

RURAL DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY WEBINAR SERIES

WEBINAR TWO



TEACH AHEAD

FEATURED TIER TWO INTERVENTION STRATEGY

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

Located in central Tennessee, DeKalb County is home to approximately 19,000 residents. Staff use the Teach Ahead strategy in summer school and also during the school year at the middle school. DeKalb Middle School is comprised of 6th - 8th grade totaling 568 students, of which 11% are ethnic minority and 67% are economically disadvantaged. Teach Ahead is also used with some high school students in the district, particularly during after school programs.

WHY IT WAS STARTED

After several years of running a largely remediation-focused program for students during the summer, staff discovered that many students going to summer school were there because they did not do the work required, not because they were unable to understand the content. They also found that often students were afraid to attempt homework or class work during the school year for fear of not being successful. Many students were repeating summer school year after year and too many students were being retained in middle school and 9th grade. Staff agreed that they needed to implement an approach that would get students up to speed academically while instilling some much needed confidence. These issues led to the design of a “teach ahead” strategy.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Teach Ahead is defined as pre-teaching next year's curriculum in the summer—or the next day's material in after-school programs. The approach builds the confidence of students who are underachieving, so they know they can do the work at the same level as their classmates. Now during summer school, rather than focusing on remediation, teachers help students do the early work for courses they will be taking when the new school year begins. Using this acceleration strategy gets the student ready and able to tackle work during the first quarter of the new school year. This strategy is particularly effective for rising 9th graders as they can feel confident that they are ahead of the curve in their academic work and save their energy for social and navigational aspects of the new high school experience. For those students who are struggling with courses during the year, teachers provide additional support after-school, helping students catch up and also cover the class material for the next day.

WHO IS SERVED

This strategy is designed for students needing additional support, especially those in danger of being retained. Students who are struggling with their academic courses are served during after-school programs and any student who has failed a course and must take summer school is served in the summer. Students are allowed to participate if they have failed three classes or fewer.

HOW IT WORKS

During summer school, the district pre-teaches the next year's curriculum. Summer school takes place 5 days a week for three weeks. The program is staffed with existing teachers willing to work in the summer. Whenever possible, the schedule is arranged so the students' next year's teacher is the one teaching summer school. This design functions as a form of looping, i.e. students have the

same teachers over a period of time and teachers have an early sense of their students' strengths and improvement areas.

Additionally, schools across the district build a safety net directly into the regular day for struggling students. The after school program runs from 3-5 PM. Existing teachers who sign up to work after-school hours staff the program. Students that are having a difficult time with a particular subject can benefit from learning the next days' material during after-school programs or during any time that students receive additional academic support.

HOW IT'S FUNDED

This program is currently funded using federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant money. However, a district could implement this strategy without spending additional funds, as teach ahead is an approach that can be built into existing programs for students that need additional support during the summer or school year.

WHY IT WORKS IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

This approach does not have to require new funds, but could be accomplished with a shift in the way the school approaches remediation programming.

SUCCESSSES

- Students who participated in summer school start the year at the same level or ahead of their classmates.
- Students are displaying better performance results in freshman academy.
- Fewer students are retained in middle school and graduation rates have increased in the district.

CHALLENGES

- Finding funding to support summer school and after school programs is always challenging.
- Finding enough teachers to teach all the subjects and teachers who are willing to work during summer school or after school is also an ongoing challenge.