

Project Based Learning: School Newspaper

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School: Phoenix Academy
District: Clark County
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My Superintendent/Principal is aware of and approved the submission of this "Best Practice". True

How many students did this Best Practice impact? School Wide: 30

School Level/Grade:

- 6th Grade, 7th Grade, 8th Grade, 9th Grade, 10th Grade, 11th Grade, 12th Grade, Alternative Program

Identify and select the standard that relates to the purpose and direction as stated in the Kentucky AdvancED Standards.

Standard 3

Teaching and Assessing for Learning

The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.

(Approach) Describe how the practice aligns to the organization's goals, and how it aligns with students, parents, staff and the community.

At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, the Phoenix Academy moved to increase the utilization of project based learning (performance based learning PBL). In an effort to increase our students reading and writing skills and to increase student driven learning and engagement, Phoenix Academy began using the school newspaper to teach the Language Arts curriculum standards. This paper is a monthly publication that engages our students, staff, and community. The paper is sent across the district as well as out to the Winchester community. The ultimate goal of our school is to engage our students in learning and to reach mastery. Research has indicated that at-risk students respond better to hands-on tactile learning. Most of our students are Kinesthetic learners. Since the use of this approach, student reading scores have increased dramatically as evidenced by MAP scores and Mastery Checks. (Formative assessments).

Describe the current situation before the practice was developed. Note reasons why improvements were needed.

Before the school newspaper was utilized, students were not responding to standard educational practices regarding teaching reading and writing with the Language Arts curriculum. The school uses Read 180 and was getting positive results, but needed another avenue to teach reading and writing skills as well as the Language Arts curriculum. Before student test scores were below expectations regarding reaching mastery. Only one student met benchmarks on the English II EOC, only one student met the proficiency level of the K-PREP, and no students met the benchmarks for ACT in English or Reading. ACT scores are not yet available for analysis.

(Deployment) Describe the process used to develop the solution which became the Best Practice (or promising approach) and describe the implementation process.

Students at Phoenix Academy are offered middle school English and English I through IV. Basically, ALL students participate in the publication of the Phoenix Sun Newspaper. The paper is the main approach we use to teach the Kentucky core content standards for Language Arts is the school paper. The paper began as a monthly publication, but now has expanded into a bi-monthly publication to increase rigor. Students select a topic to write about in the paper. Article topics vary from persuasive pieces, debates on hot topics, sports, personal experiences, school activities, music, movies, illustrations, and poetry. This student driven product is entirely made by the students including the research for the article, editing, content selection, and illustration/pictures. The students manage the paper from beginning to end and must read outside sources to produce the articles. A rubric is used to assess the quality and to give the students an idea of the expected level of proficiency. The rubric is based on the Kentucky core content standards as well as examples from the Winchester Sun and the high school newspaper. In addition, the students took a field trip to the local paper distribution company, the Winchester Sun. During this tour, the students learned about all aspects of paper including development, advertising, printing, and distribution.

(Learning): Describe the tangible results achieved, including trends for summative (outcome) and formative (leading) indicators, and the comparative data used to suggest that this is a Best Practice or, promising approach.

The tangible result achieved is a product in the form of a newspaper. With their articles complete, every student has a writing sample to assess their writing skills. The results have been very impressive regarding student learning. Our middle school MAP scores have shown gains will ALL of our students. Specifically, when we started the project, only two out of nine were on grade level (33%). Now eight out of nine students (89%) in our middle school grade levels are now at grade level on the reading MAP assessment. According to our formative assessments, two students out of six were proficient. However, after the school paper initiative five out of six (83%) students in the tenth grade are proficient. We have not yet been able to analyze our pre/post TABE data regarding reading.

(Integration): Lessons learned and future plans to sustain this best practice.

Lessons learned:

What we have learned is that student driven learning initiatives using project based learning are very powerful and effective. In addition, utilizing community partners such as the Winchester Sun have been very helpful to increase our students' knowledge of the process. The feedback from parents, community members, and other schools in the district has been overwhelmingly positive. We hope that his real world endeavor will increase our students' career readiness and encourage some of our student to pursue a career with the newspaper business.

Future plans:

At this time, we are working on expanding this project in a continued collaboration with The Winchester Sun, our local news paper. Phoenix Academy students will begin writing articles to be published in the local newspaper. The articles will be a summary of interviews of the subscribers of the Winchester Sun in a "Who's Who of Winchester" series. Our students will interview the Who's who and also write the article. The series will that utilizes a cutting edge technology by using an App for the smart phone. The app called KY XTRA allows our students to attach a video clip to a picture in the written article. For instance, a reader would scan in the picture with their smart phone and have access to a video clip that expands on the story and/or the writer of the article. The Phoenix Academy video production class will record the video clip that is attached electronically and will bring to life another aspect of the article and picture. The pictures that are highlighted will be identified by an Icon indicating the video is available. Phoenix Academy and the Winchester Sun are the FIRST publication to utilize this technology.

List any training materials/resources that could be shared with other schools and a description of how the materials/resources are being used.

Upon request to Dustin Howard, principal, copies of the school newspaper can be emailed or mailed. In addition, Mr. Howard to provide email feedback regarding the newspaper and the communities enjoyment of the publication.

The school newspaper, "The Phoenix Sun" serves several purposes including: a way to communicate current events of the school, provide feedback regarding student's writing, collect data on student performance, and communicate with parents/guardians, the school district, community members, and business partners.