

**A Focus On At Risk Youth
K-12 Teacher Institute For the Future
Of Our Youth In Tomorrow's World!
Your Schools in Action!**

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Abstract

In many school districts, at risk youth still need attention. Due to budget constraints, programs for assisting teachers to come together, collaborate and discuss the many concerns of at risk youth are decreasing, put on hold or eliminated. In order to assist teachers with this most complex problem, it is important to revisit or reexamine programs and in-services in this area. In response to this complicated issue, the authors developed one example of a “coming together” of professional educators, especially teachers of at risk youth in a collaborative effort to discuss and share ideas and hopefully stimulate, develop and improve programs for our at risk youth.

Scope

The enhancement of our total at risk curriculum can best be accomplished by taking advantage of those principles of learning and student growth and development which at risk education has brought to light. It is vital for the facilitators and teachers of at risk youth in the greater school districts {name} to establish a feasible means of communicating and focusing on the many unique alternative education programs that are currently operational.

The Duration

What are teachers currently doing in order to produce attitudinal changes in behavior and value of at risk youth, which could not be accomplished/satisfied in traditional classrooms?

Focus

The theme of the retreat, “We’re Better Together” is an ambitious undertaking to meet the challenge of at risk youth. Teachers and facilitators of at risk youth will come together in a mentor setting to share program concepts, viewpoints, possibilities, problems, and teacher training to note the process of student learning and teaching which the authors hope will result in a more effective effort in the solution that at risk youth needs in all areas of growth.

Possible Focus Directions

1. Is your district meeting this challenge?
2. What is the teacher role in at risk education?
3. How can teachers facilitate positive self-esteem of at risk youth?
4. How can teachers explore cooperative effort for outreach to other school districts of at-risk youth? (Programs, facilitators, etc.)
5. How can the teachers and facilitators of at risk youth be best utilized by regular classroom teachers?
6. Other

Objectives

1. To identify school districts at risk population:
 - Who are they?
 - What are their needs?
 - How can the classroom teacher better address at risk youth?
2. To identify teacher expectations with regard to support from other personnel in the school district in order to effectively work with this specialized population of at risk youth.
3. To focus on continued teacher commitment of at risk youth and to assist teachers to build their confidence for working with this type of student.
4. To articulate and gain support from regular classroom teachers with regard to the understanding of at risk youth.
5. To share with all teachers who need and want to know how to help their students in developing basic skills and attitudes for educational and social growth.
6. To establish a peer support system/mentoring as the keystone for adequate assistance in dealing with these students.
7. To explore and share what programs are working.
8. Other

Format

Each participating school district will share their model programs of solving the complexities of alternative education for at risk youth. The school district teachers and facilitators will also address the reality and sensitivity of those students and its effect and impact on the regular school classroom and population. There will be morning and afternoon sessions—large and small groups. Group discussions will be limited to practical matters of interest to all.

Tentative Discussion Sessions

1. Teacher awareness of the reasons why students can't function in a regular classroom;
2. Techniques for dealing with at risk youth;
3. Classroom management and teaching strategies (presented by teachers/facilitators of at-risk youth);
4. Curriculum concerns;
5. Grading;
6. Administrative, teacher and community responsibilities;
7. Student/teacher self esteem;
8. Culture, background of at risk youth;
9. Other.

Closure Expectations of Retreat

It is not just sufficient to share innovative ideas, program materials, etc. and then to go on with business as usual. These ideas and materials can be utilized as assets. An essential expectation of this retreat is to promote awareness of at risk programs and provide skills to promote awareness and information by “teachers for teachers.”

Resulting Impact of Retreat

1. Provide a reference communication network of involved teachers of at risk youth and the at risk programs of participating schools.
2. Provide a system of partnership to regular classroom teachers to assist them with their needs in coping with the at risk students in their classes.
3. System for maintaining at risk youth services and drawbacks (K-12).
4. Provide access to outside agencies for materials, guidance and support.
5. Provide:
 - a) System of keeping all teachers informed;
 - b) Channel for open dialogue;
 - c) Early prevention, intervention and interaction assistance;
 - d) Other

Final Comment

If the answer to the question – “Is At Risk Youth Growing?” is yes, then, don’t wait for a full course to develop! It is hoped the retreat will improve upon all teachers to continue their compassion, tenacity, patience, perseverance, resiliency and communication for developing a non-give-up attitude for students who just don’t fit in the regular mainstream.

Teachers can provide the best possible solutions when positive communication between each other is consistent and regular. A retreat offers opportunities for active collaboration, strengthens school-community relations, and communicates the readiness for dealing with the at risk student concerns. School/community confidence in school leaders can only be solidified if we realize the seriousness of concern for students at risk

This proposal does not provide all the answers to the complex problems of at risk youth. However, the authors hope that this proposal will help educational leaders rely upon themselves for the ability to adopt, reach-out and overcome the “Educational Leadership Challenges,” and provide a forum for what we call “Teachers Teaching Teachers (TTT).”

This proposal is by no means a definite answer to the concerns facing at risk youth and their school districts. However, it is a compendium of ideas that can help stimulate discussion among school/community leaders.

Good luck!

Sample Proposal

“A Summit Institute on Effective Teaching of At Risk Kids” Date, Time, Place TBA

Introduction

The {*district area name*} like much of {*state name*} and the nation, has an enormous problem—a large fraction of our school aged youth are “hi-risk” (show signs of becoming “discouraged learners” or “drop-outs”) or are already “AT RISK” (already evidence overt behaviors such as excessive absenteeism, truancy, low motivation and achievement levels, substance abuse, involvement with the juvenile justice system, etc.). Statistical indicators such as dropout and attrition rates, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, single parents and the percentage of young children living at the poverty level attest to how large and critical this problem is in the {*district name area*}.

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness of the problem by leaders in social services, law enforcement, education, health services, business, community agencies and elected policy officials. Currently, a number of committees, councils, commission boards, etc. are engaged in researching the problems, developing plans for improved communication, coordination and cooperation among various agencies and are strengthening existing programs and initiating new programs to more effectively address the complex and pervasive issues involved with at risk youth.

As noted above, leaders from many fields in the areas of human and social services are involved in this broad based effort (that may soon become a “movement”). However, there is one group of professionals that are much underrepresented in this process: Classroom Teachers. A basic assumption of this proposal is that there are many “regular” classroom teachers currently in our schools that are effectively dealing with “hi-risk” and “at risk” youth. These individuals can be identified, recognized and enlisted in the effort to more effectively teach these students.

Proposed Summit Conference

An overnight, invitational conference, primarily for classroom teachers would be needed at a location such as {*name*} in late July/August 200?–TBD A letter from the County Superintendent of Schools would be sent to school districts in {*name of county*} and possibly other nearby school districts - inviting a team of educators to attend the conference. The school district team would be generally comprised of seven to nine members: one or two administrators, one or two

support staff-members (counselors, nurses, psychologists, resource teachers) and three to five classroom teachers (smaller districts would be encouraged to send a team of five members).

A key part of the proposed program involves identifying classroom teachers who have evidenced a track record of successfully working with high-risk and at risk youth. These teachers would be recognized by their districts for their efforts (by being identified as effective teachers) and be given additional recognition by being invited to attend the conference. The program at the conference would be organized and structured to focus on effective classroom teaching methods and strategies that the participating teachers are currently using.

It is estimated that approximately 80 educators (or approximately 10 teams) could be accommodated at an overnight conference for an estimated \$_____. Individuals attending would receive a stipend and would provide their own transportation. Funding would be sought from the private sector, colleges/universities and County Office of Education {*name*} or any other interested agency.

Summary

Reports of the effective methods and strategies would be compiled for dissemination to educators that did not attend the conference.

Follow Up Activities

- Start Network
- District Identify Other Teachers
- Mentoring
- Staff Development
- Product-Booklet
- Annual Conference
- Other