

So, Administrators Matter Online too!

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

At Achieve Virtual, we are not bound by transportation limits or school district boundaries. As a virtual high school, we enroll students from all over Indiana to continue their high school education to completion of a high school diploma. A few of the consistent factors that influence our continued growth, success, and struggles start with having approximately 200 different full time enrolled students each semester with another 300-400 part time students taking individual classes to supplement their traditional school day. We have a major area of concern regarding our continued low success rate in our standardized math testing (11-21% passing rate each year). Perhaps most importantly, all of our teachers are part time teachers for Achieve Virtual. All are licensed Indiana teachers. However, most teach during the day in a traditional high school. Teachers who are not employed by other schools or districts are retired or stay at home parents who are still paid through our part time payout model. Like our online students, most of our teacher interactions for professional development are remote or done online outside of a few face-to-face meetings each year for our summer learning academy and summer school trainings. Teacher pay is incentivized to an extent. When a teacher has a student start their class, the teacher is paid \$50.00 for that student. After the student completes the course for credit, the teacher is awarded the remainder of the payout of \$75.00 (a potential total of \$125.00 per student). Teachers who work during the day as a traditional teacher are limited to approximately 30 online students each semester to ensure the teachers have a student load they can actually teach, as opposed to getting "lost in the numbers". One of my consistent, yearly concerns is the teacher engagement in our online courses through consistent interaction with their students and how that influences our students' engagement and pacing through their online classes. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to determine if an increase in administrator interaction and supervision with the teachers would influence teacher interaction with their online courses and students.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

Does increased administrator interaction affect teacher engagement in their individual online classes and their students, and does this improve student success?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering, we first created a formal walkthrough document for the administrator to use for checking in on individual teacher courses, evidence of student interaction, communication to parents and students, and overall appeal of the introduction page and content. Our team met and reviewed a few other secondary schools' walkthrough forms within our own district. After reviewing, we modified various components of each school's walkthrough form to create our own for Achieve Virtual. After coming to a consensus on what makes the most sense for our virtual setting, we began conducting walkthroughs of our online teachers' classes and sharing our thoughts on a single document.

We also changed our professional development model this year based on previous survey data where teachers selected their own form of professional development methods and time commitment to PD through Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). We met with our Director of Virtual and Blended Learning to create a menu of

professional development ideas teachers could participate in to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning online. Ideas such as participation in a webinar, lead a webinar, and lead a professional development opportunity in our district specific to online learning are examples of the sixteen various actions teachers could choose to participate in to meet proficiency and earn a predetermined number of PGPs. After creating the menu of options for our staff, we planned the method to appropriately distribute the plan for ILP implementation, which included every teacher meeting with our Director of Virtual and Blended Learning in order to begin the process and signing off on his or her individual plan.

The administrator also continued to monitor student attendance and attempt to individually chase down students who went missing or were not on pace to finish courses by the end of the semester. The process of chasing down students was consistent with previous years, however this year our administrator shared a Google document with the teachers that enabled them to see the administrator's actions and other information that teachers may not otherwise know regarding individual student attendance and progress. We also looked at end of the semester credit attainment compared to the previous school year, and finally we distributed and collected response data from a survey to the teachers specific to the ILPs and the new walkthrough process.

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

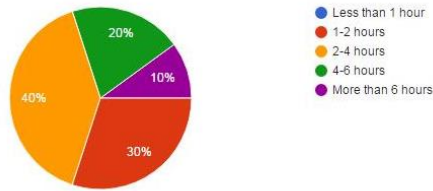
As a result of analyzing our data, two important things we learned include:

- Consistent administrator interaction with the teachers and their courses is more effective than the "incentivization" of pay and is critical to the improvement of courses and teacher commitment to the online students.
- Despite collecting data previously that stated teachers would like the opportunity to learn on their own and at their own pace, the ILP feedback clearly tells us that teachers prefer to have face-to-face interaction for their learning; again having administrator interaction.

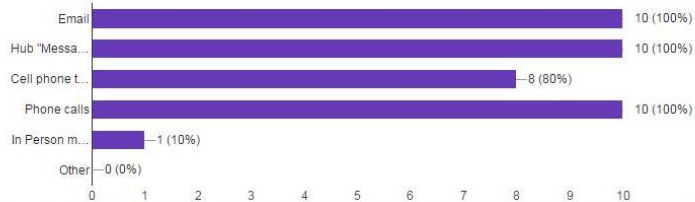
Based on the walkthrough revelations and the survey data collected from the teachers, it was clear teachers appreciate and often look for feedback from the administrator. The teachers we completed walkthroughs on were responsive to the feedback with the administrator and had a higher student success rate than those we did not complete walkthroughs on for the fall semester. Teachers who submitted missing student names that were added to the "missing student" report each week were more likely to continue to submit names and work with the administrator on attempting to reach out and engage their online students.

How many contact hours a week do you estimate you spend with AVE Students?

(10 responses)



How do you engage with your students (check all that apply)? (10 responses)



How do you think your communication impacts your students' learning?

(10 responses)

I think it helps with their motivation and understanding.

The feedback indicates that it pushes students to progress in classes at a faster rate than without consistent communication.

Communication/nagging the students keeps them working throughout the semester. Many of my students also ask for extra videos, which I send through email. They also ask for help on problems. I will write out the problems and email them a picture of my work so they can begin to work their way through it.

Mainly by encouragement and clarification. Students are consistently reminded of pacing and encouraged to ask questions.

Allows students to ask questions on each question to allow the mastery of the topic.

It forces them to not ignore the class.

My communication serves to motivate my students to maintain a solid lesson pace.

The students that choose to interact with me always succeed and earn their credit.

It is a good motivator for the students that engage with me.

It encourages the students to work on the class and complete their work. We talk about college, graduate school, potential job opportunities..... And, by the way, we discuss any misunderstandings.

How does my interaction with you influence your engagement with your students, content, and professional growth as an online teacher?

(10 responses)

It reminds me of important procedures and the value of communication with students.

I am not sure that it drastically improves the student experience. All of the things you remind us to do are things I would be doing with or without your encouragement.

Your interaction reminds me if there is a student I haven't for which I have not received a response. Also it reminds me to keep up with my reminder emails around spring break!

Reminders are always good.

Allows myself to be comfortable to ask questions to other teachers when needed.

You're a great admin, so I try to do things that you'd want me to do.

Mr. Eaton provides useful examples of best practices that help improve my communication with my students.

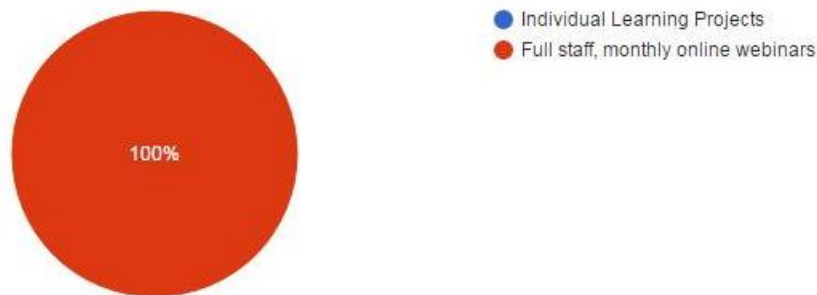
I am self motivated but I do enjoy the weekly updates as it keeps me informed about our school outside of my classes.

It helps to keep communication open and look into issues that need to be resolved promptly.

You continue to remind us how important personal contacts are for our students and provide us with excellent training to help us become better teachers.

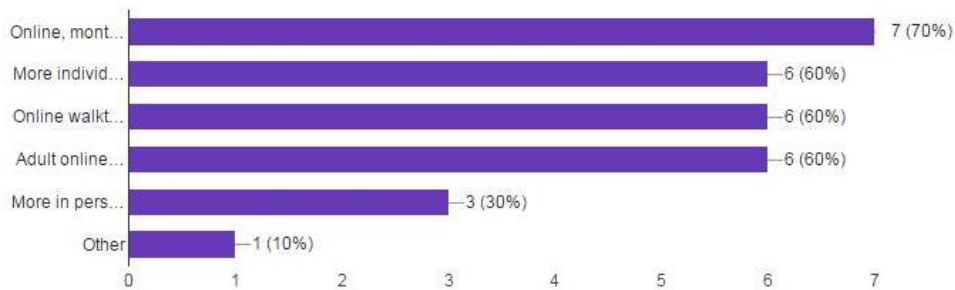
Looking at this year's professional development model (Individual Learning Projects) vs. our all staff monthly online meetings from previous years, which do you feel better meets your needs for professional growth?

(10 responses)



Overall, how do I as the principal of Achieve help you improve your engagement with our school and your students? (select all that apply)

(10 responses)



Though the ILP data was disappointing, it tells us teachers want more interaction with our leaders in order to perform better at their online teaching jobs. Many teachers started the process, but by October, most had not maintained their goals and PGP earning. By February, it appears most had stopped participating in the plan or attempting to improve their learning on their own.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The inquiry journey helped us come together as a team and really focus on creative ways to look at and potentially solve some of our school's most important struggles: obtaining high level of teacher and student engagement. As we continue to look ahead and improve what we do and how we do it, we know it will be with more thorough and evolving walkthrough practices. It won't include ILPs as a whole staff option, however we never want to close the door for individual teacher improvement opportunities. It's clear that having the administrator attempt to be more involved with the teachers helped the success rate of our students and teacher engagement. Now we need to continue to find new and inventive ways to make administrator-to-teacher interaction happen more consistently in our ever-growing and changing online world.

References:

N/A