

Personalizing School to Engage Students in Learning

What can you expect to get from this module?

This module helps participants and school teams engage in deep reflection about extra help, advisement, engaging instruction, and student and family relationships, all with the goal of improving the participants' ability to work in ways that motivate students and make learning meaningful for them. Participants examine the research, apply it via self-assessment, examine case examples of various practices and create plans for improvement.

What *shouldn't* you expect to get from this module?

This module does not provide detailed information on differentiation strategies, forming small learning communities or specific instructional strategies.

Who should take this training?

This module is for school leaders and potential school leaders. The audience may include school teams of principals, aspiring leaders, teacher leaders and others who are members or potential members of the school's instructional leadership team. **NOTE:** In order for this training to have significant impact, the principal **MUST** be part of the school team being trained. In addition, it is beneficial to include district staff involved in curriculum, standards and instruction.

Other SREB Leadership Curriculum Modules that support this module:

There are no formal prerequisites for this SREB module. However, participants may find it helpful to have attended the modules *Creating a High-Performance Learning Culture* and *Using Root Cause Analysis to Reduce Student Failure*.

What will you have to do to get the most from this module?

Participants must commit to attending as a team, completing the prework, attending two initial days, completing a homework assignment and attending one follow-up day several weeks after the initial session. It is important for teams to have time to reflect and apply what they have learned between the initial training and the follow-up session.

Big Ideas in This Module

- Realigning the curriculum and setting higher expectations is all well and good, but it will only lead to frustration unless you find ways to help students meet these expectations. This means identifying strategies to help students with a wide range of styles, difficulties, interests and strengths. "Personalization" is structuring experiences and building relationships that make learning meaningful to a given student.
- You can keep students *engaged* with instruction that has the following qualities: relevance, clarity, big ideas, active involvement, caring and working on the work.
- In order to be effective, *extra help* must be offered early, frequently and regularly. It must be easy to access. The system must be closely planned and monitored, or it will not be as effective as it could be and students will not reach their goals. Effective tutoring relationships are extended and consistent.
- Teacher advisement can provide students with timely one-on-one advice on goals and strategies, helping them before they fall behind. However, it also can be poorly conceived, inconsistent and unorganized. It takes planning, time, effort, training and dedication to make sure that it is effective.
- Small learning communities (SLCs) can contribute to a personalized learning environment, but they are not right for every school. Converting to SLCs is a comprehensive, whole-school reform.
- Most educators feel that they are doing all they can to involve parents and families in the school lives of their children. However, creative thinking and effort can lead to partnerships that enrich all involved. The same can be said for relevant instruction.

Module Design. *Personalizing School to Engage Students in Learning* is a three-day workshop (2+1). It also includes prework and homework assignments. Each section is described below.

Prework (two hours). The prework includes readings from three authors who describe how to personalize the learning environment. Participants work on a graphic organizer that identifies their individual and organizational strengths and weaknesses.

Introduction: The Opportunity to Make a Difference (four hours, 30 minutes). Participants explore the importance of creating a personalized learning environment and the various strategies that make a difference. After a series of stories and personal reflection, they organize information into a set of goals and strategies for maintaining student engagement and achievement. Participants come to the conclusion that by building relationships among school, home and community, students will be able to meet higher expectations.

Engaging Students (one hour, 30 minutes). Participants explore various strategies at the classroom, school and district level, for engaging students. They listen to a presentation and then create their own examples. They also complete a school self-assessment on current practices.

Extra Help (two hours). Participants reflect on the increased importance of extra help in an era of higher expectations. They learn about some research related to providing extra help. They work in small groups to determine whether practices in scenarios are based on sound principles and how the strategy might work in their own schools.

Advisement (about two hours). The idea here is to establish a personal relationship with a teacher adviser. Participants learn why so many attempts to do this fail and what the research says about keys to success. Participants help the trainer flesh out a description of the process involved in setting up an advisory system, and then small groups work to present a vision of an advisement system based on facts at their schools.

Connecting (one hour, 45 minutes). The two topics in this section are connecting to families and communities and providing relevant instruction. The common theme is “connections.” Most educators feel that they are doing all they can to involve parents and families in the school lives of their children. In this section, you will challenge that assumption and demonstrate the importance of partnership. The same thing can be said about providing relevant instruction. Most educators feel that they do this, but have they really explored all the ways to make instruction more relevant to students?

Bridge From Day Two to Day Three (three hours). Participants review the content from Days One and Two. Each school team chooses an action plan to describe to the others. After sharing, participants work on revising and renewing their action plans for continued effort in the future.

Small Learning Communities (one hour, 15 minutes). In this section, participants discuss how small learning communities can contribute to a personalized learning environment. They discuss whether or not this is something that their school should pursue and are referred to a more in-depth series of SREB workshops for more information.

Summary and Portfolio Assignments (about 30 minutes). Participants working as a team must plan and implement at least one effort to personalize the learning environment. Participants submit a portfolio that contains team products as well as individual reflections and narratives.