Outstanding Program Component

Academic Excellence Lab

Lincoln Street Alternative High School

Birmingham Public Schools

Birmingham, Michigan

It would not be unusual for a school with a thirty eight year history and a great graduation rate to rest upon their laurels, not worry about changing how they approach instruction. However, the staff of Lincoln Street Alternative was not satisfied to stay the course; they actively looked for ways to respond to the constantly changing needs of their students. Lincoln Street developed the Academic Excellence Lab to increase credit recovery and the academic achievement of their students. Along the way they found many other benefits from the program including improved critical thinking and problem solving skills, increased ability to work in a group and the ability to develop specific, attainable goals and execute them. With the addition of their Academic Excellence Lab, Lincoln Street Alternative took differentiated instruction to a whole new level.

Lincoln Street’s Academic Excellence Lab works something like this: On “Mindful Mondays” students “walk through relaxation exercises”. These exercises serve to help the students focus on the most important task of the Lab: setting goals. To the teachers at Lincoln Street the value of beginning the week this way is immeasurable. With mindfulness exercises, students are able to “put personal issues to the side and continue to work toward a goal.” With a specific and attainable goal set, students work all week to earn points toward credits required for graduation.

Because of the intimacy of the program, teachers make a strong connection with their students. Besides the students benefitting from this connection, the school community as a whole has been enriched. The results of this connection are manifold: students are “motivated, their attention is more focused, their energies are higher and this translates into their academic world as well as their lives, and the choices that they make.” The socio-emotional benefits are only the tip of the iceberg. Students accomplish the goals they set. The results are impressive. Of the 27 students who participated so far this year, twenty six of the twenty seven completed their first goal, of the fifteen students who had set two goals, twelve of them completed their second goal, of the five students who set a third goal, all achieved it and all three of the three who set a fourth goal, achieved their goal, translating to earning four half credits!

Birmingham Superintendent, Dr. David Nerad is proud of the work done at Lincoln Street Alternative High School in his district: “having the benefit of working with alternative program educators over my career, I see in the Lincoln Street staff the kind of qualities that allow students that have not been successful elsewhere to reconnect to the learning environment. The Lab serves as a great example of how the reconnection process works. Relationships first, followed with high expectations for performance.”

CONGRATULATIONS to Lincoln Street Alternative’s Academic Excellence Lab!