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The Quiet Crisis: Goodwill Industries Research Project

Beth A. Dillon
Regis University

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The Quiet Crisis: Goodwill Industries Research Project

Beth A. Dillon

Regis University

Abstract

This paper researches the effectiveness of School to Work, a community school based program implemented and carried out by Goodwill Industries of Denver. The problem identified is a disparity in what teenaged students need to learn and what is being taught in the current curriculum of Goodwill. The action research methodology involved analyzing student perceptions and performance, utilizing teacher focus groups, and interviewing individuals who work with teenagers on a daily basis. The desired outcome is an understanding of what students need to learn and a possible revision of the curriculum being used by Goodwill Industries.

The Quiet Crisis: Goodwill Industries Research Project

Goodwill Industries of Denver has been in business since 1918. The organization collects donations of clothing and other items from the general public. They clean and repair these items and sell them at low cost to the needy. Their mission is to provide employment, training and job placement to people with special needs so they can become contributing members of society. Goodwill Industries uses the money garnered from clothing donations to fund community projects. There are several community outreach programs sponsored by Goodwill that fit the criteria of their mission statement. Goodwill Industries provides one program in particular to Denver metro area at risk youth, aged 14-21, that teaches practical life skills in high school classrooms. It uses a curriculum which covers topics including: goal setting, self awareness, career exploration, job readiness, job applications, resumes, business writing, dress for success, interviewing, work ethics, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, life skills, college, and volunteerism. Goodwill Industries employs licensed teachers to teach these topics in the high schools that are identified as having a high percentage of at risk youth enrolled. The Goodwill teachers work with students once a week, during the 9 month school year. The program is called "School to Work."

The purpose of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of Goodwill's program, School to Work. According to a Goodwill Industries of Denver internal report, the program was designed originally in 1992 to "provide a relevant curriculum to Denver metro schools with the most at risk populations to help increase graduation rates...and explore post secondary educational opportunities..."(Goodwill Industries of Denver, 2004, p. 1). This program is extremely unique because Goodwill was granted

unprecedented access to Denver Public School classrooms. School to Work has a curriculum in place, which is used to teach students across the Denver metro area. The objectives of the curriculum were investigated, and compared to the subject matter currently taught in the program. An assessment was made to see if there was an alignment between the objectives of the program, and what students learned. Adolescent trends were reviewed to see if the program was up to date with current teenage needs. Historical graduation rates were investigated to see if there was a change in rates and if this change could be contributed to the work that Goodwill Industries is doing in the school system. It is reasonable to assume that Goodwill Industries is making a marked impact on the community with this program, if the system in place is working well. In the case of Goodwill Industries, teachers have been using the same School to Work curriculum topics and system for over ten years.

Using action research methodology, this project assessed the effectiveness of Goodwill Industries curriculum and program, School to Work. The research began by recognizing the possible problems of the curriculum, diagnosing the situation, gathering data and information, and then selecting a solution, planning an intervention and evaluating the change needed. School to Work is supposed to educate a specific population (at risk teenagers) in several life skill areas including budgeting, interview skills, and conflict management. Although Goodwill Industries has been using the same curriculum for some time, the content has not been assessed in over ten years, so there is a critical need to research the relevance of the program. Goodwill has asked for an analysis of its curriculum in order to align it with existing teenage needs. The Goodwill

Industries goal of shaping a stronger community is a noble one and every effort should be made to assure that this goal is working.

Background of the Organization

Goodwill Industries is a non-profit organization that has been in business for over eighty years. They are nationally recognized as a leading organization among those that help people increase their self-sufficiency. There are twenty seven locations in the Denver Front Range area, including clothing drop off centers, stores, and office buildings. Goodwill Industries provides community programs in a variety of areas including youth services, community employment, and adult services. Goodwill has interacted with over ten thousand students in Colorado since the inception of its youth services programs. For the purpose of this research, a collaborative team was formed to look closely at the youth program, School to Work. The curriculum and its current objectives were the focus of the project. Members of the team included a Director of Youth Services, Vice President of Workforce Development, Manager of Volunteer Programs and Manager of Youth Services and Education Facilitators. There were also two Focus Groups formed of six people, some were Career Technology Education Facilitators and others were Youth Services Coordinators and Facilitators. Their goal is to serve the at risk youth in Denver with programs that will improve the graduation rates and help students prepare for adulthood. Overall, their priority is to educate as many teens as they can, through a partnership with four Denver metro school districts. Currently, Goodwill serves 20 metro Denver high schools, two middle schools and four Greeley high schools.

In 1992, Goodwill Industries piloted the first School to Work program. Originally, it was designed to be a "...nine month, school based curriculum that would help youth understand the relevance of their education to their futures and the world of work" (Goodwill Industries, 2004, p. 1). It was a way to prepare more low-income, high-risk teens for high school graduation and to encourage them to think about attending local colleges. Goodwill wanted to make a direct, positive impact in the community and came up with the idea of implementing the School to Work curriculum in order to increase graduation rates. When discussing America's human capital trends, Jackson (2006) suggests that America is experiencing a quiet crisis with our youth's knowledge skills. "It is 'quiet' because these are creeping trends, true impact unfolds gradually, over time." Jackson also points out that demographics are shifting in the United states, and that ethnic and minority youth now account for more than half the population. This means that society must pay attention to the youth's learning rate. If the system is left unchecked, America could find itself in dire need of an education makeover.

Before analyzing the research, it is important to define what the term at risk youth means. There is no single definition of high risk youth. However, according to Collins and O'Brien (2003), "a student who shows greater disposition for dropping out of an educational program or institution before completion than a typical student" (p. 31) is considered an at risk student. There can be many different reasons a student may have a disposition for dropping out. Generally, at risk youth can be defined as students aged 13-21 who are from poor socio-economic backgrounds, possibly minorities, and come from single or non-traditional parent households. These teens may be on welfare or in and out of the juvenile justice system. They may be unemployed or even homeless. Society's

image of high risk youth often points to unsupervised youth, wearing baggy clothes, with tattoos or earring piercings and unusual hairstyles. These adolescents are at a disadvantage because of low-income backgrounds, cultural differences, and low self esteem. Today, studies show these youth need extra help desperately, because they are not finishing high school or learning basic life skills, which can help them survive in this world. Statistically, 37% of Denver's youth will not complete high school (Colorado Youth at Risk, 2006).

Competitive Environment

Appendix A shows how Goodwill Industries' School to Work program employs licensed teachers who work full time in collaboration with the Denver Public School system to teach School to Work. They spend at least one day a week in class, and four days a week at Goodwill working on administrative tasks. These teachers, called Facilitators, also utilize guest speakers from the community as volunteers to expose students to positive role models and area professionals. In 2005, Goodwill served 18 Denver high schools, two middle schools and four high schools in Greeley. During the 2003-2004 school year, the School to Work program reached 3,945 students (Goodwill Industries, 2004). Goodwill Facilitators and volunteers have access to the schools during the nine month school term in order to teach topics, give speeches, hold panel discussions, become mentors, and provide mock interviews with youth participants.

There are hundreds of agencies in Colorado that work with high risk or disadvantaged youth in some way. Commonalities in programs would include the use of mentors, structured classes, seminars or motivational speakers to help prepare and encourage students to excel. Interestingly, there are no other agencies that have a specific

partnership agreement with the superintendent of Denver Public Schools to regularly provide Facilitators and volunteers in the classrooms throughout the year.

Examples of agencies that do provide similar services include Junior Achievement, The Daniels Fund, Boy/Girl Scouts, YMCA, and United Way.

Junior Achievement (JA) offers high school programs which provide classes and lesson plans at JA locations for microeconomics, macroeconomics and free enterprise. They also offer job shadowing and scholarships. They are a nationwide organization with sites throughout the metro Denver area (Junior Achievement, n.d.). The Daniels Fund offers programs for youth in the state of Colorado. They offer scholarships, workshops and college prep classes to teens who do not have the money to go to college, but who are committed to academic excellence and giving back to the community (Daniels Fund, n.d.). The Boy Scouts of America are hoping to prepare young people to make good choices during their lifetimes (Boy Scouts, n.d.). They offer many youth oriented programs which cover a variety of topics, including leadership, arts, and outdoor education. The YMCA offers youth programs that specifically target self esteem, goal setting and youth employment (YMCA, n.d.). Lastly, the United Way offers after school intergenerational learning centers, which provide activities such as art programs, tutoring and mentoring (Mile High United Way, n.d.).

History of Problem

Denver's teen culture started to change notably in 1992. Graduation rates had taken a nose dive. Crime rates increased. This was the year that gang members and crime became so out of hand, it was deemed the Summer of Violence. People wanted answers and they wanted things to change for the better. The Mayor, Police Officers, District

Attorneys and Denver residents all took note, and a legislative response began. Curfews were imposed, and more public funds were provided to increase the amount of police officers in the city. Denver Mayor Wellington Webb created the Safe City office to help reduce violence (Safe City, n.d.). During that time, a partnership was formed between Goodwill Industries of Denver and the Superintendent of Denver Public Schools, Dr. Evie Dennis. Goodwill Industries would provide a curriculum taught by Facilitators in schools with an identified high population of at risk youth. The goal was to increase graduation rates, and prepare students for college or a career. The Superintendent was especially agreeable to this idea because Goodwill Industries would fund the salaries for the School to Work Facilitators, and this program. Goodwill came up with the ideas for the content of the curriculum, and issued a standard report to the community regarding the program highlights and accomplishments from that year forward. The Colorado Department of Education (1992) graduation rates in 1992 were reported to be 79.9% (p. 2). In Denver County, the graduation rate was 68% (p. 16). In the years that followed, the decision was made to place one police officer in every Denver Public School.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of School to Work. The program was designed to increase high school graduation rates and prepare students for post-secondary education and careers. School to Work has a curriculum in place, which uses licensed teachers who are also employees of Goodwill, to teach high school students across the Denver metro area. Adolescent perceptions and skills were investigated, and compared to objectives in the School to Work program. There should be an alignment between what students are learning, what teachers are teaching, and the objectives of the

program. There should also be a marked increase in the graduation rates for the city of Denver. The consultant and collaborative team worked to recognize problems, come to a joint diagnosis of the situation, assess the training and topics covered, confirm the problems, and then suggest possible recommendations.

The problem is that it is unclear if this curriculum is effective or if the Facilitators are teaching the course objectives. It is reasonable to assume that it is also not up to date for current teen needs, because it has not been evaluated in over ten years. This presents a critical need for research and evaluation surrounding the curriculum. There are many potential reasons for the curriculum being ineffective, including that it may no longer address pertinent issues, teachers may not be trained well by Goodwill to teach the subjects, and youth may not be open to learning. Symptoms of the problem include declining school attendance, lower graduation rates, rising teen unemployment and staggering crime statistics. Teachers are losing interest in coming up with new ideas and ways to teach the content. They are often unsure if the content is useful anymore. Truancy in schools is also a growing problem and continues to be overlooked. Crime rates and an increase in gang involvement can also be contributed to a lack of education in the adolescent community and thus be part of the problem. If the system is left unchecked, there is a likelihood of a significant decline in graduation rates, and teen drop out rates. Society will be filled with young adults who grow up without some basic life skills they need to survive or become productive in the community. They will no longer thrive and could even turn to a life of drugs or crime out of pure hopelessness. If the programs become completely useless, the Superintendent of Denver Public Schools (DPS) could sever the partnership with Goodwill, and drop the curriculum all together.

Goodwill would lose the unprecedented access they have to DPS, and may never be asked back again.

Literature Review

Researching student trends, gathering statistics, talking to students and Facilitators, and interviewing teen experts were all key to this project. According to Manning, Everett and Roberts (2006), the generation of students born between 1982 and 2002 are known as Generation Y or Millennial's. "By the time they are 21, this generation will have spent 10,000 hours playing video games, sent 20,000 emails, spent 20,000 hours watching TV, spent 10,000 hours on their cell phones, and spent 5,000 hours reading" (p. 56). Manning et al. continue to explain that in this generation, 20% have one parent who is an immigrant. They are negotiators who are capable of rational thought and decision-making skills. Learning for them is about trial and error when solving problems. There is no tolerance for delays and the infrastructure and lecture tradition of regular school programs may not meet the expectations these students have, since they were raised on Internet and interactive games. They are advanced in technology, but their communication skills are weak. This profile gives a vision of what type of student to expect in today's high school classroom. They are multi-taskers with the ability, for instance, to text, play video games, talk on the phone and listen, all at the same time. This indicates that the millennial culture is different than other cultures, in their learning styles, expectations and obstacles. This is important because in order for the School to Work curriculum to be effective, it must take these things into consideration.

Hewitt (1998) notes that a student's ability to learn is directly connected to their self esteem. "In theory, self esteem is a precondition to learning, because a child who

lacks self esteem will be unable to absorb what the school has to offer and will likely become another educational failure” (p. 18). Today’s teens commonly face a variety of self esteem and emotional problems, including depression, bi-polar disorder, anorexia/bulimia, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Some cope with stress by turning to drugs, alcohol, cutting or even burning themselves. Cutters are people who use a knife or razor blade to cut themselves in order to feel pain. Without healthy coping skills in place, teens can turn to this type of self-destructive behavior resulting in death or jail. At risk youth usually have low self-esteem and parents who were abusive either emotionally or physically. Huerter (2002) suggests “at risk youth may share similar beliefs and values of already existing extreme groups such as the militia, supremacists, skinheads, or cults. Their religious beliefs and influences vary, covering a range of fixations or rituals ranging from gothic, vampires, satanic, voodoo, wicca, and santeria” (p. 2). Adolescents generally want respect, status, and loyalty. This information demonstrates that expressing identity can come in many forms during this time period, and is considered a rite of passage for teens. In some communities and cultures, it is accepted for young girls to become pregnant at an early age, sometimes more than once, before they finish high school. This primarily can be seen in Latino communities. These girls are not always expected to graduate and go into the workforce. They often live at home with their families and drop out of high school. According to the Child Trends Data Bank, “Hispanics accounted for 40% of all high school drop outs in 2004” (Child Trends, n.d.). Therefore almost half of America’s Hispanic generation Y’s do not have the necessary skills they will need to join the workforce or become a productive member of society. This indicates that, in the future, the drop out rate may sky

rocket and society will suffer the consequences. If teens are dropping out, they may not be able to secure a good job and turn to a life of crime. For example, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation statistics show there were a total of 48,105 juvenile arrests in Colorado during the year of 2004 (State of Colorado, n.d.). This is relevant to the research because it contributes to the need for a change in the way today's teenagers are being taught and coached. It indicates that if society does not take massive action, Colorado will have many more at risk youth on the streets and many more crimes committed.

All of this is important information because no matter how effective the Goodwill Industries curriculum is, it points to many factors in projecting a student's ability to learn and successfully graduate from high school.

Entry and Contracting

Entry and contract negotiations began in January of 2005 and the action research project finished in May of 2006. The beginning stages of the entering process involved reviewing the potential problems and symptoms, some data gathering, and then speaking with the person who owns the process. A person who can authorize the change is called the process owner. The process owner at Goodwill Industries was the Assistant Manager of Volunteer Programs. In January, Goodwill Industries of Denver was approached about the idea of assessing the current School to Work curriculum and its objectives. The researcher and the Assistant Manager of Volunteer Programs, along with the Director of Youth Services, met and went over a plan for an action research project. Several areas were discussed, including the researcher's role as an observer in the Denver Public Schools, access to confidential information, and timelines. Once the contract was agreed upon, it was signed in February of 2005 and the action research project began.

Method

Using Pearce and Robinson's (1989) six-step model, this research assessed the effectiveness of Goodwill Industries curriculum and program, School to Work. Current teenage trends were investigated, and compared to the subject matter and objectives taught in the School to Work curriculum. Recommendations were made in order to bring the curriculum up to date with current teenage and teacher needs.

The research began by diagnosing the situation, recognizing the possible problems of the curriculum, and gathering data and information about adolescents. Over time, the collaborative team discussed possible solutions, planned an intervention and evaluated the change needed. School to Work was designed to educate teenagers in several life skill topics including budgeting, interview skills, and conflict management. Although Goodwill Industries has been using the same curriculum for some time, the content has not been recently assessed. It is unclear how effective the School to Work program is in actually meeting its curriculum objectives. If the program is meeting its objectives, the students will benefit by being more prepared for the workforce or college, and graduation rates will rise. It is possible that the objectives of the curriculum have become out dated and need to be revised. It is important to have both anonymous and face-to-face contact with the teachers, experts and youth when researching the data so the truth surfaces. It is also possible that the teachers are not teaching the objectives consistently or perhaps they are not teaching them at all.

By researching the effectiveness of School to Work and its objectives, problems could surface that can be easily fixed. The goal is to enable students to effectively learn the curriculum of life skills that Goodwill Industries created. It is reasonable to assume

they are more likely to graduate from high school, and become more productive citizens in the community with these newfound skills. The results of the data will reveal possible problems and solutions with key topics. Focus groups with the teachers will be crucial in order to understand what obstacles teachers in the classrooms face, what their perceptions are about the current program, and what they would like to see changed. This justifies the need for several data gathering methods, including internal and external data gathering.

Table 1

Pearce and Robinson's Six-Step Action Research Model

<i>Step #</i>	<i>Activity</i>
Step 1	Recognize the problem
Step 2	Diagnose the situation
Step 3	Involve members, gather data, confirm the problem, gain ownership
Step 4	Involved members select solutions
Step 5	Plan intervention and implement
Step 6	Evaluate the change

Note: From Management by J.A. Pearce II and R. B. Robinson, Jr., 1989, Copyright 1989 by Random House Publishing.

Validity

According to the Regis University Graduate Studies MSM 696 Classroom Module (2005), validity refers to the soundness and accuracy of a research study. In order to achieve validity in this action research, the consultant used a Triangulation method. When data are acquired and compared in several ways, Triangulation is achieved. This method of research prevents possible bias of a study by looking at the information from all angles.

Data-gathering Methods and Preliminary Diagnosis

The three data-gathering methods chosen for this research were: (a) surveys and skills assessments, (b) focus groups, and (c) personal interviews. Internal reports, annual reports and existing data from Goodwill Industries were also used as a source of secondary data for historical and statistical purposes. Data provided by the Colorado Department of Education and Colorado Bureau of Investigations was also used. These all provided a benchmark for the collaborative team to refer to when evaluating the curriculum.

The collaborative team met to discuss timelines, data gathering methods, and a preliminary diagnosis in February of 2005. Other subsequent meetings were held throughout the sixteen-month process. Goodwill Industries agreed to allow the consultant access to current students in the School to Work program, current licensed teachers (Facilitators), program materials and internal reports. One strict boundary Goodwill had was the requirement of a background check through the Colorado Bureau of Investigations and fingerprint check through the Denver Police Department for the consultant. As long as the consultant passed the checks, supervised access to underage individuals was granted. Interestingly, all volunteers who work with Goodwill Industries have to obtain the same background check clearance and fingerprinting as the consultant.

“The key to effective diagnosis is to know what to look for at each level as well as how the levels affect each other” (Cummings & Worley, 2001, p. 87). Looking at both content of the curriculum and its objectives was the starting point for the diagnosis and research. In order to measure if the curriculum met its objectives, the student’s

perceptions and performance was measured. This allowed the collaborative group to see trends surface and formulate recommendations.

The collaborative team discussed a preliminary diagnosis of the problem. Is the curriculum applicable to today's teens? Are the teachers well trained to teach these courses? Are there things that should be added or deleted from the curriculum? Are Facilitators utilizing professionals from the community in a way that works? What are the possible causes of the problems? Is there a disconnect to have white, middle class teachers develop a program geared to help minority at risk youth? An initial diagnosis was that the curriculum was probably outdated and not meeting its objectives. It was decided that training issues for staff and volunteer issues were outside the scope of this project. The possible disconnect with white educators implementing a program for at risk youth is also beyond the scope of the project, but should be investigated through future research.

Student Perception Surveys

Student perception surveys were created (Appendix B) with each question directly related to each curriculum topic objective. For example, if the curriculum objective was "Students will learn first hand what goes into business correspondence. Students will learn various formats for business letters including cover letters, thank you notes, and letters of resignation" then the question on the student perception survey would state "I can write a cover letter for my resume." The survey had 16 questions pertaining to the curriculum objectives with answers based on a Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree and not applicable. The survey also had four open ended questions regarding student opinions about the curriculum itself, what they liked, and what they did not like.

A performance or skills assessment was also created (Appendix C) to test the results of the student perception survey. For example, if the curriculum objective was “Students will learn first hand what goes into business correspondence. Students will learn various formats for business letters including cover letters, thank you notes, and letters of resignation” then the skills assessment question was “What is the purpose of a cover letter?” Both the student perception survey and skills assessment were given to the student at the same time, and were correlated to determine whether students truly had mastered the content. This ensured that each individual student perception could be compared with their individual performance.

In order to provide content validity, student perception surveys and skill performance assessments were sent out to 10 teachers and students before being administered. Content validity feedback indicated that the questions made sense, and there was no confusion with the instructions. Four metro area schools were selected by the collaborative group to fill out the surveys and skills assessments. Due to the relationship with Goodwill Industries and the Denver Public Schools, an agreement was made to handle the data gathering with the minors through the teachers, rather than direct contact with the consultant. All data collection was done at the end of the school year, after the students had completed the life skills classes. Teachers administered the surveys to their class, collected the surveys, and returned them in a self addressed, stamped envelope to the consultant. Each return envelope was marked to identify from which school it came. A total of 51 surveys and skills assessments were returned. The four schools were George Washington, South, Arvada and North High. Appendix D contains the demographics in detail.

Results

After collecting data, the information was assessed, organized and discussed with the collaborative group. Figure 1 shows the results of the findings for the topics that had some type of disconnect between perceptions and performance. It was decided to focus on only the key issues and topics that had problems. All topic results are listed in Appendix E.

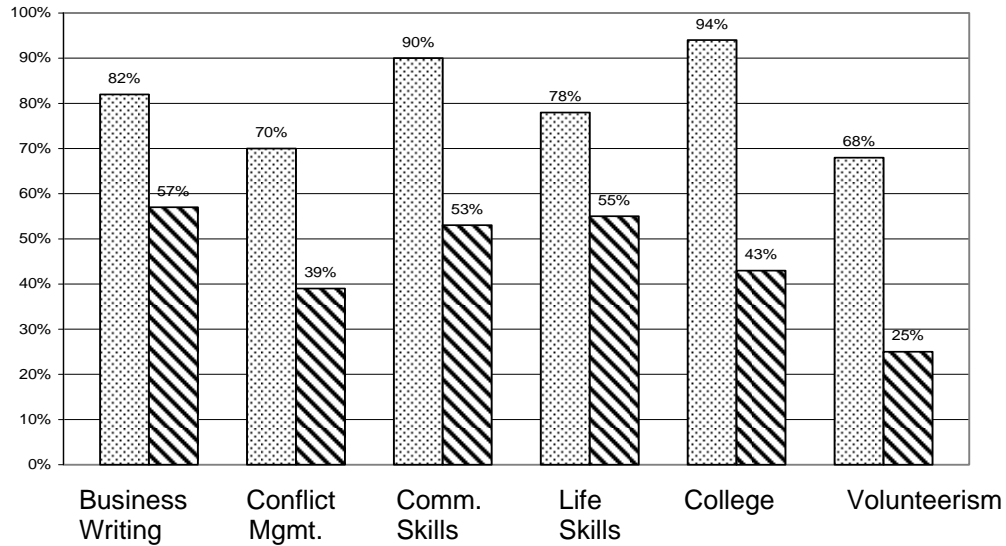


Figure 1. Disconnect comparison between student perceptions and performance.

- Student perceptions of their abilities (percent indicating confidence with topic).
- Student performance (percent able to correctly identify 3 key aspects of topic).

Focus Group Results

A Focus Group of 6 Facilitators met to discuss their perceptions about the School to Work curriculum and its effectiveness. They revealed that the curriculum is used differently by each Facilitator. Although there are fifteen topics to choose from during the course of a semester, Facilitators often must prioritize which topics they cover. This is because the schools may not grant them enough time to go over all topics. Further, Facilitators work for Goodwill Industries but are guided and directed by each school system. For example, a Facilitator works for Goodwill but reports to the teacher at East

High School regarding what topics they will teach in a semester. Therefore, depending on the requests of the high schools, some topics are pared down or not covered at all during a term. A Facilitator for East may prioritize things differently than a Facilitator for George Washington, based on what the teachers request. The focus group frames this as being flexible for the school systems, rather than a possible problem.

Besides being inconsistent in what parts of the curriculum are taught, other problems they face include school starting late or ending early, “no show” volunteers, volunteer and staff base being ethnically non-diverse, and a general feeling that the curriculum itself is outdated. The Facilitators made it clear that over the years, the curriculum has become more of a tool to use for ideas rather than a consistent syllabus taught by all.

When asked about what they would like to see changed in the curriculum, the group immediately brought up two areas: Conflict Resolution and Volunteerism. Many felt these topics were the most difficult to teach for a variety of reasons. In the case of conflict resolution, Facilitators felt unqualified to teach the topic. The Facilitators themselves have had no formal training about how to teach it. According to them, conflict resolution is a massive, subjective topic that is hard to cover without follow-up and practice. They were unclear what the goal should be for that class. Is it to expose students to the concept of conflict resolution or to give them conflict resolution tools? Many were not sure what they were attempting to teach. All of them want to empower teens by giving them some type of conflict skills, but want to keep it real world focused. The Facilitators pointed out that the types of youth they work with are all exposed to violence everyday, and the way they are trying to teach conflict resolution classes may be

unrealistic with at risk youth. However, they overwhelmingly agreed that the subject should be taught in the school systems. Some suggestions were to focus the curriculum topic to conflict in the workplace, use volunteers from the Conflict Center more, and implement continuous training for Facilitators around the topic of conflict.

The Facilitators were also frustrated with teaching volunteerism. With today's heightened awareness of security issues, the school systems do not allow field trips or off campus tours very easily. Members of the focus groups revealed this is because of insurance and liability issues for the Denver Public Schools. This makes it difficult to set up a volunteer project that the youth can get involved in during the school day. Some people in the focus group mentioned experiential learning, and thought that the only way to teach this course was for the teens to participate in a service-learning project. Another idea was to encourage the youth to develop their own ideas and then volunteer outside of school time. This would be hard to measure or track, especially when it involves assigning a grade to the completion of a task. The objective of the volunteerism class is unclear to most teachers. Is it to teach the importance of volunteering? Is it to expose the teens to opportunities for volunteering? Can they tie in resume building and job skills training to the idea of volunteerism? Would it hit home more if the youth were able to participate in a volunteer project themselves? Facilitators discussed the possibility of creating a volunteerism project versus teaching a lesson on volunteering. Truancy was also mentioned as an obstacle when tied to the volunteerism class. Students would need to be in class on the days that the volunteer project occurs. If the volunteer project is off site, the experience cannot be made up or re-created by the student.

Facilitators would like to see other topics considered for the School to Work program in order to make it more effective and up to date. These topics include sexual harassment, respect in the workplace, health/anti pregnancy and drug abuse/sobriety topics. There was a consensus that utilizing volunteer speakers to talk about these topics would be an effective way to introduce the ideas to teens. One example was to have a recovering addict or young mom speak to teens about their choices, how it affected them and their families. Speakers would need to clearly paint a picture for the students as to how drinking, drugs and pregnancy can make entering the work force and keeping a job nearly impossible. The idea would actually tie the concept of what it is like to transition from school to work. These topics could also bring the course up to date and in alignment with the problems and trends Facilitators are seeing in the school systems today.

One last barrier Facilitators face with the School to Work curriculum and its effectiveness is that it is not an ethnically diverse program. There is not a large base of teachers or volunteers working on behalf of Goodwill in the school systems who are people of color. All of the Facilitators are Caucasian. They have requested more training in Spanish, and for more Spanish speaking volunteers to be recruited in the programs. The Focus group openly discussed the problems that arise when Caucasian people speak in front of mostly Hispanic or African American groups and try to teach these subjects. There are unspoken barriers in the room because the youth cannot relate to the Facilitators. Some students feel that the subject matter does not apply to them. For example, there are a lot of undocumented youth in the classrooms who do not think they will ever go to college or get a professional job because of their status in the United States. Some cultures believe it is acceptable for a young girl to have babies and quit

high school. How does Goodwill respond to the resistance of students who are unwilling to learn? One Facilitator pointed out that it is a double-edged sword. They do not want the youth to give up their culture, but it is important for them to learn the expectations that corporations and employers have for anyone who is going to apply for a job. This means suggesting they take out their piercings, take off their baseball caps, and cover up their tattoos. It means staying off of drugs and thinking about getting professional jobs rather than staying at home and having babies after school is out.

Facilitator perceptions are that students really enjoy the mock interviews, career awareness and college panels used in the School to Work program. These topics are working well and being used consistently throughout the year. Students receive one on one attention at mock interviews, which allows them a real taste of what a job interview will be like. When a professional in the community spends time giving feedback to students, they feel more important. It is also exciting for adolescents to have professionals come into the classroom and tell their stories. This adult interaction keeps the Mock Interviews, Career Awareness and College Panel sections of the curriculum up to date. Students especially relate to the younger professionals, and feel empowered when they are told they can do it too.

When informally asked about each curriculum topic taught in the School to Work program, Facilitators felt the strongest about the effectiveness of the mock interviews, Dress for Success and Job Readiness subjects. They believe students get the most out of these classes, and that volunteers are utilized well when teaching these subjects. When asked their perceptions about which areas are not being used as much, and are not as

effective, subjects such as conflict resolution, volunteerism, and interpersonal communications came up most often (Appendix F).

SWOT Analysis Results

A SWOT analysis was conducted with focus group members in order to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the School to Work curriculum. Some of the strengths revealed were flexibility of the program, volunteer involvement as models of the community, the connection between academics and work, and that the curriculum theoretically works as a crime prevention model. Focus groups felt that the mock interviews, dress for success and job readiness topics were all by far the ones that worked the best in today's school system.

Weaknesses included more college exposure needed, volunteer no shows, lack of tracking system for students in the program, lack of diversity with teachers and volunteers, Colorado Student Assessment Programs (CSAPS), and limited time in the classrooms. When asked about the specific topics that may be weak, conflict resolution, volunteerism, self-awareness and goal setting were all mentioned.

When asked about the opportunities of the School to Work curriculum, the focus group became very excited. Some wanted more experiential and interactive parts to be included in the curriculum. Others asked for more training for the Facilitators, with cutting edge ideas for teaching, and Spanish language classes. If they could shape the curriculum in any way they wanted, they would like to see one mentor for every 9th grader in every school. They asked for internships and job shadow programs to be implemented. They wanted to implement volunteerism through hands on, service-learning projects. When asked about opportunities for other topics, ideas such as

pregnancy prevention, health and anti drug categories were talked about. Overall, some of the opportunities brought up were ideas around the curriculum, and others were ideas around strengthening the training for Facilitators.

Threats to the School to Work curriculum included Colorado Student Assessment Programs, otherwise known as CSAPS (the whole month of March demands time for taking CSAPS), learning students' names, pregnancy and truancy of students and undocumented students. When asked directly what threatens Facilitators, answers such as violence in schools, lack of teacher support, discipline in the classroom and student acceptance of the programs were all mentioned.

Founder of The Conflict Center Interview Results

For purposes of this action research project, experts in dealing with high risk teenagers on a daily basis were interviewed. These professionals are considered authorities in current teenage behavior, and have a stake in the outcome of this research. Interviewees included the founder of the Conflict Center, a North high school police officer, and the assistant director for a local college retention program.

The Conflict Center is a non-profit organization in Denver whose mission is to reduce levels of physical, verbal and emotional violence by teaching practical conflict and anger management skills. Under the premise that everyone needs conflict management training, the Conflict Center has established a diverse clientele including: people of poverty, for profit and not for profit business organizations, senior citizens, adults, teens and grade school students.

When asked why Goodwill should attempt to teach a subjective concept like conflict management to teens, the Founder suggested that if conflict management,

cooperation, and communication skills were taught, it would likely increase the student's self esteem. Conflict management skills can increase self esteem because people feel better about themselves when they make good choices and work through situations in a healthy and positive way. They essentially manage their lives better because they have tools to problem solve. Conflict management skills could cause a reduction in crime and violence in today's society if students begin to negotiate more and fight less. Fisher and Uri (1991) note, "Whether in business, government or the family, people reach most decisions through negotiation" (p. 17).

The Founder pointed out that conflict management is a skill that takes time to learn just as literacy does (reading is taught in school for 1 hour every day). Consequently, teaching a conflict management course inconsistently is more like "planting seeds" to create a change in the cultural norm. It would be a positive move to mandate Conflict Management as a core part of a high school curriculum, but if it is not, at least Goodwill is there to expose youth to the topic. The Founder asserts that violence is everywhere, as can be seen with the Columbine incident; therefore the school system is indeed a valuable place to teach these skills.

Facilitators do not feel qualified to teach the subject of conflict management because it is so subjective. The Founder indicated that the reason it is subjective is because it is a personal topic to both teachers and students. People have value systems and morality that are connected to the subject.

It was suggested that if the Facilitators have not done their own introspection about conflict or if they are not in agreement about the teaching strategies, they cannot effectively teach the subject. This indicates the need for clearly defined strategies and

objectives in the topic of conflict for the School to Work curriculum. It also demonstrates that currently, there may not be an alignment of what Facilitators are putting out there for students to learn. It is important for Facilitators to get some conflict management training, and as a team, be in agreement with what needs to be taught, in order to make their teaching credible. The Founder suggested the Facilitators consider Fisher and Uri's (1991) negotiation tenants and, in her words, teach "...in terms of you can't do power over, you have to do power with. You have to have a willingness to understand that the other person has the right to win something also."

The data of student perceptions and performance surrounding conflict was typical for what the Founder would normally expect to see. The data collected shows 66% of participants could at least correctly identify two ways to resolve conflict. The 34% who failed to have an acceptable performance level may not be able to read, do not care, or could be playing games with the survey. She stressed that conflict management is a lifetime concept to learn and Goodwill is giving the youth a good starting point. There will always be some youth who perform poorly on skills assessments and the reasons why may not always be easily defined.

When asked about the barriers of teaching conflict management to youth who live in a very diverse culture and violent society, the Founder stated, "This is not a white society thing. We have to believe that they [minorities] are able and have just as much ability as anyone else to choose non-violence."

Gang Unit and North High School Police Officer Interview Results

In 1998, the Denver Public School Systems made the decision to place police officers inside every high school in the district. This was in direct response to an

increasing amount of student violence, truancy and gangs. For the purpose of this action research, a police officer from North High School was interviewed regarding his observations of teenage trends over the years. It is important to note that 20% of the students surveyed for this project were enrolled at the same high school where the officer currently works.

According to the officer, one of the main barriers for today's teenagers in getting to their goal of graduating is the absence of a father and a broken home. He feels strongly that teenagers are not held accountable for going to school, staying out of trouble, and staying out of gangs. He believes that single mothers do their best to keep their youth in line, but if she is not home, she cannot properly supervise her kids and that is when bad things can happen. Interestingly, when the officer first arrived at North, he was met with resistance and coolness from parents, faculty and students alike. No one wanted his presence to reflect badly on the schools or their youth. There were trust issues between the officer and everyone. Generally, youth do not have contact with the police unless it is a negative one. City officials theorized that the daily presence of police officers in the school systems would create a way for teens to be more comfortable and at ease with the law. Adolescents began to learn to see police as humans and even friends or confidants. Throughout the years, the officer made an effort to invest in the youth, and get to know their families. He attends their games, works out with them, and talks to them in the halls.

The officer confirms that after school activities really make a difference in keeping youth out of trouble and in class. Anything that takes up their time in a positive way will help teenagers stay on the right path. However, there is a cycle they get caught in that can prevent teens from utilizing the resource these school clubs and athletic teams offer. In

order to participate in sports or clubs, they need to have good grades. In order to have good grades, they need to attend school. If they do not go to school, then they do not get good grades, then they are not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities, and they end up getting into trouble or dropping out of high school altogether.

The officer reveals that jobs are another challenge for teens. Identity and self-esteem are usually tied to whether or not a student has a job. If they are in gangs, their options are bleak. At risk youth can be found working as laborers for minimum wage, in jail or dead. Examples of job options teens have include fast food chains, laborers, and babysitting. Many youth turn instead to drug dealing because they want easy money and they do not have to work hard to get it. One option the officer mentioned was basic skills training such as auto mechanics or landscaping. Neither of those options are part of the Goodwill schools curriculum, however.

Youth tend to stay out of trouble when they are involved in positive activities and things that take up their spare time. By the time students reach high school age, it is reasonable to assume they know the difference between right and wrong. Often times, however, they get caught up in the heat of the moment and do not think about the consequences of the choices they make. The officer suggested that youth get into trouble because they are around delinquent friends, and they succumb to peer pressure, which leads to bad choices. Job training programs would be helpful to high risk youth, however they usually want easy money without working hard. Some teens break into places and steal items they can sell because it is a faster way to obtain money. He believes it is important to teach youth how to think and then react rather than the other way around. In a situation like burglary, youth see what they want and take it without thinking about the

consequences until they are sitting in a jail cell. This type of choice will have a devastating effect later on, when they are trying to apply for good, honest jobs.

The officer also stresses that in order to improve graduation rates some kind of action must be taken to crack down on truancy. In his experience, what works the most when trying to help today's youth is relationship building and mentoring. Goodwill does not have a truancy prevention model in their curriculum, but they do have a separate program for mentoring. The officer states there is a positive effect on adolescents when people invest in them and are there to encourage them every step of the way. This confirms the idea that mentoring programs can make a big difference with youth who are in danger of dropping out of school and making other bad choices. A key observation is that if there is a familiarity with someone in a position of trust it reinforces a teenager's self esteem and belief in themselves. Hewitt (1998) explores the connection between self-esteem and learning when he states, "Children who do not feel good about themselves will not be motivated to learn..." (p. 77). The officer also links mentoring with creating a level of expectations and accountability. "If they recognize you they will listen to you more." A total stranger will not impact things the way familiar people do. There appears to be a psychological link between youth making good choices and building trust with a mentor. This is important information for Goodwill to have because the officer implies that adult mentors can really make a difference in a high risk youth's life. When asked what other things Goodwill could do to in the schools to raise graduation rates, the officer responded, "Find out why these kids need to fight so quickly over words."

Assistant Director at Metro State College Interview Results

Metropolitan State College has a program to assist at risk youth in applying to college, called Excel. It is a collaborative partnership between Metro State and local area high schools. The assistant director of the program has insight to the barriers at risk youth face when they are starting college. For this reason, she was interviewed.

Metro developed this pipeline between secondary schools and higher education in response to a high drop out rate in the Denver Public School system in 1991. Students targeted as at risk for their program have below an eighty five index. An index is a combination of the student's ACT and SAT scores with their grade point average. The purpose of their program is to assist high school juniors and seniors with filling out college applications, entrance essays, resumes and recruitment. Metro work-study students assist at risk students with all of these areas, even if the student is applying to a different college. They consider the program to be more service oriented than recruitment oriented in its nature, although a majority of the students who go through the program end up enrolling at Metro.

Metro provides ambassador representatives to meet with the high school students in a one-on-one setting. The rationale is to give adolescents the extra guidance they need to reach their goal of attending a college. The assistant director revealed there is a problem meeting with these students due to a high amount of truancy that occurs in high school. For example, an ambassador from Metro may visit a school and request 10 students to meet with them in the counseling office during the day, and only three students actually show. When asked why that happens, she stated that students are either skipping class that day or the teacher does not approve for the student to leave.

When asked what problems at risk youth face she indicated they really struggle to stay in college once they are accepted. There are several reasons for low retention rates in college. At risk youth in particular have financial problems, or lack academic ability and preparation. The assistant director disclosed 30% of students going to college require some type of remediation. Only 61 juniors within the entire Denver Public School district scored proficient or advanced in math for their CSAP scores in 2005. Based on these numbers, it is reasonable to assume that students need more math guidance and budgeting classes. Interestingly, 70-75% of students who are Caucasian are proficient or advanced in reading. That number drops to 35% for Hispanic students and 40% for African American students. The census bureau shows an increase in the number of Hispanics in Colorado. The assistant director implies that only 35% of them are going to be prepared for college.

The assistant director also reveals a trickle down effect in higher education. Colleges and universities are both the receivers of the people who have gone through a K-12 education, and they are the producers of the teachers who teach in the K-12 education. If colleges are not producing knowledgeable people to become teachers, the students will not leave the K-12 system knowledgeable. If they are not leaving the school system prepared for college, the cycle will continue. This supports the critical need for high schools and colleges to look at things like learning styles, curriculum and how to prepare teachers to become culturally competent to teach in urban settings. Cultural competency occurs when someone in a leadership role understands completely the gamut of what goes into serving diverse populations. Because teachers are moving into these roles as a person of authority after they graduate, it is important that they are clear about

their own prejudices and biases since it may affect their future students. There is an educational gap in achievement that exists from kindergarten on up through high school with minorities and Caucasians. This is important information for Goodwill to have because it reveals the need for a curriculum that is not biased or geared towards just one race. It also shows that teachers may need training to learn how not to favor one particular student over another.

When asked about common mistakes she sees on college applications turned in by at risk youth, she stated that students fail to give information regarding their Colorado state residency most often. This indicates a high number of students who lack documentation are applying. Metro does allow undocumented students to take classes, but they are not allowed to take out federal student loans. Often times, if these students cannot find the way to pay for their classes, they drop out. It is important to note that Goodwill Industries works with many undocumented youth, although a precise number cannot be determined because many students do not reveal this on surveys.

The assistant director asserts that the differences with students come into play with how prepared they are to start college. There are three ways to identify if students are academically ready to start college: grade point average, the type of classes taken in high school, and their ACT and SAT scores. Metro does have a Student Academic Success program for people who do not meet the academic requirements for admission. It addresses expectations and resources such as financial aid, tutoring, and a writing center. This information supports the need for extra guidance in high school in the areas of goal setting, budgeting, and college application assistance. Currently, Goodwill's curriculum has all three of these components.

Secondary Data

According to Goodwill's 2005 Report to the Community, "Goodwill realizes the youth jeopardize their future when they fail to graduate and are unprepared for the demands of the workplace" (p. 4). The Colorado Department of Education report indicates that when School to Work was first implemented in 1992, the graduation rate in Denver was 79.9% (p. 2). Compare that to the 82.3% graduation rate in Denver for the class of 2004 (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.) and an increase of 2.4%. The reasons for the increase could include: discrepancy in how the data was collected, more focus on education by the government, better DPS curricula and teachers, and programs like School to Work being implemented into the school systems. There is not one way to directly connect the impact of School to Work to the 2.4% increase. It should be noted that raising the graduation rates for as many students as possible in the Metro area was one of the goals for the School to Work program. "Goodwill Industries reaches more than 10,000 at risk youth...in metro-Denver and northern Colorado" (Goodwill Industries of Denver, 2005, p. 4). The program also benefits and impacts the community. "For every dollar invested in School to Work, the community receives a \$14.00 return on investment every year in the first five years" (Goodwill Industries of Denver, p. 5) This community report is important because it suggests that Colorado taxpayers are saving money and increasing graduation rates by continuing on with this particular program.

Discussion

Student perceptions and performance were carefully compared for each topic in the curriculum at the end of the school year. It is reasonable to assume that students will perform well if they truly know the topics that have been covered. Webster's New World

College Dictionary (1988) defines perception as “The understanding, knowledge, etc. gotten by perceiving, or a specific idea, concept, impression, etc. so formed” (p. 1002). For purposes of this action research, the perceptions of students were analyzed to clarify what teens think they already know about course topics. Once the school year was over, student performance was measured with a skills assessment. It is reasonable to assume that student performance answers will define exactly what the student understands about the course topics, rather than what they think they understand. When discussing the results, some topics surfaced as needing more attention than others.

Business Writing perceptions were 82% of students believe they can write a cover letter. However, only 57% of the students could correctly identify what the purpose of a cover letter should be. If the student does not understand the purpose of a cover letter, it is reasonable to assume that they are not capable of writing one. The collaborative team discussed in detail the fact that sometimes this subject is dropped from the curriculum all together due to time restraints. It was revealed that this subject is often taught towards the end of the school year, when students do not have much focus or much time for the topic ideas. Some thought the objective could easily be changed so that students would need to use class time to write a cover letter.

Conflict Resolution showed 70% of students strongly agree that they have learned conflict strategies, however, 25% disagree that they have learned those strategies from Goodwill. Comparatively, only 66% of students were able to correctly identify ways to deal with or resolve conflict. The collaborative team seemed to feel this subject and objective was weak at best, and knew there would need to be recommendations for change. They unanimously agreed that this topic should stay as part of the curriculum,

but discussed ways to change it for the better. Forming partnerships with organizations like The Conflict Center or Peace and Justice Center were brought up. More time may be needed for this particular topic, or they could create a workshop. Members of the team also considered the idea of more training for Facilitators to prepare them for teaching this subject. North High school used to have a conflict management class that was offered for credit; however Goodwill does not have the power to implement that back into the school system. One suggestion brought up was to incorporate the idea of peer mediation into the curriculum. It was not discussed how the implementation of this would work or if it even realistic.

The Interpersonal Communication topic had a majority or 90% of students mark themselves as great communicators. In fact, 31% were not even able to list qualities of a good communicator on their skills assessments. The collaborative team discussed the idea of changing this topic to something more specific, like Communicating in Workplace. Many Facilitators believe students do not know how to change their approach when speaking to parents versus speaking to a job interviewer or friend. Some Facilitators revealed that this objective is easily cut out of the curriculum if they are pressed for time.

The Life Skills topic seems to be more of a budget topic than Life Skills. Interestingly, 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could make a budget. The student performance almost mirrored what the student perception was regarding the topic. Seventy one percent of students could correctly identify things that should be included on a budget. Thirty three percent of students were unable to correctly identify budget line items. This does reflect Facilitator experiences in the classrooms. Feedback was that students are either extremely interested in this topic, or they are not interested at

all. A discussion ensued around narrowing down the goals in this topic to be more specific. Facilitators are unsure whether they are expected to provide an awareness of the topic or teach actual skills.

The College topic showed 57% of students cannot list 3 items, which appear on a college application. This confirms a need for students to be exposed to real college applications. Facilitators believe the objective for this topic needs to be changed to reflect more post-secondary options. Financial aid and scholarships is too broad of a subject and might need to be eliminated altogether from the objective.

Volunteering results revealed 60% of students are interested in volunteering while approximately 27% are not interested. If students want a good job, they should volunteer because it will make their resumes stronger. It is reasonable to assume students may not understand that concept, which could point to lack of knowledge on their part about the importance of volunteerism. Feedback from the Facilitators was that this particular objective is taught towards the end of a school year, for one hour only. This does not leave a lot of time to plan, organize and execute an actual service-learning project. Facilitators may end up gliding over this subject, rather than implementing an actual experiential learning day. It was mentioned that students do not have a broad view of the world, which allows them to understand the significance of volunteering. They need to offer first hand experience in volunteerism. The objective seems vague and does not focus on the importance of how volunteerism contributes to their community, their success, and their self-awareness.

Joint Diagnosis of the Problem

After reviewing the results, Goodwill Industries began to see that some parts of the School to Work program were working extremely well, while other parts needed to be revised. The curriculum has fifteen topics and fifteen objectives, along with several subtopics in each section. Out of the fifteen topics covered, some needed to be updated, including the Conflict Resolution and Volunteerism class. The collaborative group pinpointed a major problem; the current curriculum does not use clear objectives. It is unknown whether the Facilitators are expected to provide students with overall knowledge of subjects or specific skills surrounding the subject matter. Other problems that surfaced were (a) the critical need to provide Facilitators with cutting edge training on each topic every year in order to keep their ideas fresh, (b) problematic utilization of volunteers--there is evidence of volunteer "no shows" during the past year, and some volunteers are not the quality that Goodwill would like when teaching these courses, and (c) the lack of a tracking system to directly monitor and tie the success of the student to the School to Work program. Overall, Goodwill understands that some youth will fall through the cracks no matter what. Sometimes the student performance statistics are affected because students did not want to fill out the survey, ran out of time, or did not care.

Recommendations

A final meeting was held with the Goodwill collaborative team in May, 2006 to discuss recommendations based on the data, interviews and other information gathered. As revealed in the research, some topics in the curriculum are working well and are considered very worthwhile. Other topics in the curriculum need to be changed or updated. Topics that worked well included: goal setting, self awareness, career

exploration, job readiness, job application, resumes, dress for success, interviewing and work ethic. There were not any recommendations for those categories because there was an indication by both students and Facilitators that those topics all were applicable to today's teens, necessary, and successful in the outcome.

Recommendations focused on key categories in the program including, business writing, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, life skills, college and volunteerism/community. Some of these topics needed clearer objectives, more specific structure, change of names, or involvement of community partners for a more successful program topic.

There were also recommendations, which revolved around Facilitator training issues and volunteer training issues. The lack of a diverse staff, and any type of diversity training surfaced as problems directly impacting the program itself. Although these were briefly discussed, it was decided that these were out of the scope of the project, but may be revisited by Goodwill Industries at a later date.

Lastly, recommendations were made to track students through their four-year journey in high school, and changing the curriculum to reflect different objectives for each grade level. In other words, the curriculum would stay the same for all grade levels, but the objectives may be different depending on the maturity and applicability of each grade level in school.

Recommendation one. One of the most interesting points brought up through this action research project was the observation that the curriculum and Facilitators needed more consistency. During the discussions, it was revealed that the objectives seemed to be extremely vague in all categories, especially in the topics of business writing, conflict

resolution, interpersonal communication, life skills, college and volunteerism/community. The collaborative team must change the objectives. They wanted to decide if each objective would be skills based or knowledge based in its nature. This is critical because there is no way to determine if the objectives are being met, unless they can be measured. The collaborative group had different opinions about which direction the objectives should take but all agreed that the objectives should be measurable. Some believed the objectives could be more measurable if they were based on specific and defined skills for each topic. Others argue that with testing, there could be measurable knowledge outcomes. If the objectives are not measurable, they need to be changed.

Recommendation two. During the action research, problems surfaced that indicated Facilitators either did not feel comfortable or qualified teaching conflict management or volunteerism. Focus groups asked for cutting edge training for employees on monthly basis that would cover a range of topics. While creating a new training process for Facilitators is beyond the scope of the project, it was recommended that Goodwill Industries investigate potential partnerships with organizations that could improve or enhance topics already being taught. For example, a partnership with The Conflict Center might be formed which allows qualified conflict trainers to teach the conflict management topics in high schools instead of Facilitators. Another idea would be to have the Conflict Center train the Facilitators themselves. This would strengthen the qualifications of the Facilitators and greatly improve the effectiveness of the subject matter taught in the schools. It also would create a consistency in what was being taught by each teacher. Another partnership suggestion was to ask each principal for service

project ideas that could occur and be tailored in house for each volunteer class. By asking the principals what they needed at their own schools, a volunteer class could paint, landscape, fix old desks, pick up trash, or come up with other productive ways to improve their schools. This would be win-win situation for the students and for the high schools and move forward with continued collaboration in the Denver Public School systems.

Recommendation three. The third recommendation looked at tracking students through the entire four years while they were in the program. One major obstacle that surfaced during the action research is the uncertainty if the School to Work program was directly responsible for raising high school graduation rates. One way to measure this would be to track the students individually as they continue through each grade level. Currently, Goodwill can use data from the Colorado Department of Education to monitor statewide graduation rates. However, this data does not distinguish which students who graduated also participated in the School to Work program. While tracking students has nothing to do with the curriculum itself, it has everything to do with its effectiveness. If the Facilitators and curriculum is doing its job, 100% of the students who participate in the program should graduate.

Action Plan Selected

While all recommendations may eventually be utilized, the collaborative team will focus its energies on recommendation number one first. What became most urgent and most important to them was bringing clarity and consistency to the curriculum objectives. Steps five and six of the action research model will happen eventually, because Goodwill Industries will create some new positions in the future which would oversee the implementation of these recommendations. Since the inception of the research, Goodwill

has gone through several organizational changes in their departmental structures. The collaborative group would like the consultant to give the organization employees a final presentation regarding the action research before they implement any recommendations. It is understood that the consultant will present the collaborative findings and let the organization decide how to implement the future changes. Goodwill understands the importance of reviewing the curriculum on a yearly basis, rather than once in another 10 years. These reviews will be ongoing, and conducted independently.

Evaluation of the Alternatives

The action research brought to light many dynamics to the program. Overall, the program is, if nothing else, exposing students to the topics at hand. When evaluating the alternatives, there were three clear ways to go. (A) do nothing at all and continue on, (B) request much more funding and utilize cutting edge experts to teach the program, or (C) look at ways to improve the program and remain in alignment with current teenage needs.

It would be easy and less expensive to keep the curriculum as it is (alternative A) and continue teaching it as best as they can in the Denver Public School systems. Goodwill could assume that it is making a difference and that the Superintendent of schools is satisfied with their efforts. The problem with this alternative is that if at any time the superintendent decides to cut the budget, cut out time allotted in schools for these subjects, or even simply evaluate the program, Goodwill risks the fact that it may be discontinued.

As with any non-profit, money can be an issue. Alternative B investigated was to have their fundraisers find more money to hire experts in the topics taught. In order to keep the curriculum up to date, experts could be utilized to teach these subjects

exclusively. This would eliminate the need for Facilitators or community volunteers. Goodwill Industries would become known as an organization that offered the best of the best to teach critical life skills to teens. However, in today's economy, raising large amounts of money would be difficult at best. There is steep competition for consumer donations in the non-profit world. It may be unrealistic to expect Goodwill to find the way to fund salaries for 15 different topic experts. It is also unrealistic to expect to find experts in the field who will be available to teach these subjects in Denver area high schools. Such experts likely have full time jobs in their own fields.

The most realistic alternative is C to continually look at the program and improve it. Society's needs and norms change over time, therefore the curriculum should be updated on a yearly basis. This will enable the curriculum and teachers to be in alignment with society's trends, and stay up to date. The program will meet the needs of the students more if it is current. Goodwill Industries must stay one step ahead of the Superintendent and anticipate the need for its program and how that applies to the school systems.

Reflective Analysis

I had no idea of what to expect from the journey of working on an action research project. Evaluating Goodwill's School to Work curriculum was not as simple as coming up with a few new ideas. The curriculum had to be picked through and looked at in every angle. What have students absorbed? How does the partnership between Goodwill and the Denver Public School systems work? Are the objectives met? Is it appropriate for all grade levels? Is the system effective? Working with the students and teachers helped shed light on the process of how the curriculum was being taught and absorbed by students.

Focus groups met with the consultant several times to discuss how the students perceive things, how the Facilitators perceive things, and what worked and what did not. One unexpected outcome was that the graduation rate in Denver would reveal an increase over the years, but there was no way to directly pin point that to the efforts of Goodwill Industries. With the help of the collaborative group, some really strong ideas surfaced, including the need for clearer objectives. The project itself was met with little resistance from the students or Facilitators involved. Goodwill Industries was open and collaborative every step of the way through the data gathering, focus groups and interviews. One of the struggles I faced was the urge to research every tangent that surfaced during the data gathering and interview process. Some of the research is subjective in that each teenager has individual issues that may affect their absorption and learning rate. Teens face a variety of problems today, including learning disabilities, psychiatric problems, physical and emotional abuse at home, and drug abuse. The project could have continued for years if I had chosen to look at each one of these obstacles and how they relate to the adolescent's ability to learn. Admittedly, the student data may have been more complete had I been able to work with the students individually. If I could do it over again, I would have taken less time between the data-gathering period and actually writing the paper. Because of the time that elapsed, writing the paper itself became overwhelming. I have gained a greater awareness of how much work is entailed in action research projects, and how many opportunities and doors it can open. I now understand how to use a collaborative team to provide a wider range of ideas and solutions. I am grateful to Goodwill Industries for providing such amazing insight to the project, and for making the experience a positive one.

Conclusion

Society needs what Goodwill Industries has to offer in the School to Work program. According to Jackson (2006) “Young women and ethnic and minority youth now account for more than half of the population.” It is vital that Goodwill continues to teach the necessary life skills these high risk students need to be successful and contributing members of society. Without those skills, it is entirely possible the America we know today could change to country full of criminals and dropouts. We are in the middle of a quiet crisis. Thank goodness we have Goodwill Industries fighting for us with their School to Work curriculum.

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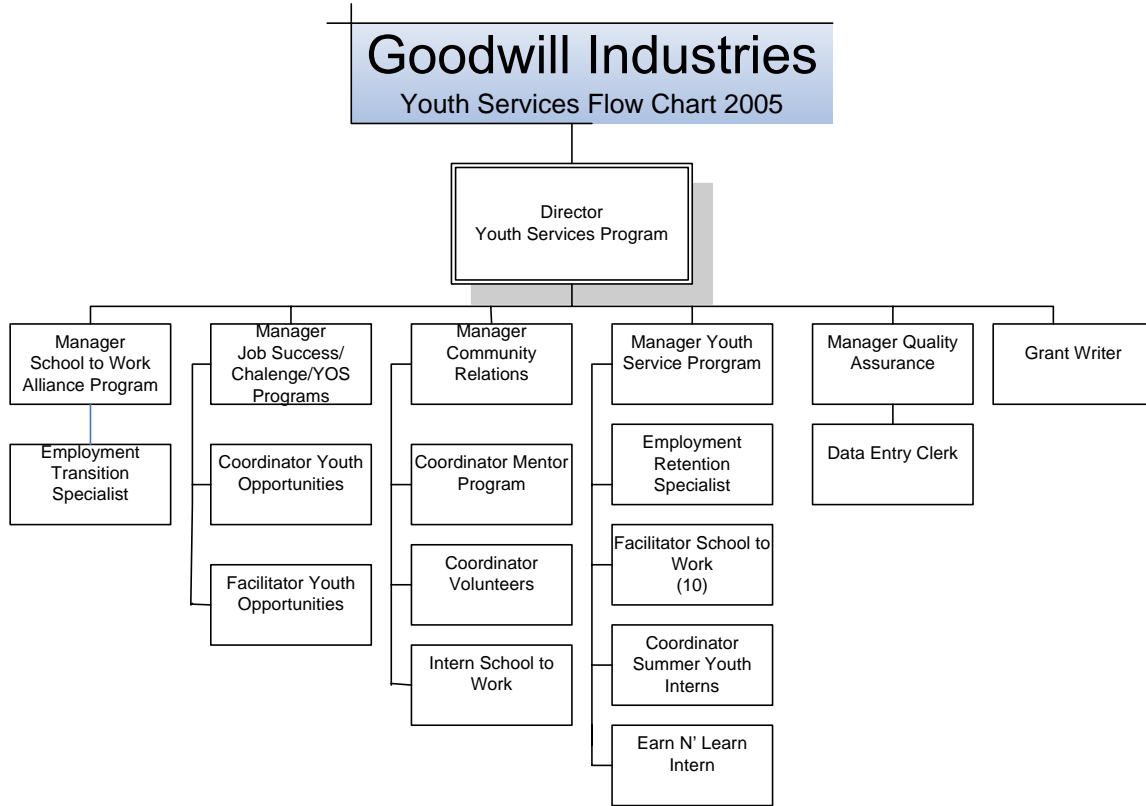
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Appendix A

Goodwill Industries Youth Services Flow Chart



Appendix B

Student Perception Surveys

Goodwill Industries Feedback Form May 2005

In an effort to improve the programs at Goodwill, and make them more beneficial to you, we would like your feedback! This is an anonymous survey. Please answer questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

Thank you for your time!

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I know how to develop short term and long term goals.					
Goodwill has helped me to examine my strengths and weaknesses					
I know where to locate employment information and job leads					
I am prepared to fill out a job application now					
I can write my own resume					
I can write my own resume					
I can write a cover letter for my resume					
I understand how to choose an appropriate outfit for work					

I am prepared to interview with a prospective employer					
I should give at least 2 weeks notice before leaving or quitting a job					
I have learned conflict management strategies					
I have learned how to practice effective communication skills					
I know how to make a budget					
I have thought about going to college					
I am interested in volunteering					

Appendix C

Goodwill Industries Performance Assessment May 2005

In an effort to improve the programs at Goodwill, and make them more beneficial to you, we would like your feedback! This is an anonymous skills assessment. Please answer questions honestly and to the best of your ability. Thank you for your time!

- 1) List 3 long term goals you have for yourself
- 2) List 3 short term goals you have for yourself
- 3) List 3 of your strengths and 3 of your weaknesses
- 4) List 3 types of jobs you can apply for this summer
- 5) List 3 places you find job listings
- 6) What are 3 questions you will find on a job application?
- 7) List 3 things you should include on your resume
- 8) What is the purpose of a cover letter?
- 9) Which of the following should you wear to an interview? (circle all that apply) dress suit, jeans, tie, blazer/jacket t-shirt
- 10) What 3 things can you do to make sure you give a good interview?
- 11) List 3 things you can do during your 1st month of employment to impress your manager
- 12) List 3 ways to deal with or resolve conflict
- 13) What 3 qualities make a person a good communicator?
- 14) If you were moving into your own apartment, list the 3 most important things you would need to budget for below: (be specific)
- 15) What are your education and career plans after high school?

15 a) List 3 types of information that a college would ask for on their application

16) List 3 ways volunteering can help you with future employment opportunities

17) I am (circle one): Male Female

18) My age is:

19) I am (circle all that apply):

African American Caucasian Hispanic Native American Asian Other:

20) I am a (circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

21) The name of my high school is:

Appendix D

Demographics for Surveys

N=51

Gender	49% Female
* 3 people did not answer this question	51% Male
Age	Mean =17 Ages range from 14-19
Race	Hispanic- 30%
	Caucasian- 24%
	Bi-racial- 24%
	African American- 16%
	Asian- 6%
Grade	Freshman- 8%
	Sophomores- 14%
	Juniors- 43%
	Seniors- 29%
	Unknown grade- 6%
School	Arvada- 29%
	George Washington- 23%
	South- 20%
	North- 27%

** Percentages may not add up to 100 because I did not include results of the N/A field which was an option in the survey.

Appendix E

All Survey Results for Topics with Little or No Disconnect

A. Topic- Goal Setting

Student Perception: “I know how to develop short term and long term goals”

Q. 1	Strongly Agree	Agree
Perception	51%	49%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified goals

Q. 21, 22	3 Goals	2 Goals	1 goal	0 goals
Performance				
Long Term	70%	10%	12%	8%
Short Term	51%	16%	25%	8%

B. Topic- Self Awareness

Student Perception: “Goodwill has helped me to examine my strengths and weaknesses”

Q. 2	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	20%	61%	10%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified strengths and weaknesses

Q. 23a, 23b	3 strengths	2 strengths	1 strengths	0 strengths
Performance	or weakness	or weakness	or weakness	or weakness
Strengths	61%	15%	6%	18%
Weaknesses	31%	23%	12%	33%

C. Topic- Career Exploration

Student Perception: “I have learned about my options for career opportunities”

Q. 3	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	53%	43%	2 %

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified jobs they could apply for:

Q. 24	3 Jobs	2 Jobs	1 Jobs	0 Jobs
Performance	67%	8%	6%	20%

D. Topic- Job Readiness

Student Perception: “I know where to locate employment information and job leads”

Q. 4	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	31%	59%	8%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified places they could find job listings:

Q. 25	3 places	2 places	1 place	0 places
Performance	69%	18%	4%	10%

E. Topic- Job Application

Student Perception: “I am prepared to fill out a job application now”

Q. 5	Strongly Agree	Agree
Perception	67%	31%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified things you would find on a job application:

Q. 26	3 things	2 things	1 thing	0 things
Performance	74%	12%	2%	12%

F. Topic- Resumes

Student Perception: “I can write my own resume”

Q.6	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	59%	37%	4%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified things they should include on their resumes:

Q. 27	3 things	2 things	1 thing	0 things
Performance	65%	10%	6%	20%

G. Topic- Business Writing

Student Perception: “I can write a cover letter for my resume”

Q. 7	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	49%	33%	16%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified what the purpose is for a cover letter:

Q. 28	Correct	Incorrect
Performance	57%	43%

H. Topic- Dress for Success

Student Perception: “I understand how to choose an appropriate outfit for work”

Q. 8	Strongly Agree	Agree
Perception	61%	37%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified what was appropriate to wear at an interview:

Q. 29b	Correct	Incorrect
Performance	90%	10%

I. Topic- Interviewing

Student Perception: “I am prepared to interview with a perspective employer”

Q. 9	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	57%	39%	2%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified things they can do to give a good interview:

Q. 30	3 things	2 things	1 thing	0 things
Performance	72%	8%	8%	12%

J. Topic- Work Ethic

Student Perception: “I should give at least 2 weeks notice before leaving or quitting a job”

Q. 10	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Perception	47%	51%	2%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified things they can do to impress their manager in the 1st month of employment:

Q. 31	3 things	2 things	1 thing	0 things
Performance	65%	10%	8%	18%

K. Topic- Conflict Resolution

Student Perception: “I have learned conflict management strategies”

Q. 11	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perception	21%	49%	21%	4%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified ways to deal with or resolve conflict:

Q. 32	3 ways	2 ways	1 way	0 ways
Performance	39%	27%	16%	18%

L. Topic- Interpersonal Communication

Student Perception: “I have learned how to practice effective communication skills”

Q. 12	Strongly Agree	Agree
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Perception	27%	63%
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Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified qualities that make a person a good communicator:

Q. 33	3 qualities	2 qualities	1 quality	0 qualities
Performance	53%	16%	6%	25%

M. Topic- Life Skills

Student Perception: “I know how to make a budget”

Q. 13	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perception	23%	55%	12%	6%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified things that should be included in a budget:

Q. 34	3 things	2 things	1 thing	0 things
Performance	55%	16%	2%	31%

N. Topic- College

Student Perception: “I have thought about going to college”

Q. 14	Strongly Agree	Agree
Perception	67%	27%

Percentage of Students who have considered college after high school:

Q. 35	Have considered	Haven't considered
Performance	78%	22%

Percentage of Students who correctly listed 3 things that a college would ask for on their application:

Q. 35a	Correct (could	Incorrect
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	list 3)	(couldn't list 3)
Performance	43%	57%

O. Topic Volunteerism

Student Perception: "I am interested in volunteering"

Q. 15	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perception	27%	41%	25%	2%

Student Performance:

Percentage of Students who correctly identified ways that volunteering can help them with their future employment opportunities:

Q. 36	3 ways	2 ways	1 ways	0 ways
Performance	25%	20%	23%	31%

Appendix F

Goodwill Focus Group Questions

1. What is the STW process? Does it flow well?
2. What would you like to see changed/added with the Conflict Resolution classes?
3. What would you like to see changed/added with the Volunteerism classes?
4. What will students say they liked the most about the STW programs? Specifically, what classes and why?
5. What will students say they liked the least about the STW programs? Specifically what classes and why?
6. We discussed the possibility of STW being a “white-focused” curriculum. Do you have ideas for how to make the program address/become more appropriate for other cultures?
7. Is there another topic you would like to see covered in the STW program? Why did you choose this topic?
8. Is there a topic that you would like to see dropped from the STW program? Why would you like it dropped?
9. What role [do you see] the volunteers have with the STW program? Would you like this to change? Can Goodwill do anything to create a better volunteer connection with STW?
10. Informally, tell me on a scale of 1-10 (1 being full knowledge and 10 being little knowledge) after going through STW, students understand:

1 Full Knowledge-----10 No Knowledge

Lower number=more knowledge

Objective	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Goal Setting	5.3	2	10
Self Awareness	5.2	2	10
Career Exploration	4	2	10
Job Readiness	3	2	4
Job Application	2.6	2	3
Resumes	2.4	2	3
Business Writing	7.4	6	9
Dress for Success	2.8	2	4
Interviewing	2	1	3
Work Ethic	4.8	2	10
Conflict Resolution	8.4	5	10
Interpersonal Communication	9	5	10
Life Skills	6.6	3	10
College	6.8	4	10
Volunteerism/Community	7.6	4	10

Appendix G

School to Work Curriculum from Goodwill Industries

STW

School To Work

A Program of Goodwill Denver
Curriculum Overview

Goal Setting:

Objective-

Students will be given information surrounding the creation, development and execution of short-term and long-term goals.

- Defining and discussing goal setting.
- Discussion and worksheets surrounding values & decision-making.
- Discussion and worksheets surrounding *effective* goal setting.
- Different goals: Employment Goals

Personal Goals

- Mt. Everest Project-movie, worksheet & discussion.
- Set some of your own goals.

Self-Awareness:

Objective-

Students will be given the opportunity as well as the tools necessary to explore individual areas of strength, weakness and interest. Students will have the opportunity to examine certain behaviors that may be blocking positive change and growth.

- A look at different learning styles.
- What learning style are you?
- Creating a good study environment.
- Self-Image and self-esteem.
- Decision Making: discussion, activity & worksheets.
- Values: discussion, activity & worksheets.

Career Exploration:

Objective-

This lesson will allow each student to explore careers and career development. Students will become aware of the value, importance and significance education plays in their lives.

- Where are all the jobs? Internet search.
- A self-inventory/career possibilities & worksheets
- CEI (Career Exploration Inventory)
- Why is job preparation important?
- The value in education.
- Attitude on the job.

Job Readiness:

Objective-

This chapter will educate students on how to effectively prepare for a successful job search, and where to locate employment information and job leads.

- The *Job Readiness Checklist*.
- The job search.
- The top ten ways to find a job.
- A “Be Real Game” worksheet and discussion.
- A look at the Internet.
- Networking.
- Developing a phone script.

Job Application:

Objective-

Students will be taught the proper methods of filling out employment applications. They will receive job application suggestions and vocabulary that can appear on various job application forms.

- A look at the job application.
- Who are good references?
- Proper methods in filling out a job application.
- Challenging vocabulary on job applications.
- Extra materials needed for completing a job application.

Resumes:

Objective-

The importance of a well written, concise and easy to read resume will be stressed to the students. Together we will sample different styles of resume writing and common mistakes. Students will develop their own resume.

- What does a resume do for the job applicant?
- Discussion around the “when, why’s and how’s” surrounding resumes.
- Marketing your resume effectively.
- Action/power words for resumes.
- Resume worksheets.
- Preparation and development of a resume.

Business Writing:

Objective-

Students will learn first hand what goes into business correspondence. Students will learn various formats for business letters including cover letters, thank you notes, and letters of resignation.

- Cover letters and their importance.
- Thank you notes-a discussion and activity.
- I quit! Resignation letters.
- 5 Helpful business-writing tips.
- Examples of letters.
- Production of students own business letters.

Dress for Success:

Objective-

Together we will look at appropriate clothing for a variety of workplace environments, including attire for interviews. In addition, students will be given information on building a basic wardrobe at a reasonable cost.

- A discussion around *How to Succeed in Business Attire*.
- The wardrobe basics for the corporate climate.
- A look at price lists & activity.
- Video clips & discussion.
- Worksheet and activity on building your own business wardrobe.

Interviewing:

Objective-

Students will learn the dynamics necessary to a successful interview. They will practice essential interviewing techniques and be able to practice their newly acquired techniques during scheduled mock interviews.

- Preparing for an interview.
- What do employers look for in an interview?
- An overview of the toughest questions.
- Questions you can ask.
- Mock interviews.
- Interview evaluations.

Work Ethic:

Objective-

Students will be provided with information regarding job retention, appropriate resignation and overall basic competencies. This will enable students to create a positive work environment.

- Work ethic and competencies.
- Basic skills and thinking skills discussion.
- Following directions exercise.
- Activity and discussion.
- How competent are you? Activity and worksheet.
- The first 90 days.
- Discussion around when to leave your job.

Conflict Resolution:

Objective-

“Conflict is inevitable.” Students will learn how to deal with conflict effectively and sensibly. Students will be given information on different strategies in resolving conflict in the workplace and in their personal lives.

- Types of conflict.
- How does conflict make you feel?
- Conflict Center strategies
- *Remember the Titans* or *Boyz in the Hood*
- Mediation. Activity & discussion.
- Steps in conflict resolution.

Interpersonal Communication:

Objective-

This lesson will provide students with an overview of communication arts. They will be able to learn and practice effective communication strategies. Listening skills will also be an essential component in this plan.

- A look at interpersonal communication.
- Rapport. What is it? How do you build it?
- The active listener. Discussion & worksheet.
- Interpersonal communication scenarios.
- Feedback scenarios.
- Practice makes perfect.

Life Skills:

Objective-

This lesson will provide students with a foundation for beginning the processes of financial planning. Students will gain information and insight on finances, budgeting and money management.

- A look at the *Real World*. Internet activity.
- Understanding the financial planning process.
- How income affects your goals.
- Managing income and credit.
- Owning and protecting your assets.
- Saving Money
- How smart is your money sense?
- Opening up accounts.

College:

Objective-

Students can look into a variety of schools and vocational school settings. This lesson will allow students time to reflect on their own future. We will discuss the college application process as well as various scholarships available.

- Is college right for me?
- A look at the different types of colleges/universities

- Internet Search.
- The application process.
- College essays.
- College or career preparation.

Volunteerism/Community:

Objective-

The students will have first hand experience in planning, organizing, and executing a donations drive for the students at their school. Students will gain important insight on the dynamics and importance of service learning.

- Our objectives and purposes.
- Setting our goals.
- Responsibilities.
- Classroom preparation.
- Collection and distribution discussion.
- Execution of our project.
- Feedback for next year.