

Annual Program Evaluation of DoDEA Project – Qualitative Data Example

Executive Summary

Through Red Apple Connect: Connecting Students to Support Opportunities, the Red Apple County Schools seeks to set up a model, multi-tiered support program focused on K-12 military students who are dealing with academic and/or social needs as a result of the impact of deployments, wounded warriors, and transfers within and out of the school system. Overall, the program has met the initial, process benchmarks for project year one. Baselines for measuring summative outcomes were established. Surveys were developed, piloted, and baseline satisfaction measures were taken for program participants. Current graduation and dropout rates for high school military students were calculated.

The program has already established a strong counseling and support program within the county. Two Transition Counselors (TCs) were hired in November of 2009 to provide academic and emotional guidance for the Red Apple County School district. Their primary roles include facilitating deployment support groups in elementary schools, reviewing transcripts of incoming students, participating in community outreach sessions, reinstating a Student-to-Student (S2S) mentoring program in middle and high schools and counseling individual students as needed. The TCs feel they are meeting a need that has been present for a long time and providing resources for a population that should not be overlooked.

Based on feedback obtained from surveys and focus groups, the support groups, individual counseling and resources resulted in positive impacts after just one semester of implementation. The individual counseling programs are well underway, and the TC's are working to document the procedures they are developing for identifying, contacting and determining the needs of incoming students and students affected by parental deployments. Over one quarter of the county's 42 schools have established military family support groups to provide ongoing support to the entire community. The focus for this program for year two will be expansion of these groups to the remaining schools. The S2S program is in the initial stages and training was the focal point during year one. Mentors have been trained at six of the eight high schools. It is recommended that year two begin with focusing on marketing the program to freshmen and transfer students, facilitating events and recruiting new mentors, as well as initiating the program at the remaining high school.

It is also recommended that project management continue supporting the transitional counseling program as much as possible as it has met or exceeded all initial benchmarks. Brainstorming regarding a sustainability plan should begin taking place in year two.

Project Description

Project Goal: Establish System-wide Transition Counseling Program that meets the needs of military students

Strategy 1: Hire and train transition counselors to provide academic and emotional guidance to military students in Red Apple County Schools

Strategy 2: Form partnerships with DoDEA Counselors & military school liaison to plan & implement outreach sessions for all military-connected families and students

Strategy 3: Implement Student-to-Student support groups for transitioning students at all High schools

The Red Apple County School District has 34,000 PK-12 students enrolled in its 42 educational facilities: 23 elementary schools, nine middle schools, eight high schools, one early childhood development center and one alternative learning center. The community is rife with a large, military population whose families move on a frequent and regular basis. Of the total number of students in the district, 40% are military-connected. For school years 2007-08 and 2008-09, 84% of Red Apple's military students were impacted by a family member's deployment. Although there are no statistics at the district level measuring such factors, it is estimated that over one third of the students in the county move into, out of, or between districts during each academic school year. Through Red Apple Connect: Connecting Students to Support Opportunities, the Red Apple County School System will provide students the opportunity to assimilate into school environments through a model transition program focused on K-12 military students who are dealing with academic and/or social needs regarding the impact of deployments, wounded warriors, and transfers within and out of the school system. The project has three components: an individual counseling program for students impacted by transitions (transfer or deployment), ongoing outreach to military families through support groups, and a mentoring program for high school students transferring into the school system.

Red Apple Connect is progressing into its second year of funding as of October 1, 2010. Project management prepared a great deal in the months leading up to funding on October 1, 2009. Once the project received funding, the project staff positions were filled on October 6, 2009.

Both TCs started on November 2, 2009. Initially, they familiarized themselves with the district, attended professional development, set up support groups and acquainted themselves with the S2S program. In addition to general transitional support (e.g., academic transcript review, one-on-one counseling), the TCs are expected to plan and implement outreach sessions, facilitate deployment and military support groups for students at individual schools and initiate Student-to-Student (S2S) groups in all middle and high schools. The TCs facilitated support groups at 12 of 42 schools during the 2010 spring semester. The S2S program has been launched and students have begun the process of becoming S2S Mentors as a result of the TCs efforts. Six of eight Red Apple County high schools have been trained in the program. Additionally, Transition Counselors participated in 14 community outreach activities during the first semester of project implementation.

Evaluation Design and Procedures

The primary framework for the evaluation of Red Apple Connect follows an outcomes measurement scheme, which is an efficient organizer for the large amount of individual activities and outcomes planned during project implementation. This framework provides the opportunity to use data to strengthen activities, target effective activities for expansion, identify training needs and prepare long-range plans. The data collection methods selected for the outcomes framework includes both qualitative and quantitative tools and methods including surveys, interviews, activity logs, observations and document review. The mixed-method approach provides for increased validity of measurement through triangulation, as well as insight into project activities and outcomes.

The project aims a) to increase socio-emotional support for military students, b) decrease strain of transition on military students, c) increase collaboration between schools, military and community in dealing with transitional/deployment issues with children. Project progress will be assessed by student/parent satisfaction with the program, and the degree to which program elements are successfully implemented throughout the system. The negative impacts of these issues have been linked to increased dropout rates and failure to accumulate credits towards on-time high school graduation. The summative outcome of the program is anticipated to be an increase in on-time graduation rate and a decrease in dropout rate for military connected students in the high schools. Benchmarks for these figures must be established in the first year as they have not previously been calculated for this subgroup.

Multiple surveys, observations and interviews were carried out by the evaluator during year one. Activity logs and documents were collected, reviewed and analyzed for evaluation purposes. Baselines for on-time graduation and annual dropout rates for military students were calculated. This report contains data collected during the evaluation. A description of each data collection instrument is located in Appendix I.

Table 1: Data sources used to evaluate interim outcomes

Evaluation Goal	Data Sources Used in Year 1	Time Implemented
Establish System-wide Transition Counseling Program that meets the needs of military students	Support Group Satisfaction Survey	April – June 2010
	Transition Counselor Logs	April 2010
	Annual Interviews	April 2010
	S2S Mentor Survey	May 2010
	S2S Advisor Survey	May 2010
	Outreach Session Satisfaction Survey	May 2010
	Collaborator Informal Interviews Document Review	May 2010
	Outreach Session Observation	June 2010 – baseline
Graduation Records	Ongoing	

Findings

Each strategy was evaluated to determine the progress and effects of the program as described below.

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent were the project strategies implemented as planned in year one?

Table 2: Key Outputs for Evaluation Question 1

Strategy 1	
# of transition counselors hired	2 – complete
# of PD activities attended	101 – including High School Summit, Resilience with Military Children workshop, Women in Combat, Military Child Education Coalition Conference, and S2S training
# of students served by TCs	3,354 (of approximately 9200 military connected students in the system)
# of contact hours logged	208
Development and utilization of comprehensive counseling plan to assist K-12 military Students	TCs are developing plan as they complete PD – written draft not yet available
Strategy 2	
# of community outreach sessions held	21
# of attendees	563
# of contact hours	42
# of military support groups set up	12 out of 42 schools in system
# of students served by support groups	497
Strategy 3	
# of S2S groups set up	6 out of 8 high schools
# of outreach programs presented	10 (4 of which were joint programs for multiple schools) = at least 2 per school
# of students successfully completing training	35
# of transitioning students who received a mentor	Data not yet available

Results indicate that Strategy 1 has been fully implemented, and only documentation of procedures is incomplete. Strategy 2 has been implemented at 28% of the 42 schools. With a 3-year timeline for the project, it will be necessary to increase the rate at which groups are initiated in the next two years to achieve full implementation. However, the facilitators completed many PD activities in preparation for working with military families in the first year, and have developed procedures for organizing and facilitating groups. Strategy 3 is the least far along, with training only initiated at 6 out of 8 schools, and no mentoring activities yet taking place.

Evaluation Question 2: How has the comprehensive transitional counseling program met the needs of military students and their families?

The data to evaluate this question came primarily from Interviews and surveys as listed in Table 1.

Strategy 1: Activities of Transitional Counselors

TCs reported that they established deployment support groups, reviewed transcripts of incoming students, participated in any community event about military services, initiated S2S groups, conducted

outreach sessions, counseled individual students and assisted where needed. TCs feel they are meeting a need that has been present for a long time and providing resources for a population that should not be overlooked. TCs indicated that students are extremely excited to participate in the deployment support groups and get upset when they miss a session or cannot attend due to academic reasons.

Strategy 2: Outreach and Support Groups

Outreach session participants indicated that the session location was convenient for them to attend. The format was easy for them to follow and the topics presented were relevant to the students that they work with. The majority of participants agreed that the information they learned in the session will help them better understand the effects of military life on adolescents. Participants appeared to be engaged and appreciative of the Transition Counselors information. Participants responded that the resources and references that they obtained during the outreach session was the most useful component.

Sixty-four percent of support group participants indicated that they made new friends during the sessions. Eighty-five percent of support group participants indicated that talking with other military students made them realize that other military children feel a lot like they do. The majority of support group participants reported that the topics presented in the sessions were relevant to their families and they enjoyed talking about them with the group. Comments recorded on the survey forms indicated that participants seemed to especially enjoy the craft activities, which provided a creative outlet for expressing what they were feeling. Parents also noted that were very thankful for the opportunity these groups gave their children to verbalize their feelings and receive support from a counselor and their fellow peers. In regards to future sessions, parents would like emphasis to be placed on how to handle your emotions constructively and not let them get in the way of schoolwork and relationships.

Strategy 3: S2S Mentoring Program

The majority of participants trained for the S2S Mentor program agreed that the S2S Mentor training helped them to understand the needs of transitional students better. When participants were asked, "What qualities and/or skills have you gained or strengthened from attending the S2S Mentor training?" The qualities/skills that received the most responses were responsibility, communication, teamwork, understanding and consideration of others.

Transition Counselors reported that high schools have been very receptive to the re-instatement of S2S groups and they will begin working on the middle schools in the fall of 2010. S2S programs have been launched in six of the eight high schools. At those schools, advisors for the program have been trained and thirty-five high school students have begun the process of becoming S2S Mentors because of the TCs' efforts. The S2S Mentor Survey and the S2S Advisory Survey showed that this program is in the initial implementation phase. Planning has taken place and training has been carried out but the actual program has not had time to be integrated into any of the six high schools thus far. Current participants in the S2S program reported that they are really enjoying the program thus far. The weakest areas reported from both the S2S Advisors and Mentors was in reference to the identification of transitioning students and marketing the program to new students.

Evaluation Question 3: How has the comprehensive transitional counseling program improved negative impacts typically associated with highly transitional students?

In 2009-2010, seven percent of the military-connected high school students formally withdrew from school, or left the Red Apple County School District without transferring. There was some discussion among administrators as to whether this was an appropriate measure of the dropout rate. It was decided to use this measure (withdrawals plus leavers) for this program because longitudinal student data is being tracked for the purposes of the project. This rate is somewhat higher than the dropout rate calculated for official reporting purposes. Analysis of transcripts and graduation records indicated that in June 2010, 69% of military-connected students enrolled in grades 9-12 had completed the necessary credits to be able to graduate on time from a Red Apple County High School. These figures will be used as a baseline to assess improvements in years two and three of the transitional counseling program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Implementation of all levels of the comprehensive counseling program for transitional students has progressed as planned. More than one third of all military-connected students had contact with a counselor in one of the three formats (individual counseling, support groups, S2S). The TCs have established processes for reviewing transcripts of incoming students, participating in community outreach sessions, reinstating the S2S groups in middle and high schools and counseling individual students where needed. Out of 42 schools, 12 had fully implemented support groups during the 2010 spring semester. This is a major accomplishment requiring training, outreach to the community and facilitation on the part of the TCs to start each group. Now that more information is in the community about these groups and models have been established, it is anticipated that the remaining schools will develop programs at a faster rate next year. Transition Counselors reported that high schools have been very receptive to the reinstatement of S2S groups. Six out of eight high schools have recruited and trained mentors to begin implementing the program next year. Transition Counselors have built strong collaborations with the Military Liaisons. The TCs feel they are meeting a need that has been present for a long time and providing resources for a population that should not be overlooked. Surveys and interviews of participants in each of the three programs indicate satisfaction with all of the programs. Topics for future support group programs were suggested by participants, and the needs that will have to be met for continued implementation of the S2S program were evaluated. The system-wide transition counseling program has been substantially implemented in year 1 and has been very successful.

Recommendations for areas that need to be addressed in order to complete implementation and improve program processes are:

- Complete a written, comprehensive counseling plan for assisting K-12 military students. While transition counselors indicated that they are still developing all the components of the program, it is essential to have some sort of working draft of the plan, especially for purposes of continuity.
- Continue holding community outreach programs and establishing support groups throughout the school system. The majority of participants in the 12 established support groups found them relevant and enjoyable. This should be a priority for the remaining schools in the system.
- Develop and disseminate information on identifying and recruiting transitioning students to utilize the S2S program. Mentors and advisors have been trained, but no students have been served. While implementation could not have proceeded until mentors and advisors were trained and ready, feedback from surveys indicates that they may not be able to proceed as planned without this additional information.
- Begin sustainability planning for program in year two. All the activities of the comprehensive transitional counseling program are supported by the TCs whose positions are funded by the current DoDEA Partnership Grant. Services have been supplied by the TCs to approximately one third of all military-connected students in Red Apple County Schools in the first year of the program, and it is anticipated that this contact will expand as the Support Groups expand to the remaining schools. It is clear that there was an extensive, unmet need for services and that the district must begin planning how to continue to provide these services into the future.