connective</u> - How frequently does the staff member have dialogue with each student. Ideally students and staff members are communicating multiple times during the day. **(Dialogue Rate = Student Response Rate*Student Count/Staff Message Count), Communication Rate = Staff Message Count/Student Count)**	Messages are not getting any responses from students. (Student Response Rate < 1) Messages are sent very infrequently to each student. (Communication Rate <=3) There is little, if any, dialog occurring between staff and students. (Dialogue Rate <15%) A large share of the student caseload is not having conversation with the staff member (Attendance Rate < 50%)	Students are responding at least daily to the staff member.(response rate greater than 4) Staff member communicates with students several times during the week. (Communication rate >5) Staff and students have conversation regularly during the week. (Dialogue rate > than 40%) Very few students are not communicating with the staff member (Attendance Rate > 90%)
9. <u>Effective</u> - this is a continuum metric. The longer a staff member performs in the higher categories above, the more they will progress to the higher bracket here.	Students are not showing improvement and or maximization in time-on-task, log-in-rates, and/or progress metrics; based on the specific goals of the staff member.	There is clear indication of maximization of engagement metrics within the staff member's caseload. The staff member is considered a top performer in student engagement statistics, with other, comparable caseloads.

Driving Improvement

- Self-evaluation for improvement (internal)
- Determining Professional Development needs (panel discussions)
- Setting School Improvement goals (staff, center, region, organizational)
- Dashboard reviews

Connection		Engagement		Achievement			
87% **Two Way Comm Rate**		**5.4 hrs** **Time on Task**		**89%** **Average Course Grade**		Tier 4 21.1% / Tier 1 21.6% / Tier 3 37.4% / Tier 2 19.9%	
-3% Last Wk Change		1.2 Last Wk Change		5% Last Wk Change		14 Students - Tier 1	16 Students - Tier 3
4.1 Response Rate	1.1 Last Wk Change	3.2 days Login Rate	.3 Last Wk Change	78% % Passing	4% Last Wk Change	15 Students - Tier 2	6 Students - Tier 4

Key Take-Aways

1. Virtual Learning removes the 'captive audience' benefit
2. Communication skills are a critical factor in staff support for students
3. Don't assume experienced staff know how to communicate effectively
4. Systems that help track staff/student engagement are critical in a virtual environment
5. Don't use data for punitive action - focus on coaching/training/self-reflection

Acknowledging our team

Quality Assurance Team members involved in this project:

Kristi Teall-Executive Director

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Questions?