Using Student Portfolios for Credit Recovery

• How can we improve the credit accumulation and four-year graduation rates of at-risk high school students, without compromising the academic rigor and integrity of our school’s program?

Process

○ **Plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate a credit recovery portfolio program** so that it would meet the criteria of alignment, rigor, feasibility, and integrity.
  • A portfolio based credit recovery program allows us to customize its implementation to the needs of the school and the New York State curriculum.
  • Portfolios allow us to create rubrics at a level of rigor so that the work is neither too rigorous nor onerous to complete nor so easy that it compromises the integrity of our regular academic program.
  • Students can be monitored as they complete the portfolios and be given access to resources and expertise as need.

○ **Successful programs with populations similar to ours had two elements in common:**
  • (1) strong teacher and guidance support; and
  • (2) compromised rigor and flexible criteria for student participation.

○ **Based on this, we were most concerned about two issues:**
  • (1) teacher and guidance counselor buy-in; and
  • (2) developing portfolios and rubrics that balanced rigor with feasibility.

Gaining Support

○ Presented the merits and potential problems of a credit recovery program at a faculty conference.

○ Presented the data that evidenced poor results from our traditional P.M. school program, where students retook an entire course they had previously failed during after-school hours.

Teachers’ Concerns:

• (1) concern that the program will make it easy for students to opt out of doing their regular class work or attending class; and
• (2) concern that younger students did not have the maturity to complete the work independently.
To alleviate the first concern, teams of teachers prepared portfolio packets including tasks to be completed, grading rubrics, a cover letter with instructions, and a list of resources that would be needed.

- Packets were created keeping in mind that this initiative targeted at-risk students, for whom resiliency in completing multiple tasks was a concern.
- We met separately with guidance and made them responsible for identifying and informing students about the program.

**Obstacles**

- Counselors resented that they were not part of the initial planning of the program, resulting in tepid support, which was a problem we never overcame.
- ELA teachers were reluctant to ease the rigor and quantity of work so that students had an opportunity to succeed
  - In the long term, we needed the buy-in of the ELA teachers, so we decided to monitor student progress on the ELA portfolios.
- When would we offer students the opportunity to work on their portfolios and who would supervise and grade the portfolios?
  - We decided that students could work on their portfolios only during extended day (from 2:40 to 3:30 PM every Tuesday through Thursday) and teachers within the content areas who were not preparing students for regents exams would supervise them and retain possession of the portfolios.
  - These teachers were available at this time at no extra cost to the school.
  - The teachers also agree to stay extra (for pay) when students needed extra time to complete a part of the portfolio.
  - However, because the program defaulted to these teachers, they were not necessarily the most vigilant teachers in terms of following up with students.
  - Also, all science teachers were unavailable, so we asked the math teacher to supervise both math and science portfolio completion, a content area he was not in a position to assess.
- Students had to complete the portfolios by the first week of May. We were concerned that the more time we gave them, the longer they would take to get started on their portfolios.

**Outcomes**

- Of 100 students targeted for credit recovery, 73 students attended at least one after-school credit recovery session and began work on a portfolio. Of these 73 students, 20 successfully completed a portfolio for credit. The tables below breakdown student completion rates by subject and by years in high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completion rate by subject:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA: 2 out of 16 students completed the work (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies: 7 out of 28 students completed the work (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Math: 7 out of 15 students completed the work (47%)
Science: 4 out of 14 students completed the work (28%)

Completion rate by years in high school:
Second Year Students: 2 out of 28
Third Year Students: 7 out of 31
Fourth Year Students: 6 out of 14

**Lessons Learned**

- Although the results in terms of numbers completing the portfolio may seem disappointing, the data to create a viable program going forward is very useful.
- Teacher buy-in increased over time. The ELA teachers, became more agreeable as I met with them and presented the student completion data. Our prediction that students would complete the ELA portfolios at lesser rates than other portfolios because of the sheer size of the portfolio proved true. Also, students expressed the that completing the credit recovery portfolios in all subject areas was more challenging than traditional P.M. school because the onus of work is on the student. This evidence led the ELA teachers to revise their portfolios and become more accepting of the program.
- Guidance counselors never expressed reluctance regarding the credit recovery program, but they also never took ownership of it. We need to include them in the process earlier on next year.
- Teachers supervising students during the credit recovery process need to provide ongoing assessment and feedback of student progress. Because the math teacher who supervised the science portfolio did not provide ongoing assessment of student progress, the completion rate of science portfolios was also negatively affected.
- Concerns about student resiliency were also validated. We hoped to mitigate this problem by having a relatively short window of opportunity for students to complete their portfolios. What we did not do was mandate student attendance. We also noted, and anticipated, that older students took advantage of credit recovery at greater rates than younger students. We hope to improve portfolio completion rate by mandating student attendance until the portfolio is complete and graded.