

Resiliency Instruction Builds Academic Confidence

Nexus Academy Charter High Schools: Ohio and Michigan

Demographics

- 5 public charter high schools
- 262 students
- 59% White
- 45% African American
- 8% Hispanic
- 57% free/reduced lunch
- 11% special education

Challenge

Before the five Nexus Academy high schools (Cleveland, Columbus, Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Toledo) opened in the fall of 2012, administrators decided to support the curriculum by including a program to build students' social-emotional resiliency skills. According to Karen Roper, senior director of instructional product development, "As new blended learning high schools with a college-prep focus, we were looking for a program that supported the non-academic skills that are critical to students' success in school."

When Ms. Roper introduced *Success Highways* to the counselors at the five schools, they immediately recognized the benefits. "I liked that *Success Highway* focuses on the resiliency skills that are essential to student success. And it's backed by research and data, which was a requirement for us," said Bonnie Simonelli, counselor at Nexus Academy of Cleveland.

Administrators realized that students would bring to their new learning environment backgrounds and experiences that were very different from their previous schools. Ms. Roper met frequently with the five counselors to discuss ways they could help students be successful.

The Six Resiliency Skills

Assessed and taught by *Success Highways*

Valuing education
Academic confidence
Connectedness
Stress management
Health and well-being
Intrinsic motivation

"We made the decision to implement *Success Highways* partly because the pre-assessment identifies students' strengths and weaknesses, along with students who may be at risk of dropping out of school," said Ms. Roper. "This allows us to develop the appropriate supports for all students from day one."

Implementation

Before school started, the counselors and success coaches in the five schools received training on *Success Highways*. "The training showed us what to look for in the *Success Highways* assessments, how to interpret the data, and how to use it to meet student needs," said Cari Hankerd, counselor at Nexus Academy of Lansing.

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Bonnie Simonelli, Counselor, Nexus Academy Cleveland

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The Nexus counselors and success coaches use *Success Highways* in grades 9-12 at every high school. The classes meet weekly for one 35-minute period. Instruction is paced throughout the year so that each student covers one lesson every two weeks. Students look forward to their *Success Highways* class time and are disappointed if they have to miss a class for any reason. They enjoy both the small-group discussions and the one-on-one time. Students who were previously reluctant to share have increasingly opened up.

According to principal Andrew Pasquinilli, educators at Nexus Academy of Columbus were surprised when the *Success Highways* resiliency assessment data showed that some students who seemed to be doing quite well were at risk of failure. “These tend to be the very quiet kids, so it would be easy to overlook them. Grades don’t tell you everything,” said Mr. Pasquinilli. “*Success Highways* helped us identify students at risk before their grades were adversely impacted.”

At Nexus Academy of Lansing, the *Success Highways* assessment revealed that students lacked connections with each other—typical for a new school serving a large geographic area—and many had felt bullied in their previous schools. “Many students have not had much social success, but *Success Highways* gives them a place where they feel safe and can build connections,” said Ms. Hankerd.

At Nexus Academy of Cleveland, the initial assessment showed that academic confidence was the resiliency skill students lacked most frequently. “Many students didn’t believe they could do well in school, so that had become a self-fulfilling prophecy,” said Ms. Simonelli.

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Results

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After one semester, teachers noted that students were much more engaged in academic work and feeling more confident and capable. They had developed the confidence to approach teachers with questions. They expressed themselves verbally and in writing on questions they had never been asked before. They understood that they were not alone in dealing with difficulties and that no one has a perfect life.

Students who had experienced academic failure in the past began to achieve new levels of success. “When you pay attention to social and emotional data, the research shows that test scores increase,” said counselor Lisa Schmitter. “In my experience, the *Success Highways* approach is very effective.”

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By the end of the 2012-13 school year, 42 percent of students reported feeling more academically confident, and 38 percent indicated higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Over 40 percent said they felt less stressed and their sense of health and well-being had improved. Half the students reported feeling more connected to others, and over one third indicated that school was more important to them than before.