

Implementation Lessons

Report #2
Future Leaders Program
Department of Social Services
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Table of Contents

Overview	1
Implementation of Learning Management System	2
Measures of Success	3
Key Findings.....	4
Opportunities and Barriers.....	5
Lessons Learned	6
Final Thoughts.....	6

Overview

The following report focuses on the challenges and successes during the implementation of the Future Leaders program in Missouri. Its purpose is to serve as a guide for future programs. The Missouri IV-D Family Support Division received a three-year, \$1 million grant from the Office of Child Support Enforcement in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund the Future Leaders program as part of the Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting demonstration. The Future Leaders program focuses on teen parenthood and emphasizes collaborative relationships between the Missouri IV-D Family Support Division and urban and rural school districts across Missouri, with a core focus on improving the lives of the youth they serve. An underpinning premise of the Future Leaders program is leveraging expertise in the legal and financial responsibilities of parenting to educate and motivate teens and young adults. The program intends to develop male and female Future Leaders in grades 7-12 through education and motivation. The program provides education focused on helping students comprehend personal development and financial literacy skills by teaching evidence-based subjects aimed at reducing teen pregnancies, learning parenting skills and relationship skills, and encouraging positive mentoring.

The curriculum is concept-based, engaging, research-driven, interactive, thought-provoking, and educational. The program also allows the Missouri IV-D Family Support Division to collaborate with multiple school districts across Missouri, with other fatherhood and parenthood programs, and with community partners to reach young people through educational strategies such as social media campaigns, presentations, classes, videos, peer discussions, and other activities.

General Implementation Strategy

The program's implementation strategy encompasses three phases:

1. *Establish action plan with partners:* Collaborate with partners on their role, availability and ability to execute plan throughout the lifecycle of the grant.
2. *Develop curriculum with partners:* Consult with various partners to develop the learning tools and topics for the Future Leaders program.
3. *Implement Pre-Parenthood Curriculum:* Chosen school districts, with partnering agencies, implemented the thirteen-week, one-hour lessons held in the classroom for seventh and eighth grade students.

Partner organizations of the Family Support Division were trained and served as facilitators charged with teaching the pre-parenthood curriculum addressing financial,

legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood. These trained facilitators have experience in delivery of education to at-risk youth. They had to understand:

- Educational goals of the Future Leaders program
- Program model – what it is, why it works, and how to implement it
- Basic techniques to engage students in learning
- How to “take ownership” of planned lessons
- How to make connections for students between real life experience and the curriculum

Facilitators received support on how to plan their educational efforts and use the modules most effectively. An extensive on-line training manual was developed and several trainings were held before the facilitators carried out the Future Leaders modules with students. Additional training was provided as needed during weekly meetings.

Below is an example of the content layout for one training focused on planning for carrying out a module. Each item listed comes with specific strategies and recommended tools.

- Know how to plan for your lesson.
- Review the upcoming module’s Facilitator’s Guide chapter.
- Know how much time you will have for your lesson but be willing to adjust as needed when in the classroom.
- Become familiar with the concepts and key terms to ensure smooth facilitation.
- Determine how you will encourage students to reflect on the learning objectives and how they relate to the real world.
- Prep the activity materials and organize them before you arrive in the classroom.
- Identify student engagement strategies you can use in your lessons.
- Contact your curriculum contact person if you have questions.

Facilitators also learned how best to engage students in the Future Leaders program. The facilitator training manual, along with in-person and virtual training sessions, supported facilitators as they learned to effectively deliver student educational content through student engagement.

Implementation of Learning Management System

Early in the Future Leaders program planning, we incorporated a learning management system (Canvas). We reviewed, acquired, and implemented Canvas as

the support tool for the learning environment. Facilitators needed to understand the logistical concerns related to effectively using Canvas and how to deliver educational content from it.

The facilitator orientation to Canvas included skills on how to:

- Sign up for an account
- View account
- Login
- Use the global navigation menu
- Use the dashboard and view courses
- View modules
- View student progress
- View calendar
- View assignments and events
- View student results in a quiz
- Manage rubrics

Using Canvas would increase the amount of data that could be collected about the program, resulting in improved ability to collect data to make needed changes and updates to curriculum, organization of educational content modules, and tools used by facilitators, and to lay the basis to conduct substantive evaluation. For example, the Future Leaders program discovered early on that some modules needed to be adapted to spread the content over two modules and that the use of some teaching strategies (such as videos) increased engagement.

Measures of Success

The ultimate goal of the Future Leaders program is to encourage middle school aged students to be more mindful of their actions around responsible parenthood and inspire them to share this mindful behavior to their peers going forward. Success (or challenge) is continually measured through change in students' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about the consequences of parenthood. This goal-based evaluation focuses on capturing data about specific changes in the target population, including data about knowledge and skills gained and to what degree, and behavior or beliefs changed related to participants' their education, work, or health status.

All measures of success are evidence-based so results are transparent and replicable. Using Canvas for managing the program provided these outputs:

Youth-related findings:

- Student's prior knowledge
- Student's prior attitudes
- Changes in student's knowledge by gender, facility, age, teen parent status, and course date
- Changes in student's attitude by gender, facility, age, teen parent status, and course date
- Student satisfaction with program
- Summary of students' knowledge
- Projected changes in students' behavior

Facilitator-related findings:

- Support for the program
- Fidelity to the planned curriculum
- Facilitator satisfaction with program
- Insights about the students
- Delivery site related insights
- Recommendations for improvement

School Administrator-related findings:

- Satisfaction with curriculum
- Recommendations for improvement

Other findings:

- Utility of the Learning Management System (LMS)
- Analysis of differences between facilities in rural, micropolitan, and metropolitan areas

Key Findings

Key findings indicate that the Future Leaders program is well received by both students and school administrators. Students who completed modules in the program showed significant knowledge gain. Data collected from facilitators who presented the materials to students indicated a high degree of fidelity to the program as it was designed.

Findings also indicate that the program approach and educational materials were effective across all sites, despite geographical location, or age of students, or the level of physical resources allocated by the hosting schools.

Student participants said opportunities to talk about issues and themselves in a comfortable environment was the best thing about the modules.

Post-tests for personal development modules show significant knowledge gain. Students, after participation in the learning modules were able, on average, to answer post-test questions correctly 73% of the time as compared to about 33% correct on the pre-test.

Facilitators indicated that they presented the module as designed 89% of the time. Within the remaining 11% (those modules not delivered per design) facilitators most commonly indicated that the lack of resources, such a table, chairs, audio-visual equipment, etc., was the reason they adapted the module.

When describing benefits of the Future Leaders program to their respective school districts, 100% of administrators cited improved awareness in the student population of the concerns and issues associated with teen development and 71% of administrators felt that the program increased awareness of teen parents and their children. Twenty-eight percent of administrators reported improved policies around teen development and improved support for teen parents because of their participation in the Future Leaders program. Fifty-seven percent of school administrators reported improved familiarity with the rights of parenting adolescents and 14% reported improved availability of subsidized childcare. Other benefits of the Future Leaders program to the school included appreciation for the program facilitators and their ability to build positive relationships with students. As one administrator noted, "It was quite nice to have another adult that students felt connected to."

Opportunities and Barriers

COVID-related restrictions created a significant barrier to presenting the Future Leaders program in reduced access to students as we could not facilitate in person as a function of COVID prevention and containment efforts, including virtual learning.

Constraints, such as differences in acceptance of curriculum and related administration turnover, changed the context of delivery of the Future Leaders program. Some school districts who indicated they were interested in deploying the Future Leaders program in their school districts found that they could not do so. Several interested school districts found it difficult to obtain School Board approval to add content to the curriculum. Community standards and community concerns also affected decisions to move forward with the Future Leaders program. Liability was also an issue as was school

district staff turnover. This resulted in a change in the school districts that ultimately implemented the Future Leaders training program.

The Future Leaders program responded to these limitations and constraints by creatively changing, and sometimes, intensifying the Future Leaders program. Ultimately, a larger number of students than first expected were enrolled in and accommodated for by the program.

Lessons Learned

Missouri, like many Midwest states, provides education across the continuum from rural school districts to densely populated urban school districts. Meeting the needs of all students requires flexibility to respond to the varying community needs. These varying needs affected this program. There were several factors that the Future Leaders program needed to consider. At the beginning of the program, of particular concern was the uncertainty around whether schools could hold in-person sessions or if their curricula would be virtual. Often, summer school programs simply did not materialize. The situation affected the ability of the Future Leaders program to collect baseline or control data from students not enrolled in the Future Leaders training modules. Some school districts, out of concern for the impact of virtual learning on education, felt they could not add additional content to their educational programs.

Midway in fall 2021, the Future Leaders program hired a college student as a graduate research assistant to help build a full test environment and restructure the Canvas environment to accommodate use by the facilitators. Significant restructuring occurred to lighten the load on facilitators.

Future Leaders program staff responded to the constraints posed by COVID and specific school district constraints by recruiting more schools and school districts to explore the use of the Future Leaders program.

Another COVID-related restraint for the Future Leaders program was a need for program staff to work remotely or in a limited in-person mode. This added an increased level of difficulty to learning to use the LMS and to create and deploy facilitator training.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, the goal of the Future Leaders program is to provide education and support for middle school aged students. Post-course, several students provided feedback about

the Future Leaders program and their experience with it. Participants' answers to two of the questions are below:

1. The three most important things I learned from the Future Leaders program are...
 - "How to save money. How to take care yourself. How to prepare yourself before having kids as teen."
 - "How to be an adult. How to take care of ourselves. How to use money."
 - "Learned about what happens if you had a child at a young age. How to control myself. How to keep my money right."
 - "Learn how to save. Don't have kids. In be mature."
 - "Don't have kids as a teen. Be kind. Something about conflict and resolution."
 - "How to save money. How to take care yourself. How to prepare yourself before having kids as teen."

2. How or why would you encourage someone else to take the Future Leaders program?

- "Because it could help you with your life and give you good advice on life. If they want to learn more about life."
- "It will teach you things you probably never thought about."
- "I would be like It'll keep you away from bad things."

The information gathered for this project brief is based on information gathered throughout the first half of the program. We have gathered this information to lead us in the direction to take to enhance curriculum, activities and service delivery to have a greater affect on future students who participate in the Future Leaders program.