

Executive Summary: Student Assistance: Letter of Agreement and Mentor

Proposal:

The Special Education Department with the support and cooperation of the Secondary Education Department requests approval to continue utilizing the services of Beacon Light to provide a Student Assistance Program as required by PA State Law. The WCSD has complemented the required portion of this program by adding a mentor for special education students. The mentor works with special needs students who are at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation.

Actions to Date:

Student Assistance is a program that was developed by the state of Pennsylvania in 1989 to ensure that students and families were helped by school personnel to make connections to services and agencies in the community to access mental health and drug and alcohol services. This involves training staff members in each secondary building and providing time for the team to meet with representatives from local agencies and assess changes in student behavior utilizing data collected by the team. The team then works with students and families to identify social service agencies that will help to meet their needs.

Many of the students involved in the Student Assistance Program are a great risk for dropping out of school. Some of our special education students, in particular, require more intensive services than can be provided by an outside agency working on its own. As a part of the Strategic Planning process required by the state, the Special Education plan was developed to address the drop-out prevention needs of special education students. The Special Education Supervisors and Principals have been working to address the needs of “at risk” secondary special education students since the beginning of the 2010-11 school year by holding team meetings within each building. Initial efforts focused on identifying potential drop-outs and ensuring that additional supports are provided to these students to help them be successful. A dedicated Student Assistance Mentor was employed to spend time working with families at their homes, calling absent students first thing in the morning to verify their absence with their parents, making a connection with students in school, and monitoring student grades and homework completion. The mentor provided an intensive one-to-one focus that has proven beneficial to many of these students.

Financial Implications:

The Student Assistance Program is funded through County allocations for Human Services and so the Letter of Agreement is all that is required for these services to be put in place. There is no cost to the District for this portion of the program.

The proposed expenditures in 2011-12 for the mentor position will be supported using the IDEA Federal monies. The mentor will be employed through contract with Beacon Light Behavioral Health.

Outcomes:

The mentoring program has proved its results directed at drop out prevention for high risk students. The program is designed to address four general areas of student functioning:

1. Academic – time on task, credits earned toward graduation, homework completion with accuracy
2. Behavioral – attendance, suspensions, voluntary classroom participation, extracurricular participation
3. Cognitive – self regulation of behavior toward goals, perceived relevance of schoolwork to future endeavors, value of learning, personal goals, and autonomy.
4. Affective – feelings of identification and belonging, and relationships

The WCSD would contract with Beacon Light on a performance basis to ensure monies spent on this program attain desired outcomes. Beacon Light agreed to continue collecting data to demonstrate performance success during the 2011-2012 academic year. We require the mentor to collect appropriate data (outcomes) for use in evaluating the effectiveness of the program in the future.

Data has been collected during the 2010-2011 school year and while that data is still being processed, early indicators suggest that the special education drop-out rate for 2010-2011 has been reduced significantly. The administration intends to present a summary of that data to the CIT committee as soon as it has been completed.

Recommendation:

That the Board of School Directors approves the Beacon Light Student Assistance Letter of Agreement for the 2011-12 school year pending the approval of the solicitor.

That the Board of School Directors approves the Beacon Light Student Assistance Contract for the 2011-12 school year pending the approval of the solicitor.