Aspirations and expectations: Narrowing the rural-urban education gap through reflection

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Need for Innovation

Students in rural schools face a silent opponent. Rural schools tackle structural and demographic challenges to provide curricula that meet the needs of 21st century students. Without a critical mass of knowledge workers, no community can hope to achieve or sustain self-development, self-sufficiency, or global competitiveness.

Rural and urban schools differ in organizational structures. Rural students differ from urban in demography. Rural students also differed in aspirations as measured by their plans for advanced education, occupational choice, and income expectations.

In 2011, Texas Education Agency merged Early College High School and STEM programs. With the STEM designation, Roscoe Collegiate (RCISD) is entering the second year of a two-year investigative process, with assistance from a STEM Advisory Committee.

The intent behind the RCISD model is for each student to complete the associate degree as an indicator of college readiness, while simultaneously earning a STEM field endorsement as an indicator of workforce readiness. The challenge is to break the poverty cycle through rigorous integrated K-16 education.

The Challenge. Although multifaceted, this innovative strategy fosters higher aspirations and achievable expectations among parents and students by identifying success factors and then encouraging reflection, learning and new ways of feeling and thinking.

Methods and Materials

Individualized letters and questionnaires in English/Spanish were sent to 185 parents/guardians of RCISD students in grades 7–12 on Aug 19 and Sep 4. Parents were asked four questions:

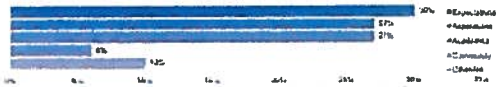
QP1. Is your child a better student-learner today than yesterday?
QP2. Do you have long-range goals for whom and what you want your child to become?
QP3. Is there a person who helps your child with homework or understanding a lesson assignment?
QP4. What is the relationship of this person to your child?

On Sep 2, 191 students in grades 7 - 12 began a daily online reflection (AAR) of their personal success.

QS1. Over the past 24 hours, what contributed most to your success?
QS2. Other than yourself, who contributed most to your success?
QS3. When did you experience the most success?
QS4. Where did you experience the most success?
QS5. How satisfied are you about your accomplishments?
QS6. What most closely defines your success?

Student Findings

QS1: What contributed most to your success?

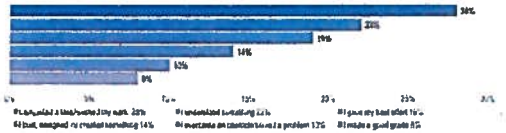


QS3: When did you experience the most success?

QS4: Where did you experience the most success?

QS5: How satisfied are you about your accomplishments?

QS6: What most closely defines your success?



During two October focus groups, 28 eighth-grade students were able to describe the response boundaries and to visualize and verbalize their present personal success as well as projected to 2020 and 2027.

Costs/Resources

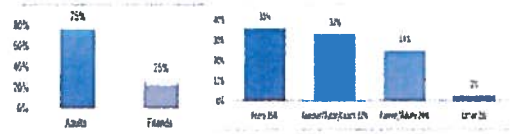
Student daily reflection and analysis—$100/electronic entry into database
Parent survey and analysis—$400/printing, postage, and electronic entry into database
Student reporting costs—$250/electronic reporting in/out from database
Parent reporting costs—$100/electronic entry into database
Consulting services—$500/research and development of instruments
Community engagement—*PRICELESS*!

Parent Findings

QP1-QP2: Is your child a better student-learner today? Long Range Goals

Parent-Student Findings

QP3-QS2: Who Contributed to Success?



QP4-QS2: Relationship of who Helped vs. Who Contributed?

Conclusions & Implications

Rural parents and students will engage in educational development. With encouragement, there is a sense of self-efficacy and internal locus of control.

The gap between rural and urban school performance can be reduced through reciprocal relationships between parents' and students' aspirations and expectations. This reflective experience will become part of the ongoing dialogue among parents, students, teachers and the community.

The response by parents/guardians will be confidentially shared with counselors and teachers as insights to individual aspirations, expectations, and level of satisfaction.

Each grade-reporting period, each student will receive a personalized letter that summarizes their responses to the six questions and encourages each of them to "***review your personal and professional goals and timelines. Discuss these goals with [your mentor] and write a short analysis, including any adjustments you plan to make.***"

Because we know high aspirations and expectations are related to higher academic achievement, we can increase student achievement through reflection and individualized action plans.

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