

Notes from Academic Support Conference – April 7, 2011

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Notes are based upon feedback during the full group report-out in the late morning session, and the end of day debrief --

Address the challenges and effective practices for the “three pillars” of the academic support programs: 1) the quality of the academic component, 2) enrichment of college and career preparation, and 3) the recruitment, retention and relay aspect of working with targeted youth

- **Quality of Academics**

- **Challenges–**

- For some in-school youth programs, we are not seeing sufficient skill growth as a result of the interventions, with youth possibly just getting to the 220 score on MCAS, but not reaching toward proficiency
- For out-of-school youth - important population to be served is ELL youth who are low-skilled, and there is a need for foundation-building in language arts; programs may not be prepared for the very basic literacy level of the youth
- For older youth who have left high school, esp. if they were members of earlier high stakes classes (classes of '03 – '08), they are hard to engage in MCAS support; they've “moved on” to adult lives
- The quality of the curricula itself varies and may not be engaging enough to be effective
- The short term nature of the programs makes it hard to make much progress in the academic skill area
- Scheduling of the MCAS retests – It is challenging to design support programs that relate well to the retest schedule
- It is a challenge to draw the right balance between straight classroom instruction and contextualized learning with effective projects
- In some areas, the partnership with school districts is not strong enough

- **Effective practices from the field -**

- Boston: started an 8 week biology prep after-school program in the weeks leading up to the February test - Devoted each week to one standard, addressed both the academic and the college and career preparation elements, enriched the program with guest speakers from relevant science professions
- Randolph: Designed an April teacher externship in which a high school engineering teacher was paired up with a technical expert at Milton Hospital, and then used the experience to improve curricula in classroom - got very good results with students in the alternative program
- Taunton: Made sure that the academic support tutors met regularly with the project leaders that led the three main projects: Entrepreneurship, carpentry and horticulture

- Brockton: Emphasized differentiated instruction, and organized teachers to focus on one subject and especially the growth patterns of students – careful attention to outcomes
 - General: Programs that make sure to get students out of the classroom environment to learn academics subjects in a context where they are relevant

- **Enriched Opportunity for College and Career Readiness**
 - **Challenges**
 - Lack of follow-up after summer programs end
 - Challenge of developing methods of creating good individual pathway plans when program staff are dealing with multiple schools and multiple staff
 - The problem of matching students with interests, where there are not enough work experiences in the fields youth have identified
 - Getting employer buy-in to work with students with challenges
 - How to measure progress of participants if they are not at a work site and there is no work-based learning plan being used
 - FAFSA – some programs are having difficulty getting parents and students to go through the process
 - **Effective Practices**
 - College readiness: smart use of Accuplacer test to help students know about the process of placement at community colleges and the issue of developmental courses, as they progress toward their competency determination
 - Career exploration: Improved program design in worksites to make sure to capitalize on wealth of information about college and career readiness in the industry in which the youth is working - Example: programs that incorporate career exploration activities in health care settings by tapping staff for presentations, so that the youth learn about the medical field from the adult practitioners

- **Recruitment, Retention and Relay (Hand-off)**
 - **Challenges**
 - Challenge in recruitment of getting hold of lists of youth who have not passed the MCAS, and thus are eligible for services, from the folks that have them
 - Addressing the problem of enrolling youth who then learn that they have to attend summer school and so can not be part of academic support program -- esp. when students do not learn till the end of the school year that that is the case
 - **Effective practices**
 - Offering students high school credit for their summer experience
 - Design methods for real parent engagement, which can really help with retention

- Make sure to find the “Go-To” person at the school district/high school for successful partnering and information sharing

Debriefing about the day: What Worked/What could be done to improve - Plus/Delta:

Pluses:

- Problem-solving nature of the small group discussions
- Open dialogue
- Opportunity to hear from other grantees
- The mix of representatives – from agencies, school districts, and different funding streams
- The break-out time for the new grantees
- Keith’s overview and description of state context – College and Career Readiness
- The “Safe Place” notion – so folks could acknowledge weaknesses/problems in their programs

Deltas:

- Folks would like a contact list of attendees
- Desire for a break-out session by fund code
- Folks want name tags with fund codes so we can see who our fellow grantees are