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**Techniques for Improving Learner Persistence:
A Summary of Participant Suggestions
October 2005**

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In the fall of 2004 and the spring of 2005, CALPRO sponsored study circles focusing on the issue of learner persistence. Twenty-four agencies across the state held study circles, with a total of 180 participants. During the study circles, participants read and discussed research related to learner persistence and brainstormed ways in which teachers and programs might improve learner persistence. The following suggestions are the result of these brainstorming sessions. Opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this list are those of the study circle participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the California Department of Education.

Attitudes

1. Teachers can
   a. Create a welcome, fun, and supportive learning environment that is respectful of learners' individuality;
   b. Demonstrate accepting, compassionate, and non-judgmental attitudes;
   c. Provide positive role models to inspire students to achieve their goals;
   d. Model positive attitudes toward work and life;
   e. Have a sense of humor in the classroom;
   f. Acknowledge that students' lives are complicated;
   g. Strive to be understanding about why students feel the need to drop/shop while continuing to convince them not to;
   h. Be careful not to apply their values to learners' experiences or needs;
   i. Not assume that students had negative K-12 experiences.
2. Programs must make a firm commitment to learner persistence (e.g., walk the talk).

The Student-Teacher Relationship

Teachers can
   a. Strive to design classes to consist primarily of learner-centered instruction as opposed to teacher-centered instruction;
   b. Strive to be active listeners;
   c. Make an effort to learn and remember students' names;
   d. Show a sincere interest in their students.

Communicating with Students

Teachers or programs can
   a. Hold monthly "dine with the Dean or Program Director " events;
   b. Create more one-on-one communication with learners;
   c. Take time for in-depth student interviews;
   d. Ask students why they attend classes;
   e. Ask students to think about why other students stop attending.

Intake

Teachers or programs can
   a. Post detailed information on the agency's Web site to give students a good sense of what to expect in classes;
   b. Use a buddy system during orientation to match students, based on their first or native languages;
   c. Include statistics in intake presentations about how education is related to success.

Planning and Goal Setting

Teachers can
   a. Ask their students frequently what they want to learn;
   b. Survey students frequently regarding their needs and goals and whether they think that instruction is helping them meet their goals;
   c. Use checklists in surveys;
   d. Teach lessons on learner goal setting;
   e. Encourage their students to establish clear and attainable goals to set the purpose for learning;
   f. List student goals as specific tasks to be accomplished;
   g. Demonstrate high expectations for students.

Class Structure

Teachers can
   a. Support student-directed learning;
   b. Provide opportunities for students to self-select their curriculum;
   c. Support student-driven establishment of classroom procedures/rules;
   d. Focus on increasing interactions between students;
   e. Conduct learner-to-learner interviews;
   f. Attend to community building as part of lessons;
   g. Provide peer tutor and other opportunities for students to work in pairs/groups;
   h. Help form student buddies to create class ties;
   i. Vary the instructional strategy, e.g., games, field trips, guest speakers, use of engaging visuals;
   j. Use kinesthetic activities in the classroom;
   k. Increase activities that focus on making students feel personally invested, such as journaling or oral histories about their educational experiences;
   l. Incorporate modular or "chunked" lessons that build towards a final product;
   m. Incorporate group projects or cooperative learning;
   n. Vary grouping strategies within the classroom;
   o. Emphasize SCANS competencies.

Organizational Strategies

Teachers can
   a. Offer concrete planning using student calendars and other organizational/time management strategies;
   b. Create student timesheets and timelines for accomplishing tasks;
   c. Overtly tell students what the focus of the class is and why it is relevant;
   d. Focus on clarity of purpose.

Recognizing/Providing for Success

Teachers can
   a. Stress success and reward success;
   b. Praise students for even small successes;
   c. Plan for opportunities to celebrate student success;
   d. Create concrete recognition of success (e.g., portfolios, folders, certificates);
   e. Create success charts;
   f. Recognize short-term goals (e.g., Post-Its for 20 hours of instruction, tote bags for 60 hours);
   g. Try journaling with students about their strengths and successes.

Support

Teachers (and programs) can
  a. Be responsive to student needs so that trust is established;
  b. Provide one-on-one counseling for all students;
  c. Identify barriers to learner persistence for all their students as well as work with each student one-on-one to develop a plan to address the barriers;
  d. Encourage students—always;
  e. Try checking in with students who dropped the class (e.g., calling, sending postcards, using the buddy system to make contact with absent students);
  f. Consider compiling a class list or phone tree of student names and telephone numbers (purely voluntary) to distribute among classmates;
  g. Ask students to identify the forces (positive and negative) that affect their persistence, and then help them create a plan to deal with the negative forces;
  h. Create a list of motivational speakers (including former students and community members) who can visit the classroom;
  i. Have a table at local neighborhood events to promote the program;
  j. Develop community partnerships.

Program Structure

Programs/Agencies can
  a. Support or try out managed enrollment to decrease classroom turbulence, which can impact negatively on learner persistence;
  b. Consider two-hour class times to decrease absenteeism;
  c. Consider planning and hosting events that involve students' families and communities (e.g., job fairs, family read-a-thons);
  d. Create a student council;
  e. Facilitate the creation of student groups.

Assessment

Teachers can
  a. Provide opportunities for students to monitor their own progress by charting their performance on spelling tests;
  b. Provide students with their test scores and with strategies to improve performance on future tests;
  c. Promote and model student self-monitoring for academic progress;
  d. Hold weekly exams (and provide certificates of accomplishment);
  e. Hold mid-term evaluations.

The Classroom Environment

Teachers can
  a. Create a wall of graduates;
  b. Create a wall of photos and cards from students;
  c. Ensure a safe and secure facility for learning.

Teacher's Reflective Practice

Teachers can
  a. Discuss how to balance relevant education with the use of textbooks;
  b. Conduct reflective observation;
  c. Define the characteristics of a teacher with high student retention rates;
  d. Read about the intersection of persistence and quality teaching;
  e. Keep in mind students' cultural differences;
  f. Focus on what they can control;
  g. Not take it personally if/when students stop attending classes.

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