

Minnesota Principals Academy- Action Learning Project
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All Students College Ready:
Safety Nets in the Elementary Grades

Abstract

The purpose of this Action Learning Project was to examine ways in which we can help accelerate the academic growth of students performing one or more grade levels behind their peers. The majority of students at our school performing significantly below grade level expectations already receive additional academic supports, Safety Nets, during the school day. These academic supports have helped improve student success, but have not been successful in closing the gap between struggling students and their peers. The School Leadership Committee chose to research quality Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs that increase opportunities beyond the school day. The committee reviewed research from effective OST programs paying special attention to recurring components of these programs in the literature. The team reviewed the components as a group incorporating the strongest ones into the design of our OST program.

The OST program we created was designed to run for 19 weeks, Tuesday-Thursday from 3:45-5:00. We recruited our own teachers to teach the program and selected students based on academic need. We put systems in place to address the most common barriers to participation in OST programs such as providing transportation and providing a snack. We partnered with Community Education to assist us with snack time and providing recreational activities as rewards. Professional Development was required for those teaching in the program both certified and non-certified. The results of the program were generally positive though lacked consistency between grade levels. 86% of the 83 participants in the program made gains from the pre to post test. Grade level data showed progress of individual grade level cohorts varied from an average of 5% growth to an average of 39% growth.

Vision: All Students College Ready; Safety Nets in the Elementary Grades.

Evidence of the need to change: There has been a dramatic shift in demographics in the past 10+ years in our school forcing us to scrutinize our teaching practices to meet the needs of the students and families we serve. School racial demographic data from 2000 reported the student population to be composed of 74.8%-White, 13.7%-Black, 5.7%-Hispanic, and 4.8%-Asian. Students who qualified for free and reduced price lunch were 17.6% of the student population, students receiving ELL services were 11.7%, and those receiving special education services was 10.6%. By 2013, those percentages had changed significantly. White students made up 29.8% of the population, Black students 40.3%, Hispanic students 20% and Asian 5.8%. The number of students who qualified for free and reduced price lunch had nearly quadrupled at 66.3%, students receiving ELL services was reported to be 16.9%, and those receiving special education services was 20.61%. The school has been cited by the Minnesota Department of Education for not making adequate yearly progress on and off in a variety of cells since the 2008/2009 school year.

Chosen OST program and components: The school leadership team reviewed several options for programs that would provide additional support for students outside the regular school day. Students targeted for this program are those not performing at grade level, even with support services provided during the school day. We chose to plan and implement a very specific and targeted Out of School Time (OST) program after school, 3 days a week from 3:45 to 5:00 for 19 weeks. We took

examples of promising programs from the literature and implemented many of the same components in our program design. Some of the most important aspects of successful OST programs in the literature are: strong leadership and established goals, alignment of program structure to meet said goals, regular communication between OST program staff and the school day staff, specific criteria for selecting students to participate, use of research-based strategies and alignment to the standards, continuous use of student academic data, and arguably the most important factor, hire teachers who are able to build rapport, maintain high expectations, and keep students motivated.

Results of pilot: Each grade level improved from the pre to post assessment, some more than others. Percentage of growth varied significantly among and between grade level cohorts.

Results From Pre and Post OST Program
Subject-Mathematics
 IKE 2013/2014 School Year

Grade Level	Number of students	Number Improved	Number with Decreased score	Number of students who left the program-No post test	Number of students with no change in scores	Average percentage of growth by grade level
1 st	17	16	1	0	0	39%
2 nd	10	10	0	0	0	15.3%
3 rd	13	11	0	2	0	18%
4 th	13	11	1	1	0	7%
5 th	14	8	4	1	1	5%
6 th	16	15	1	0	0	13%
total	83	71 86%	7 8%	4 5%	1 1%	

Implications for practice:

1. Time spend carefully designing an OST program will yield greater results
 - a. Integrate the strongest components of OST programs
 - b. Remove roadblocks to participation
 - c. Prioritize student selection by those most in need
 - d. Provide PD opportunities specific to OST program to all staff
2. Consistency and fidelity in program delivery
 - a. Ensure academic rigor
 - b. Standardize the use of curriculum incorporating consistent use of formative assessment to inform instruction
3. Assure agreed upon parameters are followed
 - a. Student contact time
 - b. Communication between school and OST staff
 - c. Teacher prep time spent examining assessment and differentiating based on assessment results
4. School administration presence throughout the program
 - a. Instill a sense of urgency
 - b. Help motivate staff and students
 - c. Be supportive of staff, families, and students. Assist wherever possible