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Redefining A Special Education Alternative High School Program To Make Students College and Career Ready: A Change Leadership Plan

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REDEFINING A SPECIAL EDUCATION

ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM TO MAKE STUDENTS COLLEGE

AND CAREER READY: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

Janine E. Gruhn

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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My work is dedicated in loving memory to my dad, William J. Brill, who was my biggest

fan and taught me to always advocate for what I believe in. In addition, to my family,

who inspire me each day, make me laugh, and understand my joy of learning.

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership Ed.D is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice.
The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited

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ABSTRACT

The change leadership plan examines redefining college and career readiness for students in alternative programs. We know from research that all students need to have the necessary skills to be ready for post-secondary employment or to attend colleges; however, students attending a special education alternative program were not successfully transitioning back to their high school and tended to stay in the district's program until graduation (Gruhn, 2016). Therefore, this change leadership plan used Wagner's (2006) 4 C's framework to examine the areas of context, culture, conditions and competencies. Focusing on 10 practices of college of career and college readiness (Brand et al., 2013), data workshops were utilized to collect data to determine the current levels of college readiness and areas to focus on for improvement. Stakeholders in the data workshops included staff and students. Research indicates the criteria to transition students back to the high school, a known procedure in the handbook, was too difficult for the students to achieve on a consistent basis. Students did not typically transition back to the high school and students did not feel successful or understand what the term "success" meant. Staff was interested in improving outcomes for students and determined through a data workshop and a survey that the students needed a more flexible schedule, needed better technology, more resources for vocational training and needed to understand how to monitor their own progress.

PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Throughout my career I have worked with students receiving special education. I have worked as an administrator and as a teacher. One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that expectations matter. Students in alternative programs often are placed in these programs due to behavioral issues, attendance concerns, or for other educational challenges. Because of these concerns, an alternative program has to be prepared to work with these unique challenges and still prepare students to meet the expectations required of the workforce or the college institutions once they graduate.

I have learned that preparing students means that we have to ensure students understand the expectations not only of the school they are attending, but expectations of others. This means that attendance matters. Students can't learn if they are not attending school. However, if an employee is frequently absent from the workplace, the team and the employer also suffers. We expect our students to earn good grades and often we think that the grade is motivation for the students. In the work place we earn a paycheck and oftentimes good workers earn pay raises or bonuses. We need to teach students that the outcome of their work matters. Right now a letter grade may not be meaningful, but later in life it may mean a raise, a bonus or promotion.

Preparing students for college and career readiness is not an easy task, it means we need to raise our own expectations, examine what we are teaching our students, and ensure we are producing students prepared to meet the challenges that will face them outside of schools. Students in alternative programs especially need to be prepared for college and career readiness as they not only are facing the potential challenges of the real world, but they enter the program faced with many challenges.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The O'PLUS program was a special education alternative program that was originally designed to provide the necessary special education services in a small setting focused on intense social emotional supports, academic interventions and individualized needs of students who were not successful in the regular high school environment. Once students received the necessary supports and they met the exit criteria of attending at least 80% of the time, maintaining their grades at an A or B average, and maintaining a level 4 on the behavioral scale, they were to transition back to the high school (Gruhn, 2016). However, based on data collected, in four years only seven students have transitioned back to their high school. Of the seven students, only two students fully transitioned back to the high school and the other five students remained dually enrolled in order to maintain contact with the O'PLUS program. In addition, over the 4-year time frame the overall attendance rate drastically decreased from over 80% to 65% and students could not meet the criteria to transition back to the high school (Gruhn, 2015 Unpublished Dissertation). Therefore, the purpose of this change plan was to change the entrance criteria, determine appropriate attendance interventions, set goals with each student, and to prepare the students with to be college and career ready.

Rationale

Redefining the O'PLUS program and ensuring that students can succeed is important as the program has value to the District, community and to me. As the Director of Special Education, I helped found the O'PLUS program along with other colleagues and staff from the Ombudsman Educational Services Alternative Corporation. The O'PLUS program was created to serve special education students because District 60 did not have an alternative school that could provide the necessary services. The O'PLUS program was in operation for over four years and has assisted many students in increasing their attendance, completing their goals, and earning credits. The district and board have been very supportive of this program and have invested a great deal of time and resources to ensure the success of the students and the program. In addition, the community has provided a great deal of support for the program, as many parents see it as the last option for their child to get an education.

The program had many benefits to the students as it offered a great deal of social and emotional supports, a small teacher-student ratio, and academic support. Although the original intent of the program did not transition students back to the high school at the rate desired, it is important to redefine the program to ensure that the students define its success. The program has supported many students and has provided them the necessary supports to earn credits and graduate, even though only a small number of students went back to the high school. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine the program to ensure the program is preparing students to be college and career ready. This is important because in a current research done by the National

Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)[3], students attended two-year colleges at a rate similar to their general education peers; however, 7.6 percent of students with disabilities attended four-year universities, compared with 29.2 percent of students in the general population. (Brand, Valent, & Danielson, 2013). In addition, the number of students with disabilities who graduate from high school and attend a postsecondary education program are low. The majority of students with disabilities in NLTS2 failed to graduate or to receive a degree from their program up to eight years after high school.

Goals

The goal of redefining the O'PLUS program is to focus on college and career readiness. The overall attendance rate is one area that needs to improve. Currently, the average attendance rate has dropped to around 60 percent and it should be around 95 percent. In addition, high expectations for all students will be the standard, and each student will develop a portfolio focusing on the necessary steps to transition from the O'PLUS program to college or a career. Lastly, students will have a clear understanding of the expectations of the program, which go beyond maintaining grades, behavior and attendance, which I defined as the exit criteria in my program evaluation. Expectations for the program will need to be clearly defined in a manner that will truly define a successful student and program.

The article titled, *Improving College and Career* Readiness *For Students with Disabilities* (Brand et al., 2013) identifies ten practices to improve outcomes. These practices include:

- Define College and Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities

- Set High Expectations, Aspirations, and Clear Goals for Students with Disabilities

- Improve Use of Diagnostic Assessments and Data to Inform Instruction

- Develop the Capacity of Educators to Use Rigorous Research-based Instructional Practices

- Develop and Assess Multiple Types of Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, a Behaviors Important to Life Success

- Improve Access to Guidance, Counseling, and Transition Services

- Create Transparent High School Diploma Options

- Create Multiple Pathways to College and Careers

- Improve Alignment of K–12 and Postsecondary Education

- Deepen Connections Among K–12 and Other Systems that Provide Supports to Students with Disabilities

These practices if implemented in the O'PLUS program will redefine the program, prepare students for college and career readiness and clearly define expectations for students and staff.

Demographics

In 2013-2014 the average number of students in O'PLUS was 27. Most of the students were male—only two students were female. Waukegan High School has 4,490 students. In the high school, 73.9 percent of the student are Hispanic, 16.9 percent are African American, 5.5 percent Caucasian, 1.6 percent Asian, .4 percent American Indian. Compared to the high school, the O'PLUS program has a higher

percentage of students who are African American than Hispanic. Of the 27 students, eight students were African American, 16 were Hispanic and 3 were Caucasian. The O'PLUS program also services more male students than female students.

The average attendance rate was 75 percent. The average credit earned was 67 percent. The major reason for placement in the program for most students was for behavior. Other placement reasons included poor attendance, transfers in to the district, which required an alternative placement per the student's IEP and a direct placement, which may have been a district decision based on the student's IEP. In 2014-2015, there were 24 students: 16 male and 8 female. Of the 24 students, 10 were African American, 12 Hispanic, and 2 Caucasian. 19 students were in the program for behavior reasons. Other reasons included: academics, medical, direct placement and move in. The attendance rate in 2014-2015 was 75%. The overall attendance rate was much lower than the Waukegan High School average attendance rate, which was 93%.

SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4 Cs

The O'PLUS program was analyzed using Wagner's 4 C's Diagnostic Tool (2006, p. 109) in the areas of context, culture, conditions and competencies. In diagnosing the "As Is," it was first important to identify the problem, which was that the O'PLUS program needed to be redefined in order to determine student outcome measures and to maximize the intensive resources in the program. After the problem was identified, it was important to reflect on several areas to determine the necessary changes.

Culture

Culture is defined by Wagner as the shared values, beliefs assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school (Wagner et al, p. 102, 2006). In the area of culture, there were many inconsistencies. The expectation of student learning was examined and it was determined that they varied from individual students. The expectations were not clear or consistent or often changed based on the student. The school environment also changed depending on the mix of students in the program. At times the climate was positive and at other times the environment was challenging based on the students who were enrolled in the program. One of the biggest strengths of the program was that the adult communication between the O'PLUS program and the district was open and effective. Meetings occurred on a regular basis in order to monitor the program, discuss students and work through concerns. Two of the biggest challenges were the student attendance and the lack of problem of solving. Students did not attend on a regular basis and the attendance dropped to an overall attendance rate of 65%. This

may have been caused due to a lack of relationships with the adults in the program. In addition, adults were not problem solving about student issues on a regular basis. For instance, if a student was not attending, staff was not trying to put interventions in place and became complacent.

Conditions

Conditions are defined by Wagner as the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space and resources (Wagner et al, p. 101, 2006). In the area of conditions in the O'PLUS program, the variables considered were the expectations for exiting, overall expectations for O'PLUS, attendance, and positive intervention and behavioral referrals. The expectations for the overall program have not been clearly delineated over the past year and students have not been able to identify the expectations.

Although, O'PLUS practices PBIS or positive behaviors intervention supports, all students did not know expectations at the universal level. In other words, if you asked students if they knew them expectations of the program, they were not able to clearly identify them. Students also could not identify the exit criteria, though most students knew they had to behave and improve in some manner. In order to exit, students had to attend for 90 percent of the time, have at least a B average, no behavioral referrals, and obtain the necessary credits. The exit criteria were very difficult for students to meet, especially in the area of attendance. Students were not attending consistency and the overall attendance rate was at 60 percent. Therefore, students could not meet the exit criteria even if they were meeting in other areas of behavior, grades and credits.

Context

Context is defined by Wagner as the larger organizational systems within which we work, and their demands and expectations, formal and informal (Wagner et al, p. 104 2006). In the area of context in the O'PLUS program, there is a diverse population of students. Therefore, staff has to understand how to work with the families and need to understand diversity. In addition, staff needed to understand how to work with students who are English language learners. In addition, all students had special education needs and had individualized learning plans.

Each of the students in the O'PLUS program also had social and emotional needs, which required sensitivity to the situation, extra support from trained social workers and social and emotional curricula. Students were often referred to the program for behavioral and attendance issues, which required additional interventions for these issues, behavior intervention plans and intensive interventions focused on attendance. The O'PLUS program had to be especially focused on these areas based on the fact that students were referred for the purpose of intervention. In addition, often the parents were not involved.

Competencies

Competencies are defined by the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning (Wagner et al, p. 99, 2006). In the area of competencies, the O'PLUS program needs to prepare students to be college and career ready. This is important since most students are not transitioning back to the high school and are graduating from the program, which may be due to the fact that staff are not teaching the necessary skills to prepare students for life outside of the program. The students

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were being referred to the program because they needed intensive intervention for both social and emotional purposes and academic purposes. Staff need to understand how to provide the necessary supports not only to work within the O'PLUS program, but also to give students the coping mechanisms and skills to transition out of the program for postsecondary school or work. In order to prepare students to be college and career ready, staff need to understand the expectations of the O'PLUS program and the role they play in helping students become successful.

SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To gain a better understanding of how to redefine the O'PLUS program to determine appropriate student outcome measures and to maximize the resources within the program, data were collected and analyzed. First, I conducted two data workshops with staff that included two teachers, two paraprofessionals, two social workers, two administrators, one specialist, one coordinator and one counselor. The data workshop had staff analyze data over a three-year period of time. The second data workshop reviewed the processes and procedures in the handbook. After the data from the workshops were collected, staff received a survey. Lastly, students were interviewed, which focused on statements from a recent student survey conducted by the O'PLUS staff.

Research Design

First of all, it was important to look at the data collected previously in a program evaluation called An Alternative Program To Help Special Education Students Transition Back Into High School: A Program Evaluation (Gruhn, p. 27-32). This data were used in a data workshop with staff (two paraprofessionals, two teachers, a director, a coordinator, a specialist, two social workers and a director), to gain their perspectives. For instance, one of the findings was that attendance over a three-year period of time remained consistent at 75 percent. Teachers and staff had additional information as to why only 11 students over a three-year period of time transitioned back to the high school. By having staff look at the data and gain their perspectives, they were able to give their views on the context and conditions of the

program. (See Appendix A for sample questions to be used during the data workshop.)

During the data workshop participants were given each data question and chart in a packet. The participants were asked to review the data and to discuss the information with an elbow partner. For each question the participants were asked to write down their responses based on the information received.

Another method of data collection was to have adult stakeholders review the current handbook of the O'PLUS program to determine if the entry and exit criteria was followed as well as the established expectations (Program Overview, Appendix B). In order to analyze this information, specific questions were developed. (See Appendix B for questions and directions). This method of data collection assisted in analyzing the current conditions and culture to determine whether expectations were truly unclear or needed to be redefined.

Additionally, a staff survey was designed to determine the needs of the program to maximize resources and defined competencies. (See Appendix C for the survey.) This survey determined what resources it would take to ensure students were college and career ready, as well as what was working for students and the improvements needed to redefine the program.

Lastly, students participated in a group interactive interview in which questions previously given to the students in a form of a survey (Waukegan PLUS Survey Data) on an individual basis were asked to the group. The students were asked if they agree or disagree with the statement. (See Appendix D for the questions.) This group interview touched on the overall satisfaction of the students in the program, and

whether or not they felt prepared for college and a career. Gaining additional information from the student perspective gave the students in a group a way to comment and explain their answers and provided more detailed responses to the previous survey.

Participants

The participants in this study included staff of: two teachers, two paraprofessionals, two social workers, two administrators, one specialist, one coordinator and one counselor, as well as students attending O'PLUS.

Staff

Staff were chosen because they work within the program on a daily basis and/or provided consultation. They provided a broad perspective as they worked closely with students and parents.

Students

All attending students were asked to participate in group interactive interviews. The students were chosen because they previously took a survey on an individual basis and/or they were currently attending the program. This gave the students an opportunity to discuss the results and express their opinions regarding the results. There were 26 students in the program.

Data Collection

The following techniques were used to gather data: two data workshops, (one data workshop focusing on reviewing three years of data and another data workshop focused on analyzing a program handbook), staff survey and a student group interactive interview.

Data Workshops

To collect data during the group data workshop, I used chart paper to provide data collected over a three-year period of time. Each piece of chart paper had a finding. Each staff had a packet of information with the data and a place for them to write their initial thoughts on their packets. Next, they were asked to talk to their neighbors and come to a consensus on information that they wanted to share with the larger group. They were then asked to write their analysis on a sticky note for each finding on the chart paper. Once all of the information was recorded, we did a walk around and had a discussion regarding each finding on the chart. The information was then summarized.

During the second data workshop session staff reviewed the O'PLUS handbook. Using a color-coding system they were asked to highlight areas that were implemented, the areas that were not implemented, and the areas that do not apply. After they highlighted their copy, we had discussions regarding their perceptions. Finally, staff was given an exit slip with the following questions: Do you think we are heading in the right direction? Are we missing anything? Do you have anything else you want to share?

Staff Survey

After the workshops were completed, staff received a survey that focused on attendance, entrance criteria, goal setting, expectations and college and career readiness. The survey used a five-point scale was arranged from one to five, one being strongly disagreed and five being strongly agree. (See Appendix C for a sample survey.)

Student Group Interactive Interview

The student group interactive interview was conducted in two groups. It was important to hear all voices and ensure each student an opportunity to express his or her opinion. Therefore, each question was displayed on chart paper. Students were asked to discuss each question with a partner before they answered. Students were then asked to use a green sticker if they agreed with the statement and a red sticker if they disagreed. They were then asked to share why. Strategies to get some of the students to talk included pulling random names out of a hat, prizes and a variety of interactive techniques.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Techniques</div>

Data Workshop

I identified themes from the responses of the data workshop and determined if expectations were clear, why attendance dropped over three years, whether or not students were college and career ready and whether or not O'PLUS was serving the needs of the diverse population. In addition to identifying themes, exit slips were analyzed to give staff an opportunity to provide additional comments that may or may not have been discussed during the data workshops.

To analyze the data from the handbook review, the researcher determined which areas were mostly highlighted with the designated color, which designated areas from the participants' perspectives were implemented and not implemented.

Staff Survey

To analyze the survey completed by staff, the percentage of strongly agrees, agree, and strongly disagree and disagree were calculated for each category. In

addition, after each section an area for additional comments was used to gather any

other comments for strengths or areas of improvement for the program.

Student Group Interactive Interview

       Student group interview data were analyzed by first calculating the number of

green or red stickers which indicated the percentage of agrees or disagrees with each

statement. Data were organized into themes of expectations, college and career

readiness, and needed resources, as well as strengths of the O'PLUS program.

SECTION FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

The O'PLUS program needs to be redefined, which requires a focus on college and career readiness for students with disabilities, increasing overall attendance, grades, and understanding the expectations of the program. To get an understanding of how to prepare students with disabilities for college and career readiness, and to truly understand the expectations of an alternative program, it is essential to review relevant literature in the areas of college and career readiness for students with disabilities, attendance for students in alternative programs, and behavioral and academic expectations for students in alternative programs.

The O'PLUS program has students who range from the age of 14 to 21 and it is typical for a student to remain in the program and not transition back to the high school. Therefore, it is essential that students be appropriately prepared for college or careers for life after graduation. In *Improving College and Career Readiness For Students with Disabilities,* (Brand et al., 2013) identifies six areas to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This literature review will be organized around these 6 areas that include:

1. Define College and Career Readiness for Students with Disabilities

2. Set High Expectations, Aspirations, and Clear Goals for Students with Disabilities

3. Improve Use of Diagnostic Assessments and Data to Inform Instruction

4. Develop the Capacity of Educators to Use Rigorous Research-based Instructional Practices

5. Improve Access to Guidance, Counseling, and Transition Services

6. Deepen Connections Among K–12 and Other Systems that Provide Supports to Students with Disabilities

Define College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness can be defined in different ways to many different people. However, according to Baird, for students with disabilities it should be defined as preparing students with skills such as independence, self-determination, social and emotional skills and attitudes (e.g. maturity, resiliency, self-management, self-advocacy, and interpersonal relations), college knowledge (e.g., finding the right postsecondary education match, understanding the college application process, and applying for financial aid), critical thinking, lifelong learning, and employment skills. (Brand et al., 2013, p 6.) These skills are essential for all students, but especially for students with disabilities as they often lack one or more of these skills, which need to be taught and included in the students' daily instruction.

According to the New York City Department of Education, college and career readiness is when a student has the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to successfully complete college courses (Parent Guide, p. 9). The parent guide from the New York Department of Education recommends that not only are academics important, but skills and behaviors are essential to college and career readiness. Some of the behaviors and skills noted are: regular attendance, punctuality, cooperation, collaboration, effective communication, respect for self and others, study skills, problem solving and work ethic.

College and career readiness cannot be purely focused on academics. Students

need to be prepared in various skills that will lead to independences and to success after high school. In the O'PLUS program, many of these skills are taught over a period of time. In order to truly define whether or not a student is prepared for college and a career, the skills should be implemented in a defined curriculum to ensure students are being taught the necessary skills. In order to work on those skills, it is essential to set high expectations and set goals for students.

<div align="center">Set High Expectations, Aspirations, and Clear Goals</div>

According to *The National High School Center,* the goals and expectations used to describe what it means to be college and career ready are not explicit, comprehensive, or shared among organizations, states, and districts. Therefore it is important that stakeholders are specific and working toward the same goals and expectations at the District level (Vanessa Hein, Becky Smerdo, Megan Lebow, Jessica Agus, 2012, p. 9). The National High School Center recommends that expectations at the District level should be clear in the areas of core content areas focused on Common Core State Standards; student declared college and career goals; social and emotional skills (self-management, responsible decision making); high-order thinking skills (problem solving, critical thinking); academic success and employability skills (organization and research skills, attendance and engagement); and civic/consumer/life skills (civic engagement, financial literacy and management, information technology) (Vanessa Hein, Becky Smerdo, Megan Lebow, Jessica Agus, 2012, p. 9). Clear expectations are very important for all students. The O'PLUS program was developed with expectations for students such as entrance criteria, attendance criteria and a behavioral leveling system. However, in order to redefine

the O'PLUS program, expectations for college and career readiness must be addressed to specifically focus on academic needs and social emotional needs to provide necessary skills to help the student become a lifelong learner.

Improve Use of Diagnostic Assessments and Data to Inform Instruction

In order to have high expectations for students, it is necessary to use data to make informed decisions and necessary changes. According to the Institute of Education Science, data can be used to: prioritize instructional time; target additional individual instruction for students who are struggling; identify individual students' strengths and instructional interventions that can help students continue to progress; gauge the instructional effectiveness of classroom lessons; refine instructional methods; and examine school-wide data to consider whether and how to adapt the curriculum based on information about students' strengths and weaknesses. (Hamilton, L. et. al. 2009). Utilizing data can be overwhelming at times, however the Institute of Education Science made five recommendations to drive decisions that included: make data an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement, teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals, establish a clear vision for school-wide data use, provide supports that foster a data driven culture within the school, and develop and maintain a district-wide data system. The recommendations for the use of data will be used in the O'PLUS program to make informed decisions regarding instruction and learning.

Develop Capacity to Use Research-based Instructional Practices

In addition to using data to make informed decisions about instruction, it is important to use research-based interventions for students with disabilities. As cited

in the O'PLUS program evaluation, Tomlinson notes that in a differentiated

classroom, a teacher works with two givens: learning requirements and students who

will vary as learners (2014, p. 3). A differentiated classroom requires a teacher who is

a flexible diagnostician willing to work in partnership with students to determine a

strong curriculum that is engaging and can be modified to help the students master the

content (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 4). In addition, high quality instruction is defined as

small group instruction or individualized instruction with many opportunities to

practice new academic skills (Flower, et. al 2011, p. 492).

In the O'PLUS program, students are provided with both an Individual Education

Plan (IEP) and an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Students work at their own pace on

the computer and are provided with instructional supports from the teachers and

paraprofessionals. Direct group instruction is provided based students' needs.

Students also received instruction on real-world experiences, such as taking

transportation in the community, applying for jobs, skills needed in the workplace and

opening a bank account. These instructional skills are necessary to prepare a student

to be college and career ready. Students who are preparing to graduate need access to

their guidance counselors.

Improve Access to Guidance, Counseling, and Transition Services

According to Brand and Valent, students need access to guidance counselors

for planning purposes because research states that students who set college-going

goals early, who have greater exposure to college opportunities, and who are able to

build college knowledge in the middle school and early high school years, have a

greater likelihood of attending postsecondary education (Brand & Valent, 2013 p.

12). Students with disabilities are required by IDEA to have a transition plan in place which: must start before the student turns 16; be individualized; be based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests; and include opportunities to develop functional skills for work and community life (LDA 2013).

In order to properly prepare a student for transition and to develop a document that can be fully implemented, the Learning Disabilities Association recommends identifying the student's vision for his/her life beyond high school; discussing what the student is currently capable of doing in both academic and functional areas; identifying age-appropriate, measurable goals; establish services designed to build on strengths and identify needed accommodations; and define each transition activity on the individualized educational plan regarding who is responsible for the activity and when each activity will begin and end (LDA 2013). By following these recommendations, the O'PLUS program will ensure each student has an individualized transition plan focused on post-secondary outcomes. Not only is it important to have a solid transition plan, but also it is also important to connect students to services inside school as well as outside agencies to prepare them to be college and career ready. In the O'PLUS program the students have a low student to teacher ratio and currently have access to two social workers. These services are essential for the students to grow both academically and emotionally. In addition to school services the O'PLUS program often brings in community leaders to speak about their careers and provide opportunities to job shadow. Research has shown that instruction and supports provided outside the classroom and in the community have an impact on post-school outcomes (White & Weiner, 2004).

Deepen Connections Among K–12 that Provide Supports

In order for students in the O'PLUS program to be prepared for college and careers, the overall attendance needs to increase from the 75 percent average over the last three years. The National Dropout Prevention Center provides strategies to prevent dropping out. Starting at birth and through the early childhood years, schools should identify patterns of attendance and try to engage the family. Once the students reach high school, other strategies should be used, such as service learning. Service learning focuses on core curriculum subjects and integrates service-based projects in the community with innovative techniques to ensure the success of the student. Another strategy may be a school-to-work program where a student is prepared with specific skills to go into a career. Another strategy is to provide afterschool and summer enhancement programs to eliminate information loss and to fill the student's afternoon. In order to improve attendance in the O'PLUS program, many of the research-based strategies presented from the National Dropout Prevention Center can be utilized to ensure students are successful

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Introduction

In the data analysis and interpretation section, the following areas will be discussed in this order: data workshop one- analysis, data workshop two- handbook overview, staff survey, and group interactive workshop. Data workshop one is a data analysis conducted by staff members. Staff reviewed current data and discussed their findings. Data workshop two is a review of the handbook to determine if it was being implemented. The survey was sent to staff members to determine overall strengths and weaknesses of the program. Finally, the group interactive workshop helped determine student opinions. The questions were taken from a previous student survey conducted by the O'PLUS program.

Data Workshop Part One: Staff

In the first data workshop, staff analyzed data collected over a three-year period of time. The first set of data analyzed was attendance, and teachers were asked to analyze the data in Table 1 below and come up with some ideas as to why the O'PLUS attendance was lower than the high school's 93% attendance average.

Table 1: O'PLUS Attendance Over 3 Years

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Total Number of Students (at time of report)	36	24	27
Average Yearly Daily Attendance	**79.5%**	**75%**	**75%**

Staff members noted many issues with the students, their home life, and the fact that

these students had a troubled background. They thought that the criteria could have been one of the issues, but mostly noted that the attendance issues were due to the different abilities and different types of students with various challenges that they had to serve in the program compared to the high school. Staff did not note or take any responsibility for the lower attendance rates. The only issue noted that was program-based and due to the administration and decisions regarding the instruction and staff. Comments that each of staff made on their own focused mostly on external issues that cannot be controlled by the actions of staff such as "home issues" or "troubled youth" and social/emotional difficulties the students were experiencing.

After staff had an opportunity to work individually, they discussed the results as a group. The discussion led to a deeper dive into the data and the group expressed concerns such as that the alternative program is getting some of the most difficult and truant students in the program, yet the truancy officers will not intervene due to the age of the students. Students in special education can be up to age 21, but after 18 they are considered adults and the truancy officer will not intervene.

Another issue that was discussed is that the high school may have a higher attendance rate because some of their more difficult truant students have been removed and placed at the O'PLUS program. Staff also stated that if they have two or three students who are truant, the overall attendance rate is lowered significantly. Therefore, they feel it is important to not only look at overall attendance rate but individual attendance rates. The emotional distress and home issues that the students experience was not only mentioned in the written comments but also expressed openly as a group. Staff stated that the students have such significant emotional issues

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and or emotional distress that at times it causes attendance problems.

The second table analyzed in the data workshop focused on average credits earned. Students need to earn 22 credits to graduate from the high school. Teachers and staff were asked to analyze Table 2 (below).

Table 2: Average Credits Earned

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Student Total (at time of report)	36	24	27
Average Yearly H.S. Credit Earned (100% possible)	89.5%	81%	67%

Many of the written comments about the decreasing credit earned percentage determined causes outside of the control of the students such as: high staff turnover rate, programs changing, lack of leadership and attendance issues. Other reasons for the decrease placed the cause on the students themselves, which include truancy issues, reading abilities and learning styles.

During the discussion, staff stated that in 2011-2012 students were highly motivated and there were a lot of student leaders. In 2012-2013 the curriculum for the program changed and there was a high staff turnover rate. One staff member stated that they had a "tough love, if you fail, you fail" mentality in 2013-2014. During the discussions, staff took more ownership for the credits dropping and the comments that they were making seemed more based on internal factors.

The next question in the data workshop focused on the student demographics. Staff was asked to analyze the table below and determine if there was anything about

the student demographics that stood out.

Table 3: Student Demographics

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Students Total (at time of report)	36	24	27
Female	11	6	2
Male	25	18	25
African American	21	10	8
Hispanic	11	11	16
Multiracial	2	1	-
Caucasian	3	2	3

The demographics were important because O'PLUS was

serving more African American students than Hispanic, even though 70% of the high

school population in Waukegan High School is Hispanic. Furthermore, more male
than females were typically

referred. However, when staff analyzed the data on their own, they did not notice

that the majority of students served were African American. Instead, they commented

on the Hispanic population and stated the demographics were very similar to the high

school.   This data were interesting because staff as a whole focused on the fact

that there were more males than females. Only one staff focused on race and that

there are few Caucasians in Waukegan. Other staff did not focus on the race/ethnicity

of the students in their writing.

During the discussion staff did not have a lot to say about this table. They

questioned the support from home and behaviors of the students. They also wondered

if what they were seeing at O'PLUS was consistent with Waukegan High School.

However, staff did not seem to feel that the data were particularly interesting or

relevant to their work at O'PLUS. Although in their written comments almost all of staff mentioned there were more males than females, there was only one comment during the group discussion regarding gender. One staff member mentioned in the discussion that when they had more females in 2011-2012, it was actually more of a difficult year to handle student behaviors and the dynamic of the program was different.

The fourth question focused on the referrals to the program. The teachers and staff were asked to analyze Table 4 (below) and to determine the reasons for referral to the program and whether or not this was consistent with the intake procedures they are currently using.

Table 4: Referral Reasons

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Behavior	21	12	15
Attendance	5	2	5
Direct Placement	0	2	2
New to District	0	4	2
Unknown/Other	10	4	3

Staff shared that they felt that the chart was consistent with the reason that most students come to O'PLUS, which is for behavior or attendance. However, there seemed to be a lack of understanding or a lack of clear and consistent guidelines in the entrance criteria or the intake procedures.

During the discussion, staff expressed a concern that they were not using this criteria for intake procedures and that the data may not be capturing all of the reasons accurately. For instance, the specialist stated that we should be recording truancy as a reason for referral. Another area of concern was that the term "behavior" should be

broken down into categories. It was explained during the discussion that students might be placed for a behavior such as attendance or an alternative to expulsion, but a student who is violent or has significant behaviors would not be sent to the O'PLUS program based on the criteria established by Waukegan and the O'PLUS program. Staff as a whole stated that if the data more accurately represented the reasons for referrals, that it would help them be more consistent with their intakes.

During the data workshop, staff was asked to summarize their thoughts about Table 5 (below) and analyze how whether or not the graduation rate was successful.

Table 5: Graduation Numbers

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Graduates	4	3	7

The graduation rate was important because it shows how many students are staying in the program until graduation rather than transitioning back to high school In addition, the overall number of students in the program is low, so to have seven students graduate out of 27 is significant. When staff members analyzed these numbers, they found that the number of graduates is representative of the number of seniors that are typically in the program.

When staff discussed these findings they discussed the fact that when the students are motivated, the students will graduate. They also discussed that the graduation numbers may appear low because they may not include the students who have exited the program and have experienced success. Staff were concerned that the numbers were low and that it is important to determine how to best collect graduation data and numbers.

The last question in the data workshop focused on grade point averages of students who transitioned from O'PLUS to Waukegan High School. Staff was asked to analyze data of students who transitioned back to the high school and to notice any specific trends.

Table 6: Numbers of Students Transitioned to HS, GPA and Stayed Full time

Year	Students Transitioned	OPLUS Student Total (throughout year)	GPA (Scale of 4.0)
11-12	4	36	Student A: 2.39 Student B: 2.57 Student C: 2.86 Student D: 2.19
12-13	5	38	Student A: 2.47 Student B: 2.40 Dually Enrollment Student C: 2.81 Dually Enrollment Student D: 2.20 Student E: 2.05 Dual Enrollment
13-14	2	40	Student A: 1.81 Returned back to O'PLUS semester Student B: 2.42 Dual Enrollment

Staff made the following written comments when they reflected on the data on their own:

- What does it mean to be dually enrolled?

- Do students transition back?

These comments staff may not be fully aware of the program goal at O'PLUS since they either didn't comment or did not know that students were able to transition back. When the group discussed this data, they concluded that in 2013-2014 there were many new students that were not ready to transition back to the high school, and in 2011-2012, students had stronger leaders amongst themselves and there was peer

pressure to get back to the high school. In addition, the criteria to transition back to the high school was set very high by both the district and O'PLUS. Staff who were aware of the criteria stated that it was difficult for students to meet 80% attendance, have all A's and to remain at a level four for behavior, which meant no referrals or suspensions. Staff stated that students attend O'PLUS because they are having problems with grades, attendance and behavior, and the criteria that was previously set was not realistic which was the reason for the low transition numbers.

Data Workshop 2 –Program Overview Handbook Review With Staff

The second data workshop reviewed the "Program Overview," which was a handbook developed at the startup of the program to describe the program, intake procedure and student expectations. The adult stakeholders were asked to highlight the areas that are currently being implementing as well as areas not being implementing.

Handbook–What is Being Implemented

The descriptions of the students listed in the program overview are typical students that the O'PLUS program services. It is important to note that the O'PLUS program individualizes based on the needs of the students, and therefore staff were concerned that having a list of characteristics that the program serves may exclude or may not seem like they individualize to the student needs.

Accommodations, Modifications & Behavioral Interventions.

O'PLUS staff work with district personnel to include behavioral accommodations, modifications, and interventions to meet the needs of these students. This is important because other data indicates that students are often referred for behavioral reasons. In fact, according to Table 4, most students in the O'PLUS program over a three-year period of time were referred for behavioral reasons.

Referral Process.

Under the "Referral Process", staff also noted that once the referral is made, O'PLUS is notified and the intake is scheduled with the student and parent. In addition, O'PLUS serves the ELL students as well as students on long-term suspensions or expulsions. The referral process is important because this affects the student make up, demographics, and the overall student population the serves. It is important to ensure that the program is right for the student and that individual needs can be met.

Intake Process.

Under the "Intake Process," the parent and students currently attend a meeting; the student hears the expectations and the goals and outcomes are discussed. This process is important for the parent, student, and program to ensure everyone is on the same page and that clear expectations are established. In addition, it gives the parent and student the opportunity to ask questions, voice concerns, and build a positive relationship with staff.

Student Expectations.

Most of the student expectations are being implemented according to the handbook that includes: goal completion strategies, increasing student achievement, developing positive rapport and increasing student achievement and attendance.

Staffing.

The "Staffing" section is also being implemented. It describes the support to the O'PLUS staff and general descriptions of the roles. Although staff felt it was being implemented, they also felt their specific roles were not identified in this section. For instance, the director role was stated in the handbook, but the specific duties and responsibilities were not defined.

In addition to the above procedures, other areas that are currently being implemented in O'PLUS as stated in the "Program Overview" handbook are: "Students," "Referral Process," "English Language Learner," and "Long Term Suspension or Expulsion." According to staff, these areas are consistently implemented in their daily practices. Staff would like to see the "Student" section updated as they feel that although it is being implemented, the wording can better describe the students and program.

What Is Not Being Implemented

At Risk Predictors.

The first finding was that not all of the "At Risk Predictors" were being implemented. The first "School Factor" that was not implemented was "Two years

behind in reading and/ or math." This is important to note since the O'PLUS program is for special education students and will take students at their individualized levels.

Individualized Learning Plan.

The Individualized Learning Plan is not being implemented in the manner discussed in the overview. Staff noted that they are reviewing the ILP; however, they have developed a different procedure with the district and the O'PLUS program that provides good information and needs to be reflected in the handbook.

Educational Process.

The entire section on the "Educational Process" is not being implemented. Staff explained that they no longer focus on seven educational areas; instead, they are focusing on Common Core State Standards. Another change that has taken place over the year is the methods in the ways the students are instructed. When O'PLUS first opened and the "Program Overview" handbook *was* developed, students were only instructed on the computer. Since then the program has been revised and students are receiving both direct and computerized instruction.

Diagnostic Assessment.

Another area that is different than what is currently being implemented is the "Diagnostic Assessment." All of the assessments listed have changed. This is important because the O'PLUS program is using new and improved assessments to get a better picture of student growth and student needs, which should be reflected in the handbook.

Graduation and Promotion.

Under "Graduation and Promotion" the students are not offered an O'PLUS diploma, instead they are provided with a high school diploma once they have met the graduation requirements.

Learning Center.

The final findings of areas that are not being implemented or have changed include the description of "The Learning Center," specifically the teacher-to-student ratio and the hours of operation. The major areas that are not being implemented as stated in the current "Program Overview" handbook are "Educational Process" and "Diagnostic Assessment." Staff stated that they have changed these areas due to the implementation of Common Core State Standards and increasing expectations for students. Staff felt that these sections needed to be updated to truly reflect the educational program at O'PLUS.

<div align="center">Staff Survey Summary</div>

Six staff at O'PLUS program completed a survey. The survey had a 5-point Likert scale, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The results are as followed.

Statement 1: Students Attend on a Consistent Basis.

One staff gave this a 2 and disagreed and five staff gave this a rating of 3, which is neutral. This is interesting because data indicates that attendance rate is low, but from the conversations we had regarding the data, staff stated that it is usually one or two students that bring the attendance rates down. Therefore, they may have felt that they could not agree or disagree with the statement.

Statement 2: Interventions are in Place to Address Attendance.

All staff either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement except for one person. This was surprising since during the conversation staff discussed the need for attendance interventions for students who were older than 18 and also expressed a true concern for the lack of interventions of attendance. This response in the survey is not consistent with the other findings.

Statement 3: Entrance Criteria is Clearly Defined.

Most staff gave this a rating of a 4 or 5 to agree or strongly agree; however, when we had our discussions regarding the entrance criteria, staff had various views and written comments regarding the entrance criteria that suggest it is not clearly defined or that there is not a clear understanding of it. Therefore, this is not consistent with other information that has been collected.

Statement 4: Students Set Their Own Goals and Monitor Their Progress.

These statements generated responses from disagree, to neutral to strongly agree. This tells me that goal setting may be part of the program but may not be consistently implemented throughout the program.

Statement 5 & Statement 6: Behavioral Expectations are Clearly Defined &
Academic Expectations are Clearly Defined.

On both behavioral and academic expectations, all staff agreed or strongly agreed that expectations are a focus of the O'PLUS program.

Statement 7 & Statement 8: Students are Prepared for College & Students are
Prepared Through Various Experiences of Careers.

The statements on college and career readiness generated a variety of ratings from staff that shows that the O'PLUS program is working on this area but may not be consistently implementing for all staff to recognize this as happening on a regular basis.

Statement 9: The Students' Social and Emotional Needs are Met in the Program.

Staff rated this area of meeting the social and emotional needs with 4s and 5s. This indicates that staff believe that the social and emotional needs of the students are being met.

Statement 10: The Resources in the O'PLUS program are Adequate to Meet the Needs of the Program.

The last area of focus is in resources, and the responses from staff ranged from disagree, to neutral to strongly agree, which indicates that some resources may be available and others may not be available. This may have got various responses because the questions were not specific regarding the type of resources necessary.

The written comments in the areas of strengths and weaknesses provided throughout the survey are consistent with verbal comments made during the discussions in the data workshops.

Strengths of the Program.

This indicates that there have been some positive changes over the years that include schedule changes, curriculum changes and positive relationships between staff, students, and parents.

However, there are some areas that need improvement, including attendance

interventions, some instructional supplies as such as technology and furniture,

development of transition programs, college and career readiness, more staff, and a

change in the hiring and retention process.

<div align="center">Group Interactive Interview</div>

All of the students in the O'PLUS program were given the opportunity to

participate in the student interview, however only seven students returned their

consents and were willing to participate. The student interviews were powerful and

provided a great deal of information and discussion. The students were instructed to

put a red sticker if they disagreed with the statement or a green sticker if they agreed.

During the interviews the students asked if they could use the silver sticker if they

were unsure, therefore this was allowed to make the students more comfortable. After

the students put their sticker on each chart we discussed their answers to get more

information. The students had 18 statements to respond to and discuss the information

with their peers.

Overall the student interactive group interviews were very engaging and

provided a lot of information. The themes that the students had the most to say about

were: 1. The feeling of success was difficult to define; 2. Respect for their teachers

and each other; and 3. Being prepared to graduate.

Theme 1: The feeling of success was difficult to define

The statement in the interactive group interview about being successful

provided a lot of insight because none of the students felt that they could say they

<div align="center">37</div>

were successful. Some of the issues were due to home concerns and others were due to past struggles or behaviors. The statement was, "I feel successful." When this statement was presented all of the students stopped talking and would not put any stickers on the chart and only one student agreed with this statement. One student asked to leave the room. The other students asked if they could say that they were unsure. When asked if anyone wanted to say anything, one student said that he couldn't say he felt successful because he did not get support from his dad. Another student said, "I messed up really bad and now I'm more serious so I am not sure if I am successful." The students expressed that they wanted to be successful but they just weren't sure if they could actually say that they were successful. The students almost seemed conflicted when they came to this question and very reflective. However, it also seemed that they didn't know how to define success.

When the students were presented with the following statement: "I am proud of my work." the students all agreed with the statement and really took the time to express some positives about themselves. One student stated "I am really working hard" and another student stated, "I am almost done." The students did not hesitate when answering this question and were very happy to have the opportunity to talk about how proud they were of themselves. This statement may have been more concrete to the students—they understood what it meant to be proud of their work.

Theme 2: Respect from their teachers and each other

When the statements discussed respect, the students were very vocal about this area during the discussion time. The idea of respect was very important to the students especially when the statements discussed the teachers respecting the

students. When the students were asked if they respected their teachers, they were unsure and for the most part the discussions came down to if the student received respect, they gave respect back to the teacher. The students felt that the teachers were nice; however, the students noted it was a matter of personal space, which meant not reaching in front of the student or grabbing something off of the student's desk without asking. The statement was "I respect my teachers." One student agreed with the statement and other students were unsure. One comment made about this was that "Some days we give attitude back when they give us attitude." The students did not talk about their own behavior or go deeper into this conversation. It was interesting that when they had to reflect about their own behavior it was more difficult for them to interact with each other and the researcher.

When the statement was "I respect other students in my class," the students expressed that they were a family and even if they were mad at each other they would forgive the next day. One student stated, "This is my family at school," and another student stated, "Students get along. We can be mad at each other and the next day we are cool." The students showed that they cared a great deal for each other and spoke highly of their relationships. Overall, respect was very important to the students and definitely something that is earned and not automatic.

Theme 3: Being Prepared to Graduate

Lastly, the statements about attitude improving and being prepared to graduate sparked various conversations with the students. The students expressed a sense of urgency to graduate and to make sure they are taking the right steps to improve;

however, they also seemed a little conflicted and even nervous at the idea of graduating or being prepared for life after high school.

The statement about attitude was, "My attitude about school has improved since I started." Half of the students agreed and the other half were unsure. One student stated, "Now it is time for me to graduate, I don't want to disappoint my grandma." Another student stated, "I got scared and I didn't know what I was going to do next if I didn't change," and another student stated, "I felt like I was going to drop out, and now I want to graduate." The students clearly have changed their attitude and spoke positively about the changes that they have made in themselves.

The statement about graduation was, "I am prepared to graduate." All of the students agreed with this statement. This generated a great deal of conversation. Students commented on: being ready and contacting his parole officer; another student stated she wants to get it out of the way; one student wanted to make money; and another student stated he was nervous. The conversation of graduation brought up various topics for the students based on what was currently happening in their lives. Although the students agreed with the statement, it seemed like the conversations brought up some issues or concerns that the students may be experiencing both inside and outside of school. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the students are prepared to handle the various situations that they may face as graduates in order to prepare them to be college and career ready.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

Introduction

To determine how to redefine the O'PLUS program in order to prepare special education students for college and career readiness, Wagner's 4 C's Diagnostic Tool (2006, p. 109) was utilized establishing a vision of success. Below is how the O'PLUS program is redefined to prepare students for college and career readiness in each of the Four C's. This model is a vision of implementing the program to the fullest extent to ensure the success of all students and includes culture, context, competencies and conditions.

Culture

Expectations for all students are based on college and career readiness standards. Students understand when they come to the O'PLUS program that it is not an alternative program for students with behavior and academic issues, but a program for students who want to succeed, know the definition of success and who want to be college and career ready. The school environment is a positive, safe, and stable place where students, staff and parents want to be. Students have positive relations and respect themselves and staff. Staff respects themselves and the students, as well as the personal space of the student as well as the learning needs of each individual. Student changes or enrollment changes does not affect the stability or positive culture of the environment. Therefore, students who enter the program in the middle of the year learn the routines, positive culture and are respected by all. Communication between O'PLUS and the district is open and effective. Adult stakeholders collaborate as a team. By teaming up, the staff problem the staff works together to

promote a positive environment, and participate in a professional learning community.

<div align="center">Context</div>

The context of the O'PLUS program has a diverse population that is representative of the student population in Waukegan High School. The O'PLUS program serves students who have special education needs and provide individualized services that not only focus on academic skills but also social and emotional needs. The entrance and exit criteria are clearly defined in the new parent and student handbook. This information is shared and communicated to all stakeholders. There is high parental involvement that includes a mentoring program, Parent University and opportunities for parents to visit and volunteer throughout the year.

<div align="center">Competencies</div>

Students have a clear understanding of academic expectations and know what it truly means to be college and career ready through the use of the Common Core State Standards, District Developed Standards and individualized goals and progress. Students understand behavioral expectations and receive positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. All students feel successful and understand what it means to be successful. In addition, students monitor their own behavioral/social and emotional goals and objectives. Students attend for more than 95 percent of the time to prepare for college and career readiness. Students have a transition plan to ensure goals are clearly defined for life after school. Students monitor their own progress towards meeting their goals and work in collaboration

with staff to ensure that they are taking the necessary steps towards meeting their

transition goals.

Condition

Students meet expectations and monitor their own performance through

formative assessments, progress monitoring, and collaboration meetings with a

mentor/staff for support. Students will attend more than 95 percent of the time. If

they are unable to attend, the student contacts the O'PLUS program to obtain work or

extra support. Students monitor their own behavioral expectations by checking in and

out with staff, monitoring their own behavioral level and processing their social

emotional daily goals with a social worker or staff mentor. PBIS is evident

throughout the center because expectations are clear, respect is mutual between staff

and students, and behavioral tiered systems of support are implemented with fidelity.

Academic expectations are clearly defined by the standards; students understand the

academic expectations, which are challenging yet achievable. Students work with

rigor and monitor their academic progress and IEP goals and objectives in

collaboration with their staff mentor.

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

Introduction

Moving forward, research states that in order to prepare students with special needs in alternative programs for college and career readiness, it is necessary to: 1. Set high expectations, aspirations, and clear goals, 2. Improve use of diagnostic assessments and data to inform instruction, 3. Develop the capacity of educators to use rigorous research-based instructional practices, 4. Improve access to guidance, counseling, and transition services, 5. Deepen connections among K–12 and other systems that provide supports (Brand et al., 2013). The following strategies and actions will be used to redefine the O'PLUS program in order to prepare students for college and career readiness.

Table 7: Strategies and Actions

Strategy	Action
Redefine Entrance Criteria	- Review Handbook and rewrite handbook - Define entrance criteria
Redefine Exit Criteria	- Review handbook and rewrite handbook - Define exit criteria
Clearly define expectations	- Work with staff and students to define universal behavioral expectations to reinforce PBIS - Clearly define academic expectations. - Develop goal-setting tools for students. - Develop monitoring tools for staff and students. - Define expectations for respect for Students and Staff
Increase attendance	- Develop specific interventions will staff to increase attendance - Develop monitoring tools

	• Increase communication between home and OPLUS
Increase college and career readiness	• Develop individualized portfolios • Focus on individual plans of each student. • Monitor student progress on a bi-weekly basis • Students will monitor their own progress and set goals. • Provide community and onsite training. • Provide job-shadowing opportunities. • Explore Colleges • Mentoring/Collaboration meetings with a staff

Entrance Criteria

Redefining the entrance criteria provides staff clear guidance on which students are accepted into the program. Staff are then able to focus on the necessary areas to prepare students to be college and career ready.

Exit Criteria

Redefining the exit criteria gives both staff and students a clear definition of the end goal and criteria for leaving the O'PLUS program. The exit criteria must be obtainable, but also allow students to meet their goals of either to returning to the high school or transitioning to the next step of being college and career ready.

Expectations

Expectations must be clearly defined for academics, behavior, and to ensure a culture of respect between the students and staff. By clearly defining expectations, students understand how to monitor their own progress, what it means to achieve goals, and have a clear understanding of what it means to be successful.

Student Attendance

Student attendance will increase through the use of interventions and a change in the learning environment. Increased attendance means that students have more time with the teachers, more time for learning, and more time to prepare for college and career.

College & Career Readiness

In order to prepare for college and career readiness, the students engage in various activities that include building a portfolio and resume, gaining work experience, job shadowing, developing a transition plan that focuses on career, and completing applications for colleges and jobs.

By utilizing the above strategies and actions, the O'PLUS program will be redefined as a program based on research that has high expectations for students receiving special education services. This program will focus on the future of these students to prepare them for a life beyond high school. The data collected in this research study—the data workshops, survey and student interviews—reflect a need to focus on the above strategies and to maintain many of the strengths such as the small student-to-teacher ratio; the new structure, leadership and curriculum; and the counseling and resources available to students.

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Appendix A

Adult Stakeholders Data Workshop: Part One

Data Analysis

1. In Table 1 what do you notice about the attendance rate for the last 3 years? The

high school averages 93%, why the difference? What does this mean?

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Student Total (at time of report)	36	24	27
Average Attendance	79.5%	75%	75%

2. In Table 2, what do you notice about the average credit earned over the last three

years? Why do you think there was a decrease in 2013-2014?

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Student Total (at time of report)	36	24	27
Average Credit Earned	89.5%	81%	67%

3. Is there anything of note in Table 3 about the O'PLUS student population?

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
O'PLUS Student Total (at time of report)	36	24	27
Gender	Number of Students	Number of Students	Number of Students
Female	11	6	2
Male	25	18	25
African American	21	10	8
Hispanic	11	11	16
Multiracial	2	1	-
Caucasian	3	2	3

4. In Table 4, what do you notice about the reasons for referral to the program? Does this seem consistent with the intake procedures and criteria we are currently using?

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Referral Reason	Number of Students	Number of Students	Number of Students
Behavior	21	12	15
Attendance	5	2	5
Direct Placement	0	2	2
New to District	0	4	2
Unknown/Other	10	4	3

5. In Table 5, what are your thoughts on the number of students who graduate each

year from the program? What does this say about the program and its success rate?

Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Graduates	4	3	7

6.   In Table 6 on transition data, is there anything significant you notice or specific

trends?

Table 6 Year	Students Transitioned	Students Enrolled (throughout year)	GPA (Scale of 4.0)
11-12	4	36	Student A: 2.39 B: 2.57 Student C: 2.86 Student D: 2.19
12-13	5	38	Student A: 2.47 Student B: 2.40 Dual Enrollment Student C: 2.81 Dual Enrollment Student D: 2.20 Student E: 2.05 Dual Enrollment
13-14	2	40	Student A: 1.81 Returned back to O'PLUS semester Student B: 2.42 Dual Enrollment

7. Do you have any additional comments regarding the data you just reviewed or
additional observations?

Appendix B

Adult Stakeholders Data Workshop: Part Two

Review of Program Overview Handbook

Directions to Group:

1. Please take a half an hour and review the "Program Overview" of the O'PLUS program. As you read highlight the areas that are implemented with the green highlighter. Areas that are NOT implemented highlight with the yellow highlighter. If you are not sure, put a question mark (?), next to that section.

2. After you are done reviewing the "Program Overview" and you have highlighted. Please take the next 10 minutes to discuss with a partner.

3. After you shared out with your partner, please determine one person to report your findings to the group. The information will be recorded on the chart paper. Please feel free to add additional information and participate in the discussion.

Exit Slip:

1. What did you learn from the review of the "Program Overview"?
2. What additional comments do you have or want noted?

Appendix C

Appendix C-O'PLUS Staff Survey

O'PLUS Survey

Students attend on a consistent basis.

* Required

1. **Attendance. ***
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

2. **Attendance ***
   Interventions are in place to address attendance.
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

3. **Entrance Criteria ***
   The entrance criteria is clearly defined.
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

4. **Goal Setting ***
   Students set their own goals and monitor progress
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

5. **Goal Setting ***
   Staff members set goals for students and regularly update the progress.
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

6. **Expectations** *

Behavioral expectations are clearly defined.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

7. **Expectations**

Academic expectations are clearly defined
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

8. **College and Career Ready** *

Students are prepared through various experiences for careers.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

9. **College and Career Ready** *

Students are prepared for college.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

10. **Social and Emotional Needs**

The students' social and emotional needs are met in the program.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

11. **Resources** *

The resources in the O'PLUS program are adequate to meet the needs of students.
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

Appendix D

Student Group Interactive Interview

Directions:

1. There are statements listed on each piece of chart paper. Please use your
   sticker to mark on the chart paper whether or not you agree or disagree with
   the statement. You will use a green dot if you agree with the statement and a
   red dot to disagree. If you need help reading the statement, please ask your
   teacher, paraprofessional or other adult in the room to assist.

Statements:

- I feel safe and secure at the O'PLUS School.

- My teachers give me feedback on my progress and my behavior.

- I feel successful at school.

- I am proud of the work I have done.

- The teachers work with me and encourage me.

- I like being at O'PLUS.

- I can concentrate here, can get my work done and I am not distracted by
  others.

- My teachers respect me.

- I respect my teachers.

- I respect other students in my class.

- My attitude about school has improved since I started.

- I am prepared to move to the next grade or graduate.

- My attendance has improved.

- My behavior has improved.

- My academic courses are challenging yet achievable.

- I like using technology to help me learn.

- I work harder at O'PLUS than at my last school.

- I make better life choices.

2. After you are done marking your answers with your green or red dot on the chart paper, we will discuss the results.

3. Please feel free to comment, participate and ask questions.