Communities In Schools of North Carolina is leading the national network in providing the most effective student supports and wraparound interventions and supports directly in schools to support students and teachers. Working collaboratively with 400 schools across North Carolina, Communities In Schools impacts the lives of more than 230,000 youth each year. Driven by research-based practices surrounding the best predictors of student success – attendance, behavior, coursework and parent and family engagement – Communities In Schools is changing the picture of education for students across North Carolina. Learn more about Communities In Schools of North Carolina at www.cisnc.org.

The Nonprofit Evaluation Support Program (NESP) is a collaborative effort between two University of North Carolina Greensboro organizations – The SERVE Center and The Office of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Services (OAERS). NESP's mission is to provide program evaluation services and program evaluation capacity building support to nonprofit and community-based organizations while providing authentic learning experiences for future leaders in the field of program evaluation.

The SERVE Center at The University of North Carolina Greensboro is a university-based research, development, dissemination, evaluation, and technical assistance center. For more than 24 years, SERVE Center has worked to improve K-12 education by providing evidence-based resources and customized technical assistance to policymakers and practitioners.

The University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) is one of the sixteen university campuses of The University of North Carolina. UNCG holds two classifications from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as a "research university with high research activity" and for "community engagement" in curriculum, outreach, and partnerships.

Table of Contents

Overview

CISNC Introduction

In the 2014-2015 school-year, Communities In Schools of North Carolina (CISNC) introduced a framework that aligns site and student metrics and interventions and supports to four areas that have been shown to have the greatest impact on student success: attendance, behavior, coursework, and parent involvement, or ABC+P. Both combined and individually, attendance, behavior, and coursework are among the best predictors of a student's academic success and on-time graduation. While collecting data around ABC+P is critically important to understanding the school and student, it is even more important to use the data to drive high impact intervention and support delivery to empower each student to reach their full potential. To this end, Communities In Schools of North Carolina has partnered with the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to design curricula specifically for CIS within the ABC+P framework to enhance student outcomes in school and success in life. This document is one of more than 50 modules developed to support local CIS staff and most importantly the students that are served. We encourage you to explore all of the modules available online at www.cisnc.org.

Using Evidenced-Based Strategies

There are a multitude of strategies that claim to address attendance, but there are few that actually do so for all students. We suggest that schools use an evidence-based, decision-making model to ensure that high quality information informs the decisions made.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education defines evidence-based decision making as routinely seeking out the best available information on prior research and recent evaluation findings before adopting programs or practices that will demand extensive material or human resources (including both funding and teacher time) and/or affect significant numbers of students (Whitehurst, 2004).

CISNC uses the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework as the basis for its practices. RTI is a multitiered framework of academic and behavioral interventions that require school staff to make instructional decisions based on data. This document focuses on a Tier Two strategy. Tier Two strategies typically focus on students who have not responded to Tier One supports and include supplemental instruction and interventions that are periodically monitored to ensure students are responding to the supports. Tier Two supports are targeted, structured, explicit, and can take place in small groups or general education classrooms.

CISNC calls for the use of evidence-based interventions versus generally researched practices. The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) defines evidence-based interventions as:

... an intervention for which data from scientific, rigorous research studies have demonstrated (or empirically validated) the efficacy of the intervention. Applying findings from experimental studies, single-case studies, or strong quasi-experimental studies, an evidence-based intervention improves student learning beyond what is expected without that intervention (Center on Response to Intervention [Center on RTI] at American Institutes for Research and the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII), 2014, p. 4).

A research based curricula "may" incorporate strategies that have been generally researched, but not studied using a rigorous research design. The following suggestion is based on interventions that have been studied using a scientific, rigorous research design. When incorporated with fidelity and as part of a systematic process, students should positively respond to these strategies.

This document is written to provide schools with strategies to be used with Tier Two targeted students who are chronically absent or are at risk of chronic absenteeism. In the context of our review, we propose two strategies designed to reduce student absenteeism:
- Breakfast Club
- Family Connections

Problem/Rationale

Improving test scores as a means for raising educational gains receives greater local and national focus than does attendance; however, studies indicate that middle school attendance is more predictive of passing high school than middle school test scores and is as predictive of high school grades as is high school test scores (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & de la Torre, 2014).

Chronic absenteeism is one of the major problems faced by teachers and administrators. When students miss too many school days, it can negatively impact their academic achievement, be disruptive to classroom instruction as teachers have to shift attention to students who need to catch up with the rest of the class, as well as have a negative effect on the overall school climate. Students who do not attend school or will not attend school may be positively influenced by a stronger sense of engagement and belonging at school. Students who feel that adults in school care about them and value them may be more likely to attend school (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Monitoring attendance daily is the first step schools can take to identify students who may experience chronic absenteeism. Schools will then need to explore reasons students are absent from schools in order to find solutions to reduce absenteeism.

Student absenteeism may fall into three categories:
1. those who cannot attend school,

2. those who will not attend school, and
3. those who do not attend school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Students' academic achievement is most strongly associated with high family expectations for success as well as constant communication with students about their school activities (Castro et al., 2015). Structured school-family partnership programs that equip families to help their child academically, encourage greater participation in their child's academic journey, and connect with families at all income and education levels will attract families who are unlikely to become involved on their own (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Similarly, promoting a school-wide culture and climate that encourages positive behaviors while reinforcing the school's expectations, including regular, on-time attendance, is one of the strategies that schools can use to influence student outcomes (Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a process for planning, implementing, and evaluating a Family Connections program in middle schools to help students and families better engage with school staff and community resources to reduce barriers and increase school attendance

Implementation Plan

Uses

Student Support Specialists can use the information provided in this guide to develop a Family Connections program to be used with families whose students have been identified as chronically absent or exhibit indicators of becoming chronically absent.

Audiences

The primary audience is the Student Support Specialist.

Materials/Equipment/Space

- Student data
- List/directory of community resources
- Incentives for students

Note: For presentations, check for access to computer, Smartboard or data projector and screen, relevant power cords, and remote slide advancer.

Time

The Student Support Specialist will need to dedicate time:

- Daily/weekly: connect with students and families, conduct home visits, attend parent-teacher conferences, etc.
- Daily: 1.5-2 hours to lead or facilitate after-school learning activities (e.g., Career Camp).
- Monthly: 1-1.5 hours monthly for family support network meetings.
- Semester: 2-4 hours per semester to review and analyze data with School Attendance Team and/or teachers, to evaluate implementation of the program, and to assess whether additional interventions/supports may be necessary for specific students.

Sample Intervention – *Family Connections*

Activity	Lead Responsibility	Process Notes
Set Goals for the Family Connections Program* (*Adapted from Attendance Works PEOPLE strategy. For additional information, visit *http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools-people/*.)	Student Support Specialist	*Work with the School Attendance Team early in the school year (e.g., within the first few weeks of school) to identify positive ways to connect students and families to school staff and provide extra support to overcome barriers to attendance. It is important that students and families do not feel singled out or branded because of the extra support. Also, the Family Connections program can/should be integrated with other Positive Behavior Interventions (PBIS) or Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies.* *Connect with community agencies and develop a directory of who can provide extra family supports.* - *Solicit additional supports that can be used as incentives for families (e.g., gifts for students who meet attendance goals).*
Identify Students	School Attendance Team	*Use data to identify students who may benefit from the Family Connections program. Consider:* - *Chronic absence (student missed 10% or more of school in the prior year).* - *Students who missed 2 days in the first two weeks of school, 2-3 days in the first month, or four days in the first 8 weeks of school.* - *Students/Families with low income.* - *Students in transitional grades (e.g., 6th grade).* - *Discipline referrals.* - *Teacher referrals.* **Note: The Student Support Specialist will need to sign a confidentiality agreement with the school to view individual student data. See sample confidentiality form at http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Confi-Agreement-CBO-5-4-11.pdf*
Connect and Engage Students	Student Support Specialist	*Work with student to set personal attendance/behavioral goals.*

Activity	Lead Responsibility	Process Notes
		- *Work with student to develop personal strategies for meeting goals.* - *Consider incentives for meeting goals and/or showing marked improvements.* - *Track daily student attendance. Follow-up immediately with absent students and families in a positive way. For example, check in to make sure that everything is alright with student rather than to reprimand for missed school day.* - *Meet with student and parents together to share student's personal goals. Explore ways to support these goals in school and at home.* - *Connect student to personal mentor/buddy. See Attendance Buddies module.* *Expose student to positive learning activities to foster improved attendance and behavior. For example, develop engaging before-or-after school programs or activities matched to student interest and level of need.* ***Sample Program: After-School Career Camp*** *Camp can be broken into units (e.g., STEM, life skills, etc.).* - *Set daily school attendance requirement as criteria for participation (i.e., no school, no camp).* - *Send special letters of invitation to at-risk students to participate in the program.* - *Invite teachers, parents and community leaders to lead highly interactive sessions (e.g., hands on activities).* - *Schedule one special monthly family session where family members are also "students" and interactive activities are designed for family involvement.* - *Incorporate regular (e.g., monthly) weekend service learning projects that involve the entire family. For example, one activity could be to make soap together. An add-on to the activity could be to have the family serve at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter and give away the soap.* - *Allow students to give suggestions for lesson topics and speakers.* - *Allocate time for students to work on homework/provide homework support.* - *Require parental contract/agreement for student participation. Share program benefits for students/families (e.g., technical/vocational skills,, academic support, after-school care, etc.). Make school attendance requirements explicit.* - *Secure community participation to help support the program (e.g., donations/funding for supplies, snacks, etc.).*

Activity	Lead Responsibility	Process Notes

Connect with Families	Student Support Specialist	*Work with Student Support Team to establish and implement a Student Attendance Success Plan.*
		- *Invite parents to be part of the planning process.*
		- *Work with teachers as a liaison/additional point of contact for families. For example, be available to participate in parent-teacher conferences to provide extra support to families.*
		- *Call families regularly to discuss student progress. Offer additional resources.*
		- *Conduct home visits with families to establish face-to-face connection and to find out/monitor areas where extra support can be provided (e.g., transportation, health needs, social services, etc.).*
		- *Send home middle of the year letter*
		  • *Praise student and family for their efforts, if improvement shown. Encourage them to keep up the good work.*
		  • *Incorporate school attendance policy reminder.*
		
		Access Student Attendance Success Plan documents (in English and Spanish) at:
		http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/student-success-plan-facilitator-handout
		
		Establish a family support network.
		- *Facilitate a monthly meeting to help families build relationships with other families in the community.*
		- *Build parental knowledge and skills to academically support and set high expectations and boundaries for their child.*
		- *Encourage shared ownership for success of network. For example, ask for volunteers to lead the sessions, bring food, establish carpools, share experiences, etc.*
		- *Establish a transportation network (e.g., carpool, parent buddy system, etc.) to ensure that students attend school and arrive on time.*
		- *Recruit network members to serve as mentors/tutors/volunteers for learning activities.*
		- *Invite new families to the school/community to participate.*
		
		Work with community agencies to promote a "Positive Attendance Campaign."
		- *For example, place posters around the community in places frequented by families (e.g., recreation centers, libraries, health centers, bus stops, supermarkets, etc.).*
		- *Contact local radio and TV stations to develop/play regular public service announcements about the importance of daily attendance on student success.*

Activity	Lead Responsibility	Process Notes
		Work with school district to increase community awareness by sharing attendance statistics and promoting district-wide goals, as well as focus on priority schools/communities. *Districts can publicly lend their support/resources to develop parent education programs, support after-school programs, etc.*
Monitor Progress	Student Support Specialist	- *Work with the School Attendance Team to track student progress.* • *Assess student data quarterly.* • *Assess Family Connections program to identify what is working, not effective or areas that can be improved. Look for ways to add additional supports to families.* ○ *Solicit regular feedback from teachers, school administrators/staff, families, community partners, etc.* - *Award quarterly certificates to students with perfect attendance or who have shown improvement.* - *Organize an end of semester celebration for meeting attendance goals.* - *Assess which students/families can be transitioned out of the Family Connections program and/or which students may need more individualized intensive interventions and supports (e.g., case management).*

Suggested Supplemental Activities

Some additional Tier Two strategies to foster regular attendance include:
- Help families and students connect with other students to travel to school together (whether by bus, car pool, or walking).
    - Identify how students with poor attendance typically travel to school – both mode and route.
    - Identify how students who live in close proximity and exhibit good attendance typically travel to school – both mode and route.
    - Reach out to parents to try and connect them with other parents to help them create a support network.
        - Should be informal, not forced, and without revealing confidential information to either party.
            - For example, ask family member "Are you aware of other families who have students at the same school who live close by with whom you could car pool? Are you aware of other students living close by who ride the same bus?" If the person,

replies with "yes" or "possibly" then ask if they would feel comfortable contacting the family.
- Consider making introductions at PTA/PTO meetings or other school events.
  - o Reach out to students to try and connect them with other students to help them develop relationships and a support network.
- Initiate student morning meet and greet program.
  - o Have upperclassmen available to meet greet students each morning at bus and car pool drop offs.
    - Upperclassmen form an informal line to shuttle students into the building.
    - Students arrive into the school building safely and are greeted by multiple older students along the way.
    - Upperclassmen have chance to serve as mentors and set tone for appropriate behaviors upon arriving at school and interacting with the school community.
    - Helps car pool traffic to continue moving and provides reinforcement to parents that their child will enter the school building safely.
  - o Upper grade classrooms can rotate responsibilities for morning meet and greet duty.
    - Opportunity to reinforce expectations and develop mentoring skills among upperclassmen.
- Daily attendance monitoring.
  - o Track daily attendance of students who have a history of chronic absenteeism or exhibit warning signs of becoming chronically absent.
    - Contact parents of students who are absent on the day (morning) that the student is absent.
      - Track calls, whether parent was aware student is absent, reason for absence.
        - o Be sure to maintain a positive tone that expresses concern about the student's well-being, rather than a punitive tone.
      - Check in with student weekly and review attendance for the past week. Congratulate students on good attendance and work with students who continue to have absences to identify reasons and possible solutions.

Resources

Attendance Works – http://www.attendanceworks.org/
> *The Power of Positive Connections*
> http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/assessments/power-positive-connections-toolkit/
> Engage Students and Families with Personalized Outreach
> http://www.attendanceworks.org/engage-students-and-families-with-personalized-outreach/

The following optional resources will provide additional information and suggestions for enhancing or extending activities. Read through the resources carefully to become familiar with any concepts and instructions as they may pertain to the content and the extension of activities.

Attendance Works – http://www.attendanceworks.org/
> Student Attendance Success Plan documents
> http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/student-success-plan-facilitator-handout/
> Key Attendance Messages
> http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/AAMMessages_2014.pdf
> Handouts for Parents
> http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/parent-handouts/

National Network of Partnership Schools (Johns Hopkins University)
> http://www.jhucsos.com/

National PTA
> Tips for Teachers on Family Engagement
> http://www.pta.org/

National Mentoring Partnership
> Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring: A Checklist for Mentoring Programs.
> http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_1225.pdf

Note: All posters, images, and activity guides identified are copyright cleared for non-commercial use.

Measuring Success

Identifying outcomes and collecting data to measure the success of the intervention can help track the quality of implementation as well as the effectiveness of the intervention.

Students

Track individual student attendance data and chart (e.g., baseline data; monthly attendance monthly; interventions/supports provided).

Assess students' attitudes and knowledge about the importance of school attendance. Ask:
- Why they think coming to school every day will help them to do better in school.
- What they might miss out on when not at school.
- To name some responsibilities that comes with being a student.
- To identify things they can do to prepare for school and to arrive on time.

Assess impact of learning activities (e.g., Career camp, service learning projects, etc.) on:
- Attitudes about going to school.
- Feelings of connectedness/belongingness at school.
- Importance of setting and meeting personal goals.
- Academic progress.

Families

Collect data from families concerning their experiences with the Family Connections Program:
- Whether they felt more connected to the school by having someone to communicate with regarding their child's attendance (including obstacles to regular, on-time attendance).
- How would they rate the frequency and quality of communication from the school regarding their child's attendance?
- Observed improvements in their child's attitudes, behavior and academics since participating in the Family Connections program?
- What were the most meaningful aspects of Family Connections Program? Areas for improvement?

School Staff

Ask staff participating in the Family Connections program:
- About their experiences and perceived benefits for students and staff, as well as, challenges in implementing the program.
- Additional areas where school-family partnerships could be supported.

Appendices

A. References

B. Research Alignment

Appendix A: References

Allensworth, E. M., Gwynne, J. A., Moore, P., & de la Torre, M. (2014). *Looking forward to high school and college: Middle grade indicators and readiness in Chicago public schools*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Middle%20Grades%20Report.pdf

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Flannery, K. B., Sugai, G., & Anderson, C. M. (2009). School-wide positive behavior support in high school: Early lessons learned. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 11*, 133-145.

Whitehurst, G. J. (2004, April). *Making education evidence-based: Premises, principles, pragmatics, and politics.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, Distinguished Public Policy Lecture Series. Retrieved from http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/events/lectures/DPPL-Whitehurst.pdf

Appendix B: Research Alignment

Citation	Brief Summary of Strategy	Sample Size	Impact/Evidence of Effectiveness	Implementation
Fantuzzo, J., Grim, S., & Hazan, H. (2005). Project START: An evaluation of a community-wide school-based intervention to reduce truancy. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*(6), 657-667.	The purpose of the present study was to conduct an evaluation of a citywide implementation of Project START. Project START (Stop Truancy And Recommend Treatment) is a collaborative interagency effort including the city school district, judicial system, Department of Human Services, and community social service organizations to reduce truancy through community-based interventions. The students were chosen for the intervention if they had a history of 25 or more unexcused	567 truant students from elementary, middle and high school, in one school district.	Unexcused absences were measured at four time periods: baseline, 0-30 days, 30-60 days, and 1 yr. post court. Truants referred to both types of court demonstrated significant reductions in absence rates between baseline and 30 days post disposition and evidenced significantly lower absence rates during this period compared to nonreferred truants. During the third period, truants referred to community-based court continued to demonstrate an absence rate significantly lower than baseline. At 1 year post court, the community-based court students	Common to both community-based family court and traditional family court interventions are the following basic steps: (a) referred truants and their legal guardians are summoned to family court, (b) each case is reviewed by a court master, who may require multiple court visits, (c) the court master determines the disposition of the case and orders the next steps, and (d) court sanctions are in place if parents do not comply, including involvement of children's protective services. The community based court plan also involved two major elements: the location of court

Citation	Brief Summary of Strategy	Sample Size	Impact/Evidence of Effectiveness	Implementation
	absences and a pattern of attendance problems. Students were placed in three groups: multidimensional, community-based family court (Project START), traditional, one dimensional family court, and nonreferred truants. Each group contained 189 students.		returned to baseline while traditional and nonreferred students had an increase in unexcused absences.	proceedings and the involvement of community-based service providers. Courtrooms were created within designated school buildings so barriers to court participation were reduced. Also, caseworkers from service organizations were present in the community-based court to promote family utilization of community services. Traditional family court required truants and families to attend the central city municipal family court and no community-based service providers participated in the court proceedings.
Hendricks, M. A., Sale, E. W., Evans, C. J., McKinley, L., & Carter, S. (2010).	To assess the effectiveness of a truancy court	185 students in 6th and 7th grade.	Results indicated that students with more severe truancy at baseline	Students were selected for participation and then contact was made with

Citation	Brief Summary of Strategy	Sample Size	Impact/Evidence of Effectiveness	Implementation
Evaluation of a truancy court intervention in four middle schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 47*(2), 173-183.	intervention (modeled after the TCDP) on middle school students of varying truancy severity. Students were divided into three groups: mild, moderate and severe. Groups were based on variation in attendance.		experienced the most improvement during the intervention and maintained at follow up. Moderately truant students also improved from baseline to intervention but not as much as severely truant students. There was no effect on mildly truant students.	parents/guardians to discuss the program. After parents and children agreed to participate in truancy court, parents were asked to sign a Family Participation Contract agreeing to attend all sessions, support recommendations of the Truancy Court Team and provide documentation explaining all absences for their child. Students signed a contract agreeing to meet program expectations.
Shoenfelt, E. L., & Huddleston, M. R. (2006). The truancy court diversion program of the family court, warren circuit court division III, Bowling Green, Kentucky: An evaluation of impact on attendance and academic	The TCDP is a voluntary program that bridges the communication barrier between parents and schools in order to promote the best interests of the children through counseling and open	74 elementary and middle school students in the intervention group matched with 74 students in the control group.	Overall, the rate of unexcused absences for the TCDP students dropped significantly during their participation in the intervention (Pre-TCDP mean = 5.23; D During-TCDP mean = 2.09).	After a student is referred to TCDP, teachers interview these students to ascertain their willingness to participate in the program. The TCDP mails letters to parents of truant children to give them the opportunity to circumvent formal court

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Citation	Brief Summary of Strategy	Sample Size	Impact/Evidence of Effectiveness	Implementation
performance. *Family Court Review, 44*(4), 683-695.	communication about the difficulties faced by the family and child that contribute to the truancy problem. Students are referred to the program after they have accumulated enough unexcused absences or tardies to be considered truant.		For junior high students, participation in TCDP decreased the rate of unexcused absences (Pre-TCDP mean = 6.2; TCDP mean= 2.5).	proceedings by participating in TCDP. Scholastic and personal data is collected on the child; the judge meets with children, parents, counselors, and principals to perform an initial interview (15-30 minutes). Parents and students complete consent forms and behavior contracts. Case plans are then generated for each family. The court judge and director of TCDP meet with students biweekly for the duration of the treatment. Interventions that ensure continued success of the child are also provided.

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Best/Promising Practices

Promising Practice	Source(s)	Comments/ Limitations
Breakfast Club	Count Me In! *Examples of attendance strategies and interventions: A comprehensive data-driven approach.* http://countmeinmaine.org/site/	Small groups of students meet with school staff over breakfast every day or multiple times a week before class begins. Community volunteers can join the group once a week. Activities: - Staff and community volunteers analyze data and identify at risk students. - Adults check-in/check-out with students. - Work with students to have them design both fun as well as formal activities. Results showed increased attendance and on-time arrival for targeted students. Children also developed relationships with staff members/volunteers who led the breakfast club group.
PEOPLE Strategy	Count Me In! *Examples of attendance strategies and interventions: A comprehensive data-driven approach.* http://countmeinmaine.org/site/	Priority Early Outreach through Positive Linkages and Engagement (PEOPLE) is a strategy that aims to develop relationships with at-risk students and provides positive supports that facilitate students attending school every day. Activities: - Review attendance data to identify common patterns and needs. - Award certificates to students with good and improved attendance. - Share attendance goals with community. - Connect teachers with students and families. - Strategically assign staff members to follow up with absent students and their families.

Promising Practice	Source(s)	Comments/ Limitations
		- Meet with family regarding those students whose attendance rates did not improve. Results showed increased awareness in the community about school and student attendance. Chronic absence rates were reduced from 15% in 2010-11 to 8% in 2011-12. Academic achievement rose 30 points in the last year as a result of the increased time in school.
Rise N' Shine Before-School Activities and Clubs	Count Me In! *Examples of attendance strategies and interventions: A comprehensive data-driven approach.* http://countmeinmaine.org/site/	Activities are offered in the morning before classes begin. The activities are offered year round or for 6-8 week sessions and run by community volunteers or school staff. Activities: - Identify staff/volunteers to oversee activities. - Determine options and space that will appeal to target population (have students help design the clubs offered). Results showed increased student engagement and attendance as well as increased on-time arrival of students who have been tardy.