Reconnection Center Program: 2009-10

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At-a-Glance

The Reconnection program was designed to assist students recover credits for courses they had not passed in the traditional classroom setting. The program allowed students to remain enrolled in assigned course(s) on their campus while recovering credit from a previously failed course. Credit recovery allowed students to remain on track to be promoted or graduate with their cohort.

The Reconnection program provided students with online and offline work. The online work was prescriptive, meaning that the student pre-tested over the objectives in a module, using NovaNet. The pre-test determined which objectives the student needed to master. The student worked through only those modules and was tested again at completion. As students mastered a module, they moved to the next module. Students did not have to spend additional time on those modules whose objectives had been mastered; they were able to focus on only those objectives they had not mastered. Offline coursework was generated from the district's mandated curriculum (Curriculum Planning Guides). Students completed work based on the requirements of the district prescribed curriculum. With successful completion of prescriptive online work, teacher graded offline work, and the district Assessment of Course Performance (ACP) test, students were awarded credit using district grading standards.

Program Components

The Reconnection Center program served 3,799 students during the 2009-10 school year. The program used grant funds to place at least one teacher-facilitator at each site. The school was then expected to provide matching numbers of teachers from the school site. In some instances this did not occur as principals were not required to match and may have felt their teachers would be of more use in the regular classroom. Most centers lost staff between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. In the 2009-10 school year, only two sites out of 22 Reconnection Centers had four teachers (one in each subject matter: math, science, English, social studies). Eleven sites were functioning with only one teacher.

Based on observations the evaluator conducted at 12 Reconnection Center sites and meetings with program staff, five main similarities across Reconnection Centers were evident. All centers had a sign-in process, used the same curriculum, and had students on task and focused. Students at all centers knew how to access resources and there was little need for directive action towards students. Directive action meant that Center staff must intervene when a student was not fully focused on their work. While the similarities were clear, each Center had its own culture and set of procedures. These differences can be attributed to differences in how each facilitator chose to run his or her program and also the nature of the relationship between Reconnection Center staff and the school administration. In some instances, the differences were not due to the facilitators, but to the administration at a campus. Some Centers were greatly underutilized by the school, while others were utilized to their fullest extent. In some cases Centers had too many staff members for the number of students being served, and in other cases there were too few teachers to provide the one-on-one assistance students needed.

Student Demographics

The evaluator analyzed student data from Dallas Independent School District databases for the last three school years (2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10). The Reconnection student population increased by 10 percent between the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years and then decreased by 21 percent between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. The Reconnection program was serving a higher percentage of seniors than the other classification groups. The majority of the Reconnection Center student population were male, Hispanic or African American, and were economically disadvantaged. Their average age ranged from 17 to 19 for the three school years.

Developmental Assets Profile

The Developmental Assets were 40 common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults. Reconnection Center program students were less likely to report good or excellent levels of the assets than those students not receiving program services.

Credit Recovery

The stated goal for the Reconnection program for the 2009-10 school year was to, “provide credit recovery in core content areas to 10 percent more students than 2008-2009.” The program did not meet this goal. In three instances the number of students served increased across all three school years. The number of students served decreased across all three years in four schools. The remaining thirteen sites showed an
increase in student population from 2007-08 to 2008-09, but a decrease from 2008-09 to 2009-10. In addition, there was a coinciding increase in the number of credits earned during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years with a subsequent decrease in the number of credits earned between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years.

**Student Achievement**

Students not in Reconnection were outperforming Reconnection students in attendance, Grade Point Average GPA, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores and in some cases ACP scores. However, program students had shown improvements in these areas over the past three school years and the difference between program and non-program students was often times minimal.

The results showed that Reconnection students in a given year were less likely to graduate or be promoted than their counterparts not enrolled in the program. These results were to be expected as Reconnection students were usually those who had gotten off track from their cohort and were in need of services to catch up. However, the percentage of Reconnection students who were promoted each school year increased from 2007-08 to 2008-09.

**Student Interviews**

Student comments reflected a much deeper meaning and value of the Reconnection Center program than just academic success. For students, the main strengths of the Reconnection Center program were that it was self-directed and allowed students to work independently. Students reported that they liked getting to work at their own pace and that they could work with the Center staff to set deadlines that were attainable for them. When asked what they would like to change about the program, most students said they would not change anything. Some students mentioned that there were either not enough teachers to help them with work, or not the right teachers for the subject matter in the Centers.

**Staff Perceptions**

Facilitators and teachers identified many strengths of the Reconnection Center program such as: serving students who were at-risk of dropping out and providing them with much needed academic support; offering self-paced and flexible schedules to accommodate individual student needs, allowing students to earn credits at their own pace; providing computer-based work to suit individual learning styles; allowing students to recover partial credits, meaning students did not have to spend time on course work which they had already mastered; and remaining open for extended hours both before and after school and offering an extended year into the summer.

**Parent Involvement**

The Reconnection Center program work scope identified the following as an outcome of the program, “Ensure communication/orientation of 95 percent of parents of students in Reconnection Center program.” However, very few of the Centers were collecting parent contracts. Center staff reported that no parent orientations were occurring. Facilitators reported that parent involvement should be an individualized decision for each student.

**Summary and Recommendations**

A successful Reconnection Center requires several critical elements: 1) the program needed a good relationship and foundation of understanding between the school administration and Reconnection Center staff, 2) Centers needed the appropriate amount of staff to run successfully, and 3) the program must have the right students to be successful.

There were five recommendations as a result of this evaluation. First, readiness evaluations should be conducted at each potential new site for a Reconnection Center and a new assessment conducted each time there is a change in administration to determine whether the expectations of the school’s administration are in line with those of Reconnection Center program management. Second, Reconnection Center program management should work with the school to identify one counselor with whom Reconnection Center staff can work to bring students into the program. Third, the program should create a Memorandum of Understanding between Reconnection facilitators and campus administration identifying the criteria that will be used to identify students for the program. If an acceptable arrangement cannot be made then the program should consider withdrawing from the campus. Fourth, Center facilitators should collect data on the courses taken, time taken to complete each course, and course grade for further analysis. Fifth, add a button on the Student Support Website to allow facilitators to indicate whether a student has transferred campuses or if the student is receiving services at Village Fair.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the Reconnection Center Program Report, EA10-132-2, which can be found at [www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/](http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/).