

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Engaging Parents and the Community

Foxfire Center for Student Success, Ohio • January 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Rigorous/Relevant Instruction

Highlights

- Community involvement is emphasized at Foxfire High School.
- Activities such as “Curbside Coffee” and “FAFSA Night” help keep parents informed.
- Foxfire has developed a program known as “Pay it Forward” to encourage students to volunteer in the community while earning elective credits.
- Foxfire students have the opportunity to build a home from the ground up through the Youthbuild program. The program has provided students with career training, social skills, and job skills.

About the Site

Foxfire Center for Student Success

Zanesville, OH

Demographics

75% White

17% Other

9% Black

47% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

20% Special Education

Foxfire Center for Student Success is an alternative high school in Zanesville, Ohio. It serves as a dropout recovery school for students from the local and surrounding districts.

The school provides:

- Ongoing monitoring of student interventions and immediate adjustments in these interventions if needed
- Invisible mentoring for all students
- Extensive academic supports for credit recovery through project-based learning
- Wrap-around services with an on-site community health nurse
- Small, personalized classes
- Instruction that is relevant and provides opportunities for students to work in the community

Full Transcript

I'm Deb Lussier. I'm the Assistant Principal here at Foxfire. One of the things that Foxfire tries to do is to ensure that there is a lot of community involvement and try to get our parents involved in the school because we believe it takes a cooperative effort between everyone to meet the needs of our students.

We took the program in two separate ways; we wanted to do two kinds of parent involvement. One was to bring them in, to bring interest into the program. We do Curbside Coffee, and we do that every time we have a major event. And we send people from our staff out into the parking lot, and they meet and greet the parents as they pull up to inform them of news and let them know like if it's interim time or if there is going to be a parent involvement meeting.

The other thing that we need to do is we need to inform the parents and try to help educate them on some issues. We have a night which we call FAFSA night, and that's where they come in to fill the federal form out to get financial aid for their students that are going to college. And we bring people in from the community that are well-versed on how to fill out a FAFSA, and they will sit down one-on-one with the parent at the computer and fill the form out online to try to make sure that they are filled out correctly, so the kids can get as much financial aid as possible. And it makes it less intimidating to the parents. They feel more comfortable about filling it out and asking question that way.

The parents have a negative connotation when it comes to communication with the school because everything in the past has always been negative. You know, if they got a call from the school, it was bad. And so what we try very hard to do with these parent involvement nights is to try to make the parents more comfortable and try to present them with some positive communication and make them understand that

we need that piece to get their kids through this process so they can go on. They have an important role in helping their students' transition into the adult world.

Community services is an important piece of the Foxfire program. We decided that we would call it Pay it Forward, because that's what basically they're doing. And we believe there are several reasons why the Pay it Forward program is important to Foxfire and to the students. One of the things that is important, of course, is they need credit. Then they have to get elective credits either through work study or community service, so that's a piece of it, but the biggest piece is that if we're supporting our core values, which is what we are based upon, is that the students learn it is important to care and it's important to take ownership in your community and give back.

We do it in three different ways in our building, we do individual, we do it in small groups, and then we do it in whole-school projects. So, an individual may be just scheduling a kid for three hours one day to work at the animal shelter, or we've scheduled them to go down and help some of the local agencies make pamphlets or stuff envelopes, just something as simple as that. They've volunteered in preschools.

Small group things, some of the things we have done is we took kids down to Salvation Army over the holiday, and they were making baskets and filling boxes, and we took them down for just a day. One of the things that they did that got them really hyped up this fall is, we want to establish a rapport with our neighbors, and so we sent flyers up and down the road and said, you know, "hey, we have a day off. We will rake your yard if you'll call us." And the neighbors called, and they went and on their day off, they raked leaves for neighbors. It was a really good experience, and the kids really like that. And it also gave the neighborhood as well as the community a chance to see our school in a positive line which we think is really important, because often times our community has a negative impression because we are titled "at risk."

One of the newest pieces, I could guess, that we added to the community service is what we call the Youthbuild program, and what it basically is is a program that promotes job skills, training. It's a construction program where the youth have to go through what they call mental-toughness program in order to qualify. That teaches the kids to be able to take direction, to be able to handle their frustration, and learn some of those social skills that some of our kids are lacking. Once they've passed that program, then they go into the actual construction part of the program. They are giving training where they give certain licensureships if you are OSHA, and then they will actually build a home from the ground up. This has provided a lot of our students with career training, job skills. They work on being able to get along with peers on the jobsite, being able to take instructions from your boss. So, a lot of that has been very beneficial to our kids. The other piece that's beneficial is, it helps us with the attendance because it's mandatory that the kids attend here on the shift that they're not working or they can't work that day. And they do get paid, so they like that piece of it, and it's motivated them, and it's helped them to become more regular attenders of school.