Accountability flaws

Introduction

Student Success Academy (SSA) is a free public charter school with the main campus being located in Waipahu on the island of Oahu with satellite campuses located on the island of Kauai and Maui. Virtual programs running state-wide with every island represented excluding Ni'ihau. SSA was founded in 2008 with an enrolment of 237 students mainly composed of students from Oahu. In its second year of operation, the school grew to an enrolment of 500 students with over 800 on the waiting list and expanded its virtual program state-wide due to need. Subsequently in year three, 2010-11, the school again doubled in size to 1000 students state-wide with over 380 students on the waiting list. This year, enrolment was limited by the Local School Board to equalize the grades and assure that every child receives the same high quality education. The school consists of a demographic of approximately 30% of our students being military, 31% of Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian descent, and the remainder being a mixed demographic including 44% White, 24% Asian, 9% Japanese, 5% African American, 5% Chinese, 2% Hispanic. The school benefits from a diverse and blended population as it focuses on being a collaborative learning environment.

The core program is provided in a blended environment; the students take classes online and face-to-face with remediation being directly related to their need based upon formal, informal and anecdotal assessments. The school provides a vast array of electives ranging from hula, ukulele, Hawaiian language, 2D and 3D Video Game Design. The staff has grown from six full-time teachers and four part-time teachers in year one to currently over 45 full and part-time staff. The staff is very diverse in their background

as well as in their expertise. All teachers are highly qualified in their content areas with no teachers teaching out of their license area.

Accountability Problem

One of the contributing factors to student success in any school is parental involvement. Research shows that parental involvement and engagement is crucial to the success of any child. Because Student Success Academy is a hybrid school, the curriculum is delivered online and the students work primarily from home on the OLS. At the K-8 level, parents are responsible for helping the students learn the content, complete their assessments and mark progress (Armstrong, 2002). Students at the Student Success Academy are expected to come to the school at least once a week for the four core classes: Math, Science, English, and History and each class is 50 minutes long.

Education as an investment for our society's future has become a matter of priority nationwide and globally. With online education, parents are responsible to fulfill a " learning coach" responsibility yet teachers are finding that many parents do more than assist. At SSA, progress checks and report cards and based solely off of the progress being made on the Online School (OLS) and teachers are finding huge discrepancies between the progress shown in class versus what they demonstrate online. Students come to class not knowing the content they should have learned online at home, with progress being checked off as " mastered" by their parent. Students end up being short-changed because either the parents are doing too much of the work for them and/or marking progress too quickly.

Levels of Accountability

The primary purpose of education is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to be successful in life. Since standards are the basis for measuring how well students have learned what they need to know and be able to do at various grade levels and academic growth, they are the foundation for the state and local curriculum and instructional alignment and assessment.

Standards-based accountability requires collecting student data and reporting information based on clear and defined standards for what students must know and be able to do. Student mastery of the academic content is derived from state-mandated standards: content and performance. Decisions regarding student learning and achievement, professional development, curriculum and instruction, and resource allocation should be based on both content and performance standards. The standards represent the foundation for determining student achievement (Hamilton et al., 2008).

Educational accountability calls for holding key individuals and groups responsible for measuring and improving student academic progress in online learning. There are a variety of ways by which stakeholders are responsible for student performance in online education. Students are responsible for achieving mastery on individual and classroom assessments correlated with state-mandated academic content standards; schools are accountable for providing students with a curriculum that is aligned with state and national standards and for assessing student progress relative to

those standards (American Association for Higher Education, 1996). Online schools create assessment systems to evaluate student performance (Frye, 2008).

Fuhrman (1999) states that measuring student performance involves choosing a set of indicators and instruments (Fuhrman, 1999). Upon enrolment at SSA, every student completes a computer-adaptive test in Reading and Math that pinpoints the proficiency level of the student, corresponding to the specific standards of the state. The assessment gives a detailed diagnosis of student instructional needs, including instructional adjustments and measurement of student gains across reporting periods. Students at SSA are required to take this test at the start and end of each school year.

Regarding the day-to-day spectrum, at SSA, the OLS is designed to allow students to progress at their own pace within a mastery/competency based curriculum. Lessons are designed to provide core content and assessments of the learning objectives whereas a student must achieve an 85% or higher at the end of the lesson in order to unlock and move on to the next lesson. Each lesson and assessment totals percentage points which build throughout the year to total the expected 100%. Teachers at SSA are expected to monitor student percentages weekly, checking to make sure that students are completing their daily assignments and assessments.

SSA struggles with accountability in regards to the " learning coach" roles. In order for students to complete the assessments, parents (referred as " learning coaches") must enter a password for their child and monitor them.

This was designed to keep both the parent and student accountable every step of the way. SSA struggles, however, with finding that parents give the child their passwords and many complete their lessons and assessments without any parent involvement. Having the password also allows the student to see answer keys for various assignments and assessments.

" In theory, professional educators in a school can and should hold themselves accountable for ensuring that all students have opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the world that lies before them" (Murphy & Datnow, 2003). In the context of the word accountability as " an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions", teachers at SSA feel there are huge flaws with the accountability measures for grade reporting (Mirriam-Webster, 2003). Most don't feel confident with the grades they report on student report cards knowing the large discrepancy of OLS progress and in-cass assessments. Although teachers attempt to intervene when they notice such gaps in the student's learning by offering tutoring (online or face-to-face), there is nothing in place that holds the " learning coach" responsible aside from recommending that the child attend tutoring or re-doing a lesson and assessment online.

Most of the problem here stems from a lack of genuine parent involvement. A large majority of the student population attending online schools fail to realize the family and parent commitment needed for student success.

Family Survey

After conducting a family survey to investigate the level at which parents help their children with their school work, it will be established whether they take the greatest part and children are left with just a small percentage of work to do or not. If the results turn out they do the greater part it will mean very acute constraints as they end up being so reliant on their parents over petty things that they are supposed to have learnt by themselves at home. It is however expected that the parents are aware of this fact to ensure that they do not do too much of what is expected of their children thinking that they are doing them favours to help them score good grades at school. An example of a survey questionnaire to be posed to a sample of parents will be such as the one represented below:

The above questionnaire will be presented to the parents who shall be expected to fill it appropriately and honestly. Depending on the results reports, it will be determined the kind of action to take in educating the parents on the need to allow children have some work to do individually. Though there are many advantages associated with parental involvement in school learning, there should at least be a regulation of what and how the parents should be involved in helping the children with their assignments. To have a clear picture of the advantages associated with parental involvement, it is important to briefly pinpoint some of the benefits associated with it.

To start with, there is attainment of higher grades as the parents are able to convince their children on the importance of taking their studies seriously as well as helping them with their homework (Callison, 2004). The second benefit is that children have a perfect learning environment as the parents are likely to provide a conducive environment for learning (LaBahn, 2006).

They are also likely to invest much of their income in the education system of their children by buying books and other learning materials for their children. There is also the guarantee that positive attitudes will be developed as disciplinary measures will be embraced by both the teacher and the parents.

Other additional advantages are that the teachers get some morale to continue with their work as the students perform better hence boosting the teachers' mood (ParentNet, 2012). The parents make higher ratings of the teachers also hence less likely to blame them on their children failure. Children also receive high support from the parents and relatives as well as other family friends. Among all these, the greatest is that the school earns a high reputation that undoubtedly markets it in the outside world.

Unlike with other entities where advantages and disadvantages almost balance or disadvantages outweigh the advantages, with parental involvement it is a different case. Parental involvement has many advantages as compared to the disadvantages. The major disadvantage with this kind of schooling is that sometimes parents tend to do a lot of tasks that are required of the children and this leaves the children with too little or sometimes none of the activities to carry out by themselves (Jeynes, 2011). This might have a very acute side effect as the children remain inactive in the learning process, something that just propels them through the education system without acquiring necessary skill, attitudes and knowledge as required by the future.

With the help of the that will be acquired from the above survey, it will be of paramount importance to educate parents and convince them that though they are required to help their children with their assignments, it is important for tthem to sometimes allow children perform some tasks on their own. This does not only help children develop diligence in children, but it also improves their competence hence preparing them for their future life (Hornby, 2000). This is achieved by making them grow more responsible and learning how to meet deadlines as well. The research will be an eye opener to parents to make them realize that what matters most in education is not how a child is considered punctual in completing assignments but how well he or she understands the content of what is being taught by the teacher.

Responsibilities of a Learning Coach

Before introducing the responsibilities of a learning coach, it is important to note that a learning coach is a person who helps learners with their studies especially those who are taking online lessons. As such, a learning coach is entrusted certain responsibilities. To all the students that he or she is entrusted with, he or she should ensure that each student should be persuaded to have a wide range of programmes that are well balanced (Marsick & O'Neil, 2007). Each of these children should also be given a chance to discuss the learning programmes or opportunities that they feel are apt to them. This makes them have a better understanding of the content as it is required of them. Another responsibility of the learning coach is to help the learners set their goals and targets as well as assist them attain those targets.

In addition, the learning coach should refer children to a specialist for support in case need be. They should also be helped in setting priorities by giving the very first priority to the most valuable goals catered for first. It is also importance that the learners should realize their strengths and weaknesses so that they can embrace the most appropriate ways of dealing with their difficulties. When learners are addressing weaknesses, they should also be allowed to recognise their success and rejoice over them. This in one way or the other helps in increasing their self-esteem (Marsick & O'Neil, 2007).

The learning coach should also ensure that the learners are assisted in designing and developing individual action plan. They should finally support learners acquire and develop portfolio evidence for their key skills (Jeynes, 2011). Since in Student Success academy teachers are normally fully trained, there is feasibility and transparency which promotes the reputation of the school. It is thus nothing to bother about concerning registration of the coaches as all those who are employed are normally fully certified.

Adjusting Final Student Report

Due to the observations made that children are doing so well in their online reports but so poorly on other teacher assignments done in class. This has the implication that parental involvement has exceeded the required level and children rely too much on their parents for their online work but do too little on their own. As earlier mentioned, this has a very serious side effect as the children remain inactive in the learning process, something that just

propels them through the education system without acquiring necessary skill, attitudes and knowledge as required by the future.

Framework for Diagnosing Problems

Diagnosing a problem simply means providing a solution or rather remedy to a predicament. Though there are many methods of solving a problem, Clarke and Estes have come up with an efficient framework to work out problems that are likely to be encountered in a school setup (Estes & Clarke, 2008). As it is with the case with other many schooling institutions, there are many challenges that face such organizations sometimes to the extent that they are put in the jeopardy of collapsing.

In order to diagnose performance gaps and hence achieve the preset goals, Clarke and Estes suggest that one has to establish the root cause of the problem before he or she goes ahead to search for the remedy. After the cause has been identified, it should be established how much change is required to achieve these changes. The three major causes of performance gaps as explained by Clarke and Estes are people's skills and their knowledge, the motivation they have in achieving those goals, and the barriers that exist within the organization such as inadequacy or absolute lack of the apt tools and equipments (Estes & Clarke, 2008).

Knowledge and Skills

It is the expectation of all the children, teachers and the parents at SSA that after completion of the children's education system, they shall be hired to work for a wide range of organizations. In these organizations, they are

expected to show competence by high performance as well as manifestation of knowledge and skill failure to which they can maim the companies to which they are working for (Estes & Clarke, 2008). It is for this reason that there is need to dissuade parents from performing all tasks for their children even those that they are required to perform by themselves. Though training of under-experienced personnel happens after school it is an inconvenience to the child as it is a waste of time.

Motivation

Motivation refers to both the internal and external factors that propel one towards achieving a certain goal. Normally, children will tend to be reluctant in searching for knowledge as they will rely on their parents to carry out tasks, even the petty ones for them (Estes & Clarke, 2008). This does not only apply to children at SSA but also in other schools around the globe. This makes them lose the morale of studying and their brains do not develop as they are less put into exercise of facing challenges. There are three crucial aspects that motivation is involved in. Firstly, children set goals that they want to achieve at the end of a certain duration, secondly they gather efforts that propel them towards the attainment of those goals and thirdly there is the involvement of the mind in the process. This therefore encourages growth in all dimensions including physical, mental and psychological.

Organizational Barriers

Organizational barriers refer to the lacking or inadequate tools within the organization (Estes & Clarke, 2008). It is however important to note that this problem does not exist in Successful Student Academy. This research will

investigate whether learners are provided with appropriate leaning materials which they are expected to use in doing their assignments. The reason as to why it is important to use this framework in analysing the accountability framework in this instance is because the framework helps establish whether all the parties involved in running the school are receiving adequate support to achieve the preset goals. In addition, it assesses whether the teachers, though being fully trained and knowledgeable, are motivated in carrying out the activities set ahead by the organising committee.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be inferred that though parental involvement in education is important, it is crucial to ensure that parents do not interfere with the intellectual development of the child by doing too much work for them. There should be a balance on what the teacher, the child and the parent take part in and indeed, the child should most of the activities while the parent should only guide the child on what he or she is to do. As the child strives to excel in his or her studies, both the teacher and the parents should provide an environment that favours learning environment for the child.