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ABSTRACT

A project identified as potential dropouts 53 Springfield (Ohio) South High School freshmen and 24 London (Ohio) High School juniors and seniors who demonstrated irregular attendance patterns and poor grade achievement. The 53 freshmen and 15 London High School students were enrolled in a career club, an intervention program to address their dysfunctional patterns by focusing on the development of success patterns. Parents were approached by letter or personal contact to involve them in the project. The Career Coach provided 30 businesses with a brochure detailing Career Club activities and the pre-employment work maturity competencies the youths would attain. Effectiveness of program interventions was assessed through grades and attendance rates. The coordinator and instructor conducted small group sessions to help students express and examine feelings concerning school, provide feedback, and develop decision-making skills. One-on-one sessions provided time for students to discuss critical and personal problems. Testing and remediation was successful as evidenced by marked test score improvement in reading and math. The instructor met with all parents and reinforced visits with telephone contacts. Improvement was seen in school attendance and grade achievement of 20 South High freshmen. Findings indicated that life patterns of freshmen were very difficult to change. (YLB)

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FINAL REPORT
SCHOOL DROP-OUT
INTERVENTION FOR AT RISK YOUTH

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LOCAL NEED

Alarming high drop-out rates were identified in Clark and Madison Counties at the time the at-risk youth proposal was submitted. Education officials had identified that there was a significant correlation between irregular student attendance and drop-out experience. In addition poor academic achievement levels were identified as factors associated with potential drop-outs.

The identified local need was found to be substantiated throughout the operation of the project. The anticipated numbers of youth who would be in need and would be referred by the Springfield City Schools and by the London City Schools did occur as planned.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify freshmen at South High School and juniors and seniors at London High School who demonstrate both irregular attendance patterns and poor grade achievement.

At South High School fifty-three (53) freshmen were identified who had the above attendance patterns and thus were considered to be at risk of dropping out.

In London High School twenty-four (24) juniors and seniors were identified with irregular attendance patterns and poor grade achievement and thus "at risk."

2. To offer these students an intervention program that will address their dysfunctional patterns by focusing on the development/enhancement of success patterns.

Fifteen (15) London High School students were enrolled in the career club.

Fifty-three (53) freshmen at Springfield South were enrolled.

3. To involve parents in the educational lives of their children in order to enhance and reenforce new found success patterns. A count of parent contacts will be kept.

To involve parents in the London City Schools project letters were sent to each parent explaining the project and the JTPA eligibility process. Parents were also contacted by the Career Coach Instructor. Thirty (30) parent contacts were made.

In Clark County parent involvement was harder to obtain than anticipated. Contacts were attempted with the students' parents or guardians. The South High School Truant Officer accompanied by the project coordinator made home visits to 25% of the parents. An additional 25% of parents or guardians were contacted by telephone. An individualized letter was sent to all parents. Ten (10) parental contacts were made.

4. To provide linkages between the high schools, other community agencies, and the private sector in order to promote success patterns outside the school area. A record of agencies/groups contacted will be kept.

Thirty (30) businesses in London/Madison County were contacted personally by the Career Coach. A brochure was developed detailing the activities conducted for the Career Club and the pre-employment work maturity competencies the youth would attain. This was included in the business contacts made by the coach. The following agencies and groups were also contacted to provide linkages for the program; Chamber of Commerce, Health Group, Inc., Juvenile Court, Madison County Mental Health, Career Industries, and Ohio Bureau of Employment Services.

In Clark County linkages were developed with the following agencies and programs; GED program - Springfield City Schools, OWE program - Springfield City Schools, Mentorship program, Student Credit program - JTPA, GOALS program - Springfield City Schools, Opportunities Industrialization Center of Clark County.

5. To assess the effectiveness of program interventions through quantitative measurements such as grades and attendance rates.

In the London City Schools project attendance rates were carefully monitored. Awards were given for perfect attendance throughout the semester: 46% had perfect attendance in February, 38% for March, 58% for April and 50% for May. All youth involved in the Career Club passed the school year and were promoted to the next grade level. The Career Club youth were pre-tested at the beginning of the project and their scale scores for the class were 752 in reading for a grade equivalent of 7.9 and 698 in math, grade equivalent of 4.6. When these same students were post-tested in May, 1990 their scale score in reading was 756, grade equivalent of 8.4. This represents a reading gain of 4 months. The math scale score was 765 which has a grade equivalent of 9.2. This is a gain of 4 years, 6 months.

London City Schools decided to grant one-half academic credit to the Career Club because their assessment of the effectiveness of the program was positive. This half credit has major significance for many of the youth who may only need an additional half credit to graduate.

In Clark County of the twenty (20) youth actively participating, 49% were absent less than six (6) days on a monthly average and 14% maintained perfect attendance. For the same twenty youth prior to the start of the project, 0% were absent less than six days and 0% had perfect attendance. 93% of the twenty youth received passing grades in all five (5) subjects they were enrolled in.

6. To secure continued funding if the program proves successful.

The Career Club at London High School will be operated during the school year 1991 using JTPA funding. Forty-nine (49) youth were

identified by school counselors as needing the Career Club this coming year. Thirty-two (32) have been scheduled into the club which will meet during the fourth period of every school day. The program will be further enhanced by the use of two computers and software which have been purchased with funds received from the Aetna Foundation to support the Career Club.

ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINES

1. The coordinator and instructor will implement small group sessions to help youth express and examine their feelings concerning the school environment, provide feedback, and develop skills in decision making. This will help students to develop a positive attitude concerning self and school. This will be on-going throughout the 1989-90 school year.

The instructor splintered the class for various activities. The activities were designed to address the above.

2. One-on-one sessions will be held between the students and the coordinator and instructor. These will provide time necessary for the student to discuss critical and personal problems and allow for trust building. Timeframe will be as above.

The students met individually with staff at least twice during the year. A marked increase in self-confidence was noted and commented on by the building principal at the London site.

3. Students will be tested to identify grade levels and academic deficiencies. Remediation will be offered to those performing below their expected academic levels. Testing will occur at intake by the Tecumseh Consortium. Remediation will be offered throughout the 1989-90 school year.

Remediation was offered in the classroom as well as after school at the Madison County site. As evidenced by the test scores improvement in reading and math was marked.

4. Parent involvement will occur throughout this program. Parent support groups will be formed by the coordinator to provide information and seek parental encouragement of improved school attendance and performance. The instructor will meet with the parents of students one-on-one during home visits to discuss progress or digression of students and reenforce the program in the home environment. Timeline for this activity same as #1.

The instructor met with all parents and reinforced visits with telephone contacts. She also discussed personal and academic progress with the parents and suggested options for the parents to take with their children to help them succeed in school.

5. The coordinator and instructor will be responsible for taking daily attendance of the youth. They will follow-up on any absentees, ascertain and record reasons for same. Timeline: on-going throughout the 1989-90 school year.

Attendance was taken every school day after January 24, 1990. Absences were checked with the attendance office and followed-up by a home visit or telephone call.

6. The instructor will pre-test Madison County youth to determine deficiencies in the Tecumseh Consortium PIC recognized competency system. The system will be utilized as a basis of curriculum for the first nine (9) weeks of the semester. Those students determined ready will be placed into unsubsidized employment or Try-Out employment during the last nine (9) week segment. Follow-up will be done by the instructor. 100% of program participants will be placed or determined as achieving youth competencies by the end of the 1989-90 school year.

Of the fifteen (15) youth beginning Career Club, three (3) moved from the area during the semester. Twelve (12) completed the Club and tested out as competent in our system. Six (6) were placed into unsubsidized employment and are still employed.

EVALUATION PLAN

Attached is the final report submitted by the South High School/Oesterlen Coordinator. The report does show improved attendance rate and grade level gains as identified in the review of objectives above.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Mr. Robert Dye who was identified in the proposal did perform the coordinator duties of the South High School/Oesterlen Service for Youth project for the first part of the grant period. Mr. Dye accepted an out-of-state job mid-year and a second coordinator was hired. The duties as outlined in the grant were performed by the coordinator personnel. In addition the secretary provided the clerical support needed for the program as planned.

In the London City Schools experience an instructor with a current teaching certificate and in-school experience was hired to operate the project. That instructor stayed for the first semester and then accepted a full-time teaching position in another school. A second instructor was hired for the second semester who also met the criteria of having a teaching certificate and appropriate experience. That instructor has been brought onto the Tecumseh Consortium staff as a full-time employee and will be teaching the Career Club in the 1990-91 school year.

MATERIALS DEVELOPED

The London City Schools project developed a newsletter, written, edited and distributed to the community by the Career Club students and a Career Club-specific brochure was developed last year (See Attachments 1 and 2).

The Springfield South project did utilize handouts which were pertinent to the subject of each group discussion. These handouts were developed by the project coordinator.

REPORT DISSEMINATION

Final reports have been sent to London City Schools Superintendent, London High School Principal, Springfield City Schools Superintendent, Springfield South High School Principal, Tecumseh Consortium Private Industry Council, London Area Chamber of Commerce and Tecumseh Consortium Managers.

PROJECT CONTINUATION

The Career Club at London High School will operate during school year 1990-91. Forty-nine youth were identified by school counselors as needing the club. Thirty-two have been scheduled into the club which will meet 4th period every school day. The program will be further enhanced by the use of two computers and software in conjunction with the youth competency system and basic skills.

South High School has decided not to operate this particular program at South High during the 1990 - 91 school year. Springfield City Schools has received a drop-out grant which may be used to fund a similar program at

South High School which would be staffed by school personnel.

Oesterlen has plans to operate their program in three (3) middle schools during school year 1990 - 91. Specific plans are currently under development.

ATTENDANCE PROGRAM at South High School: Annual Report: June, 1990

In October, 1989, 53 ninth grade South HS students were identified for this program. The target population was divided into three groups which met weekly on Mondays through Wednesdays from 12:30-1:00 pm in the school Library. Weekly group sessions were scheduled in order to establish consistency, develop familiarity among group members and form a support system.

Out of the original 53 students, 20 attended group on a semi-regular basis throughout the school year- semi meaning 68% or better attendance rate. Intermittent group attendance could be attributed to school suspensions, excused/unexcused absences, or extra-circular school activities.

The system for involving these students in groups was a gradual process. Initially I met with each student one-on-one and explained the purpose of the groups and the reasons for their selection to the groups. Following these individual meetings, these students were grouped according to their class rank at South HS- incoming ninth graders were separated into 2 groups and repeating ninth graders in the 3rd group. Group attendance was found to be better among the incoming ninth graders (60% attendance) than the repeating ninth graders (40% attendance). Group topics centered around self-esteem, problem solving, goal setting, stress management, a socialization skills.

In addition to weekly group meetings, contacts were made with these students' parents or custodial guardians. Terry Stevens, South HS truant officer, and I made home visits with 25% of the parents. The difficulty with home visits was the unavailability of the parents at the time of the visit-i.e. either the parents were not at home or refused to answer the door. As a follow up to home visits, a parent meeting was scheduled at South HS. Letters were mailed to each parent inviting them to this informational meeting. Only one parent attended. The final step to involve parents was phone calls. An additional 25% of these parents were reached. Therefore a total of 51% of the parents were reached by home visits, parents meeting or phone. A final letter was mailed to each parent at the close of the school year. This letter detailed the progress of the students and encouraged the parents to support their children in their future educational endeavors.

There was improvement seen in school attendance and in grade achievement of the final 20 students who participated in the program. On a monthly average 49% of these students were absent less than 6 days and 14% maintained perfect attendance. Thus 63% were attending school 70% of the time. In addition to attendance, 93% of these students received passing grades in 5 subjects, earning each an average of 3.31 credits at the end of this school year.* Tenth grade class standing requires 4.25 credits. Several of the students who were unable to earn the 4.25 credits during the school year, will be attending summer school to make up the lack of credits. 5% of these students earned enough credits to be ranked as tenth grade students.

* Some subjects were equal to a $\frac{1}{2}$ credit and others to 1 credit.

Several unique features which were utilized in these groups were guest speakers and introduction to several special programs. Guest speakers included Jim Clinger, JTPA teacher, Gwen Kelly, Mentorship program advisor, and Chris Frost, JTPA community program coordinator. Also I presented group members with information on the following programs: OWE, GED, GOALS, OIC. 5 students enrolled in the JTPA summer work program and several others (exact number undetermined) were considering scheduling JTPA in their school program for 1990-91. Nine students were recommended to the Mentorship Program for next school year. And the GED, OIC, and GOALS programs were discussed with several students who had 18th birthdays over the next 4 months and had expressed the desire of not returning to school after May, 1990. These programs were recommended as options to dropping out of school and not earning a diploma.

CONCLUSION:

Having completed six months of group work with 9th grade students who were considered high risk of dropping out of school, I arrived at several conclusions. Ninth grade high school students have established life patterns, including poor school attendance and grade achievement. Therefore it is very difficult to change these life patterns. These students also have little family support, primarily because of parental attitude—i.e. once a student reaches high school, these parents feel that they have little to no control in forcing their child to attend school. Furthermore many of these parents are poor role models. They are welfare recipients, unemployed and/or low motivated individuals who are not impressed with the value of an education, all of which attributes to little parental involvement.

I feel that there would be greater potential for this program in the middle schools. In addressing the 8th grade students, primarily, such an intervention group could utilize JTPA and OWA programs as self-esteem builders. There also might be greater opportunity for school staff involvement, since middle school teachers have greater contact and more time to spend with their students. If such a middle school program is initiated, I might suggest that a meeting between the school staff and program coordinator be held in order to explain the purpose and details of this program. Such an introduction at South HS was not done and consequently a few problems occurred which could have been avoided with such a meeting.