

Hawthorne Family Literacy Program

Hawthorne, California

Program Description

The Hawthorne Family Literacy Program (HFLP) serves a small, insulated community in the Los Angeles area. While it is only five miles from the beach, many of its families have never seen the ocean. The HFLP is part of the K-8 school system, a partnership between two school districts and a community-based organization in the Los Angeles area. It offers English-as-a-Second-Language classes, GED preparation, parent education, and Parent and Child Time (PACT), plus an array of special topic workshops in response to family requests. Current funding levels enable the HFLP to maintain an enrollment of 80 families, spread across three sites.

Director: Donielle Cole
Type of program: Family literacy/parent education
Students Served Per Year: 80
80% ESL, 20% GED
Paid Instructors: 4 FT ; 3 PT; 6 PT instructional aides
FT Administrative Staff: 2
Annual Budget: \$579,500

Data Collection and Management (Promising Practices Revisited)

Staff

One person is responsible for data entry.

Database

Excel spreadsheets, plus database provided by Even Start Program.

Data Collected/Monitored

- **Attendance:** Monitored weekly. Students sign-in daily and information from the log is transferred to an Excel spreadsheet daily and to the database monthly. Attendance is also transferred by hand to a form so that staff can monitor attendance and solve potential problems in a weekly “Articulation Meeting,” a meeting set up to increase communication among staff using a case management approach to student support. The form also lists new students and any students who exit the program, including their reason for leaving. (Note: Retention is high; only five students left the program last year.)
- **Assessment:** Monitored monthly. CASAS pre-tests are administered to students at enrollment. They are tested for progress at the beginning and at the end of each quarter (approximately every two months), having completed at least 100 hours of instruction.

Student Intake/Orientation

Staff meets with students one-to-one to discuss requirements and expectations when the students *pre-enroll* in the program. They are then given a 30-day probation period to attend classes to determine if it is a good fit for them and if they will maintain attendance requirements. To pass probation, they cannot miss more than two days. Students sign a contract stating they understand and will maintain the following requirements:

- maintain 75% attendance
- call in advance if they must miss a class
- submit a written request for planned leave at least two weeks in advance
- be on time to class and to appointments
- attend annual orientation meeting (for continued enrollment to the next year)
- volunteer in preschool class twice a month (for parent education program)

Data Management Teams and Their Processes

HFLP holds weekly “articulation meetings” attended by staff, the lead ESL teacher, the family literacy program coordinator, the early childhood education instructor, and all instructors. They review student attendance, reason for leaving for any students who drop out, and information on any new students, as well as observations about student performance. Their goal is to identify and problem-solve any potential barriers to student success.

HFLP operations are transparent, involving all stakeholders in their processes and program improvement, especially the students themselves. A parent advisory committee, established to promote student empowerment and ownership of the program, is composed of two representatives from each of their three sites, elected to one-year terms by their classmates. They meet monthly to discuss any questions, concerns or suggestions from the students and from the staff, and to propose changes to help assure student success.

While overall performance is reviewed and analyzed on an ongoing basis, the team annually completes a self-evaluation with the Even Start survey BEFORE reviewing their results reported and analyzed by Even Start (the funding source). This procedure teaches staff to understand and use data to support the program and to not be tempted to adjust the program simply to impress a funder. Once they receive their report back from Even Start, they then compare their rating and analysis to that made by Even Start. These combined reports guide decisions on where to focus energies for improvement, along with looking at research and best practices in the field.

Examples of Data Analysis for Program Decision-Making

Example One: Low Attendance/Low Achievement Rates

When Donielle took charge of the program six years ago she reviewed statistical reports to become familiar with the program. She noticed that the student attendance rate was 55%, and that their achievement rate was also about 55%, according to the CASAS Performance

Indicators. Making no assumptions, HFLP reviewed their data to identify the 55% by tracking and documenting individual student attendance hours and comparing them to their test scores. The data confirmed that there was a correlation: students with low attendance also had low test scores. Staff discussed how to improve the rates. They shared their ideas with the Parent Advisory Committee, and then the Committee shared it with the parents (students). They all agreed to establish a requirement that students maintain a minimum attendance rate of 75%.

Implementing an Improvement Plan

Having set a goal of increasing attendance to a 75% rate, staff recognized the need to first change the procedure for recording student attendance. Previously, instructors turned in monthly attendance sheets to the adult education office, which would then copy the sheets and send them to the HFLP. As a rule, there was a two-month lag time in getting the reports. They changed procedures to have the students sign in/out of the classes, enter the hours daily on a spreadsheet so that up-to-date data was always available. They also decided to review attendance at weekly articulation meetings with staff so that they could head off any potential problems developing with students.

Next, they determined that students who did not maintain the attendance requirement would be dismissed from the program. HFLP created a process for such a dismissal:

1. Students are taught to track their own attendance so there are no surprises.
2. When students first fall below the 75% mark they receive a verbal warning – a casual, conversational, but direct reminder of the requirement and its consequences.
3. If students fall below the mark a second time they receive a warning letter – more formal, advising students that if they fall below the standard again, they will be dismissed.
4. If students fall below the mark again, they receive a dismissal letter to inform them that they are removed from the program. If they wish to reapply, they may do so after a 60-day wait. When they reapply, they will go on the waiting list.

Indicator of Impact

A young mother of three was dismissed from the program, and exactly 60 days later, following policy, she called to re-enroll. Unfortunately the site she had attended (which was located across the street from her house) had closed. When her name came up on the waiting list, her only option was to attend a site farther away. She did so, walking 45 minutes each way, each day, with four children in tow, and she maintained nearly perfect attendance.

Finally, they recognized that this new procedure for recording student attendance would greatly increase the staff's workload. It became necessary to hire someone on a part-time basis to maintain the data.

The Results

Many of Donielle's adult education colleagues had doubts about establishing such a stringent system. Their classes also have inconsistent attendance, and they said that if they were to implement this type of strategy, they would have to dismiss so many students that the program numbers would dwindle to the point they would not be able to keep the class open. Yet HFLP found results were just the opposite. Rather than experiencing a decrease in students, their enrollment grew and a waiting list had to be established.

While some families were dismissed, those that remained were more committed, and receiving more hours of instruction, they made greater learning gains. The increased learning gains motivated them to further improve their attendance and achievement, creating an upward cycle in which students were inspired by their own gains! As a result, attendance rates now surpass the 75% requirement; last year it was 85%. Further, only five students left the program. Word of mouth spread that *you will learn* in this program.

Example Two: Increasing Intensity of Instruction

Students need to have sufficient intensity of instruction to make gains. NCSALL reports that, on average, 100 hours of instruction are needed to make a gain of one level. Donielle reviewed Even Start standards, which recommend that students participate in at least 60 hours of instruction per month. HFLP was offering classes three hours per day for a total of 48 hours per month. Donielle and staff also noted that students had been asking for more hours of instruction. They began to consider increasing classes from three hours to four hours per day to reach 64 hours per months, in an effort to increase student learning gains.

Implementing an Improvement Plan

HFLP contacted the adult school to see if it would support four hours a day of instruction instead of three, since the adult school pays the teachers. The adult school gave its approval. HFLP then discussed the idea with the full team, including the Parent Advisory Committee and the teachers to get input and consider what impact the change would have. The Parent Advisory Committee discussed it with the students. Consensus was that they should make the change, and the new schedule was implemented in the following quarter.

The Results

As a result of this increase in intensity of instruction, along with the attendance requirement change detailed in the first example, gains have progressively increased each year. In 2007, 87% of all enrolled students met the CASAS benchmark gains for their instructional level, compared to 55% before the changes were made in 2001. This also facilitated an increased number of students completing ESL instruction and transferring to GED instructional programs. See the *HFLP GED Study Group Growth 2006-07* chart.

Skills for Data Analysis

Donielle provides leadership in using data to make program decisions by leading and encouraging staff to always be looking at data and figuring out what it means to the program, what is reflected in the numbers. By always asking questions and encouraging staff to do the same, she helps them to develop personal skills that then translate into organizational skills that benefit the HFLP. Those skills include

- Seeing the bigger picture and what impact change will have on the program
- Being a strategic thinker who ties everything to data
- Always looking to develop partnerships – finding what’s mutually beneficial.

HFLP’s recommendations for using data for making decisions:

- Review data with a critical eye, and know the parameters for data validity. For example, in the Early Childhood Education program, HFLP is required to administer the Peabody Picture Test to measure the receptive vocabulary of four-year-olds. Their program scores were 55%. The test is designed for English-speaking children, however, and the program serves children from homes in which English is not the first language. Therefore, 55% is a much better result than thought at first glance. Another example is with the CASAS assessments. If students are not given the appropriate test for their level, their scores will not be valid and cannot be used.
- Ask what is truly reflected in the numbers: “How can you tell *that* from *this*?” Again, see the example of the Peabody Picture Test described above. What do the numbers truly reflect for your program?
- Make sure you understand what information the funders really want. Sometimes the questions they ask are not the ones that will really provide the answers they desire. It is up to you to understand the funders’ needs and to help them understand what data will give them that information.

Creating a Culture of Accountability

At the HFLP everything ties to data. It can be tempting to make assumptions about what is happening within a program, and to make changes built on those assumptions. When the program noticed the attendance rates and achievement rates were similar (as seen in example one above), they could have just jumped in and began making changes based on what seemed to be obvious; but rather, they checked it out. Only after reviewing the data, did they begin to formulate a plan for program improvement. As one adheres to such principles, with such value for data and its integrity, a culture of accountability becomes a way of life and supports all facets of a program.

In addition to using its data well to make decisions, HFLP excels in involving all of the stakeholders in the organization, especially the students themselves. They are actively involved as equal partners in receiving and reviewing data, understanding what it means, and proposing

changes to improve program operation based on the data. They are not mere beneficiaries of the program, but they help to direct its course as well. Their inclusion and degree of involvement creates a sense of ownership for their own learning, for the learning of their classmates, and for the overall success of their center. They share the responsibility for the HFLP.

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