Advocacy Project Part 2

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**Generate Vision Data**

In order to uncover the needs of the Block 9 students and create interventions that are effective in solving these needs, it was imperative to ask the students directly what they feel they need help with. I was able to accomplish this by delivering a needs assessment to the entire group. Due to my previous conversations with the teachers, principal, and the group itself, it was clear the focus had to be on helping students find a purpose in life, a purpose that allowed them to look forward to plan their futures. Given that measuring a “purpose in life” is somewhat subjective and difficult to measure, the needs assessment translates “purpose in life” to career and college exploration and other opportunities after high school. Unfortunately, the Block 9 students are the school’s freshman most at-risk to not graduate or drop out of school. They lack the connection between excelling in school and reaching the goals they have for themselves in the future. The needs assessment asks questions regarding teachers' and parents’ expectations about the students going to college, whether or not their counselors have been helpful in planning their futures, whether or not they actually do need help with this planning, the importance of graduation to them, and what they think they will do after high school and their knowledge of how to get there.

The needs assessment was administered at the beginning of January 2014.  One of the most glaring statistics was that even though 62 out of 64 students have an idea of what they want to do after high school, 67.2% of students do not know the steps necessary to attain their goals. This is especially important for the 62.5% of students that want to attend a college or university that do not realize the importance of academic success during high school. What seemed very interesting is that the 32.8% that know the steps to their goals are the students that reported having As and Bs in their classes. This shows that there is a connection between doing well in school and knowing what and how to reach goals after high school. Another question that stood out had to do with whether or not students know the steps they need to take to graduate from Mariner High School. 53.1% still have questions about graduation requirements and 18.8% do not know what the requirements are.  The statistics that I want to change relate with students knowing what they need to do to be admitted to a college or university, community college, technical college, to obtain employment, or to attain any other goals they set for themselves. This in turn will give them the information about graduation requirements since many of those requirements overlap with college requirements. It is extremely important for them to understand that academic performance in high school will affect what they envision for themselves in the near future.

**Commit to Yearly Bench Marks**

My goal is that the percentage of the Block 9 students who do not know the steps they need to take to attend college or university, community college, technical college, military, or to obtain employment will decrease by 10% every year.

·        Year 1: 57%

·        Year 2: 47%

·        Year 3: 37%

·        Year 4: 27%

·        Year 5: 17%

**Identify Where and How to Intervene**

In order to better serve the Block 9 students, it is crucial that Mariner High School intervenes in a couple different ways.

**Microlevel:** Given that Block 9 serves the school’s most at-risk freshmen, it is important that counselors and other staff carry out specific activities that will increase students’ knowledge about career exploration. This can be done through the guidance curriculum and also through meaningful and engaging activities. School collaboration is required in order to set these students up for success.

**Mesolevel:** As I analyzed the needs assessment, I realized that I cannot work in isolation when it comes to help students succeed. Therefore, asking and meeting with different school staff to share the needs assessment and the conclusions it yielded is very important to me. Not only am I sharing what my ideas are to intervene, but I am also asking for ideas and suggestions from the staff.  These suggestions from the teachers, principal, and the career center may have the ability to make any intervention I carry out more successful for our students. After the interventions have been delivered, I plan to share the pre and post test results with school staff in order to increase awareness of the importance of helping this group of kids in career planning.

**Macrolevel:** When it comes to reaching this level with my intervention, I hope that after I show the results to teachers and the principal, this intervention, which is broken down into three different parts, can be used the following years with the Block 9 students. If this occurs, it would be most beneficial if the assessment was administered at the beginning of every school year so that more academic success can be reached. Since I have been working very closely with parents at Mariner, carrying out parts of this intervention with them would be very helpful as well. In order for students to succeed, parental involvement is crucial. Many parents are unaware of the many different opportunities their kids have after graduation and do not know how to properly prepare their children for success after high school.

**Select Interventions:**

When I first discussed this advocacy project with the Block 9 team, they mentioned that using class time for study skills groups was not something they have found helpful in the past. The school principal discussed the idea of helping students find a purpose in life and connect that purpose with their academic performance all throughout high school. My original idea was to bring in different speakers to the Block 9 classes to discuss ways in which they have overcome difficult situations that at some point prohibited them from doing well academically. Even though the idea should inspire students to do better and increase their motivation, it will be very difficult to measure the effectiveness of the process. When I came to this realization, I decided to focus on college and career readiness. Research says that although we don’t expect students to craft a customized program of study while in high school, they do need to explore more college and career opportunities earlier so they can understand what content knowledge, learning skills, and cognitive strategies are necessary to succeed in a particular career path (Conley, and McGaughy, 2012).

I decided to split my intervention in 3 different parts using school resources such as students and teachers to help me inspire and provide knowledge to the Block 9 students.

·        **Intervention Part 1- Senior Panel:** I chose 14 seniors from Mariner to serve as mentors for a day to the Block 9 freshmen. All the seniors were chosen based on plans after high school, barriers they faced during high school to get to where they are right now, graduation status (Some of the seniors were not able to graduate on time, however, they are exceeding in their classes right now), and school and community involvement. According to research, high school mentors have several unique strengths that can benefit younger students. A strength involves proving the younger students with a friend that is close in age and may be easy to relate to (Cooney, Grossman, and McMaken, 2008). Senior mentors were given a script with topics that needed to be covered with Block 9. Some items required for discussion include: What their plans after high school are, how those plans are connected with their academic performance during high school, what needs to be done year by year regarding college exploration (talking to teachers about college, discovering what their interests are, taking to counselors, attending the College and Career Center, preparing for SAT/ACT exams, and visiting colleges). Block 9 students were also asked about what they plan to do in their futures.

·        **Intervention Part 2- MESA Activity:** Given that the majority of the Block 9 students belong to a minority group, bringing in the MESA class to talk to the students and do activities seemed like a great idea. The MESA class stands for Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement. This is a class designed for students of color interested in pursuing careers in math, engineering, or science. The class includes college information, career information, enrichment projects, and SAT/ACT preparation (Mariner High School Class Catalog, 2014-2015). The idea of this activity is to discuss how the class in helpful and beneficial for students. The MESA students that came into the 2 Block 9 classrooms talked to students about academic and personal barriers they have faced during their time at Mariner and how the MESA class helped them overcome these barriers. They talked about field trips they have done with MESA, especially their college visits.  In addition, they discussed how this class helps students decide on a career path and the internships and potential employment opportunities with Boeing that MESA prepares them for. This intervention not only covered plans after high school, but was also very interactive. The MESA class brought materials to carry out an activity. The main activity consisted of building a catapult. The activity gave the students a taste of the type of projects they do in this class. Another goal of the activity was to help students realize the importance of being organized, and the importance of communication when working in groups, both skills that will help them academically and in their future careers.

·        **Intervention Part 3- Guidance Lesson:** The last part of my advocacy project involves doing a guidance lesson regarding college. The Goals for the lessons include: type of colleges (community and technical colleges, and 4 year universities), the degrees they obtain from each, opportunities to transfer from a community college to a 4 year university, and financial aid such as scholarships, FAFSA, and WASFA (Washington Application for State financial Aid). Students will be given true/false scenarios to which they have to respond as a group. Also, the College and Career Center will be coming to the classroom to talk about what they do for students. They will be also doing an activity in groups where they are given an envelope with a career path (i.e. Military, Vet assistant, etc.). Inside of the envelope they will find different steps that are needed to reach the specific career path. Their assignment is to figure out the order of the steps and present it to the group.

**Personal Reflection:**

1. **What did I learned about myself as a school counselor**

* I learned that I love to be out in the classrooms interacting with the kids and teaching them. I never imagined that I was going to be as confident as I was when talking to a class.
* I have always been the kind of person that enjoys doing projects independently, however, I was able to come out of my shell and involved teachers and even students

1. **What did you learn about being an advocate in the school?**

* Even though I have learned this throughout the past 3 years at Seattle U, I was able to see that every kid has the potential to succeed as long as we provide them with the necessary tools to overcome barriers. Tools come in different shapes and names, but they have to be specific to the students’ needs. Also, seeing the student as a whole in paramount. Truly getting to the root of things will allow us to see that whatever unproductive behavior the student is portraying, is a symptom of the real problem.
* Spanish –speaking meeting
* I cannot make assumptions about anyone

1. **What barriers and risks did you experience as a result of your advocacy efforts that can help you in the future? Also, identify possible solutions to these problems. Be detailed in your overview.**

* **Barriers:** Teacher resistance in the type of intervention I wanted to carry out. I wanted to do studying skills with the Block 9 students, however, teachers, although nice, told me they were not going to give me their class time to do this. I should have explained more in detail the benefits of doing something like this with the students, but instead I just let it alone. I did not feel I had the power to contradict teachers that have been in the educational system for so long.

1. **What might you do differently based on what you learned?**

* I would have created the needs assessment at the very beginning of the school year in order to intervene faster. I would have also done the interventions I did with Block 9 with more students.