Task 6: Findings

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The Norfolk Southeastern Cooperative Educational Program (SECEP) seeks to provide students with a nurturing and educating environment which should meet the needs of students and their families. There are a number of programs that cater to students with developmental disabilities, behavioral problems, and lack of emotional awareness. Multiple staff members who run these programs were able to provide useful information about their goals and objectives as being a part of SECEP.

**Results**

Due to time constraints, utilizing interview methods was the best option to gather data. Each employee was asked a series of questions regarding students’ short-term and long-term success, conflict, and curriculum. The first concern to be addressed was “how is it ensured that students are given the tools and skills they need in order to be successful in and outside of school”? Teachers and students receive all information regarding academics and behavior through frequent meetings throughout the year. There are transition goals in the Individualized Educational Plan that are written to prepare students for employment. SECEP stands by developing or enhancing specific work skills that are believed to be important for a personal who will maintain employment. They also implement differentiation which is a proactive response used to shape and guide the mindset of a student with sound educational principles.

Activities that implement educational and recreational needs are important for expanding a student’s thought process and well-being. Teachers and counselors have students participate in physical education meditation, yoga, and occasional field trips that align with Virginia’s educational plan. All of these are significant in promoting health, wellness, and satisfaction. This helps maintain a balance between the duration of providing academic material and allowing students a form of free time to take mental and physical breaks from a typical classroom setting. Considering that SECEP is referred to as an alternative school for youth, the concern is in what ways are students prepared to reattend a traditional school schedule. Utilizing IEPs and guiding students toward using proper communication and expression of emotions assist in reconnecting them with themselves and peers. Youth who with behavioral and/or emotional disorders may be more susceptible to less fortunate situations. Therefore, it was asked “how is conflict addressed between students and students, students and staff, and staff and staff”? Staff and students follow a process called Conflict Mediation. Parties involved with conflict are asked to pause, breathe, and decide on their next steps. Conflict should be addressed privately. Determine the most appropriate medium to deal with the occurring issue. It is critical to create an opening for communication so that everyone plays an equal part in the conversation. Students are even given the opportunity to separate themselves from classes, so that they are given the opportunity to calm down and reassess.

A child’s educational and personal growth not only includes the student, but as well as his or her family. SECEP seeks to include families by being invited for one-on-one meetings to discuss goals with principals, teachers, and educational specialists so that the student can return to traditional schooling. They are also provided with the necessary resources to assist with treatment and rehabilitation services. Students and families are strongly encouraged to attend program and assemblies that cover newly added policies, upcoming meetings or events, and open discussions of any concerns. Creating academic plans for students is not an easy task, especially when needs of all students must be considered. Utilizing the differentiation tactic guides instruction to meet individual needs. The use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction. Teachers do this through contact process, product, and environment according to a student’s readiness, interest, and learning profile. Students who follow an IEP may have specific goals to guide behavior such as proper language and successful interaction with others.

**Conclusion**

SECEP ensures that they provide the best quality of their services by creating specific academic plans for students who need them, allowing students to analyze their thoughts and emotions, and using proper tools and skills to address conflict. They have developed a solid foundation to give students with behavioral, emotional, and developmental disorders the opportunity to become better versions of themselves. They show honest concern for their students through simple communication such as asking about their day and provides help in any way that they can. In addition, they positively work for personal improvement through a token economy in which students who keep up their good behavior are rewarded based on a point system. Using positive reinforcement is an effective way to increase wanted behavior. Faculty and staff also make it their duty to keep families updated on the goals and objectives of SECEP regarding staff and students. There is room for improvement in every program available. Art therapy should be considered an activity for free time in the future if it is appropriate for the budget. Some schools may see it as more of a privilege than right. However, it is something fun, but can also be educational if implemented correctly. Although no educational program is perfect, SECEP engages in proper personal and educational development for its students.

**Implications**

Being able to only use the interview method for gathering information has its difficulties due to the fact that data solely relies on the statements an interviewee provides the interviewer with. Not all perspectives can be supported because there are opportunities of dishonesty. Those who are being evaluated may want their program to be viewed in the most positive way, so they may either avoid revealing their areas of weakness or they minimize the problems or issues that occur within the program. In addition, interviews do not give as much raw data as an observation could. Observing a situation in its natural occurrence can provide better responses and less skewed data. These findings can have a positive impact on the program.

**Recommendations**

As stated previously, there could be some new methods of enrichment implemented into the program such as art therapy and written reflection time. Art therapy is a creative way for people to express their thoughts and emotions. If staff would like to make it a more rigid based class, then they can apply a specific lesson such as learning about particular brush strokes and then having students use that to create the art piece that aligns with the goal or objective for that day. Written reflection time is also important because students are often being told what to do and how to do something all day whether that is by their teachers or family. Utilizing this time to express thoughts on paper may give them a better understand of their thoughts and emotions, and can possibly decrease their in-class interruptions by students. Teachers should be open to reading these reflections, and any students who may want to discuss what they reflected upon can privately indicate that in their reflection. If willing to discuss their experiences, they can be referred to the school counselor.

It is also recommended to have individual goal sheets for each student rather than making it open to an entire classroom. A student’s wants, concerns, and personal developing areas should remain confidential. Maintaining confidentiality in this situation is important to reduce risk of conflict between students especially. For example, making this information available for all students increases the likelihood of a student being bullied or made-fun of. Instead, teachers should just have names of students and some type of color or shape that only demonstrates positive outcomes. At the end of each week, students should be provided with their weekly behavior report and have it discussed among teachers and family.

**Goals and Objectives**

A goal for SECEP should be to improve overall personal development within the students. In order to reach this goal, students should be allowed to use partial class time for weekly journal reflections and if needed, emphasize any concerns in particular with staff members. Students Should also engage in in-class discussions regarding academic material which could enhance interpersonal skills. This is almost similar to the YES program that researchers utilized in their data collection “*Youth Empowerment Solutions: Evaluation of an After-School Program to Engage Middle School Students in Community Change*.” They helped students become aware of the importance of their community, engaging with adults, and maintaining responsibility. Another way to reach this goal is utilizing the token economy to increase success rates within students. This can be through pizza parties, field days, or selecting certain items from a small store that SECEP already provides. Researchers of *“Implementation Quality and Positive Experiences in After-School Programs”* have implemented a similar program by rewarding students for positive behavior and also not overloading them with so much academic material in hope that it will keep them busy or that they will retain all of the information. As stated, it is important to find a balance between academic and recreational aspects of learning, especially when focusing on building up a student’s personal development.

References

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