Introduction

In the spring of 2012, the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program conducted a study of the impact of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program on partner high schools’ students, faculties and the schools themselves from the perspective of the partner schools’ principals, faculty members/high school adjunct instructors and guidance counselors. Principals, teachers and counselors were queried in similar, but separate surveys regarding the ways in which their participation in 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has impacted them personally, their students and their high school. Principal respondents indicated an overall positive experience with the 1818 ACC Program, a positive impact on their students’ teachers’ schools’ and personal experience, and high recommendations to future 1818 ACC students.

Methodology of the Study

The Program Director of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program and the Assistant Director developed the research instrument heavily dependent on the NACEP “Principal Impact Survey” template. They converted the questions to a questionnaire, utilizing the Qualtrics on-line survey tool. The survey contained 18 questions, addressing school demographics, and the impact of the 1818 ACC Program’s presence in the school from academic, personnel, and marketing perspectives. Each surveyed group, principals, teachers and counselors, received a similar survey. However, each survey focused questions from the perspective of the subject group.

The researchers conducted the entire study electronically. Principals received an email invitation on May 4 and May 14, 2012 to participate in the survey. The survey results were confidential, but not anonymous, as the researchers held email addresses and could identify respondents and non-respondents.

Subjects

The study included the 85 principals of the 85 active partner high schools in the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program during the 2011-2012 academic year.

Respondents to the survey all claimed 10 or more years of experience with the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program. Fifty percent of the principals (7) serve schools with enrollments of 500 – 1199 students; 29%, (4), 250-499 students; 14% (2), 1200 or more students; and 7% (1), 249 students or less. Respondents predominantly serve suburban schools (64% or 9 principals), but 21% serve rural schools (3 principals) and 14% (2 principals) work in urban schools. Nine of the fourteen respondents serve in private schools and five in public schools. Only one principal indicate that he or she never interacts with 1818 ACC students. The other 13 indicated that they interact with these students occasionally (5), often (4), or almost daily (3).
Rate of Responses

Researchers received 14 responses from the possible 85 active partner high schools in the study, for a response rate of 16%.

Summary of Responses

The first “impact” question with its five sub-questions dealt with 1818 ACC’s impact on students in the partner high school. Principals responding overwhelmingly agreed that the program has a positive impact on their students. The strongly agreed (5) or agreed (8) that students continued rigorous learning throughout their senior year; developed realistic expectations of college (5/6); developed a good understanding of their academic skills (4/9); gained in-depth knowledge in the subject area (6/7); developed effective time management skills (5/8); and developed effective study skills (6/6). One item worth addressing separately is the item “considered for the first time going to college.” Only one principal strongly agreed. The other 12 either were neutral (6), disagreed (3), or disagreed strongly (2). A possible explanation for this may be the fact that all of the respondents are principals of college preparatory high schools, both public and private.

Principals either strongly agreed (5) or agreed (8) that the presence of 1818 ACC on their campus encouraged their students to enroll in more challenging courses. Most agreed (4) or agreed strongly (5) that 1818 ACC was keeping their students from attending college courses off campus. However, several were neutral (2) or disagreed (1) on that point.

Principals largely agreed that the presence of 1818 ACC in their high schools impacted their guidance counselors in several ways. One strongly agreed and eight agreed that the program’s presence changed the way that counselors present college options to students; one disagreed. One strongly agreed and seven agreed that 1818 ACC increased their knowledge of current academic requirements; three disagreed. Two strongly agreed and five agreed that counselors developed a better understanding of the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in college; four disagreed. And finally, two strongly agreed and six agreed that with the presence of 1818 ACC, counselors perceived more students as capable of higher levels of academic achievement; three disagreed. Each of the survey items in this section received one neutral response.

Principals generally agreed that the presence of the 1818 ACC Program in their schools created a positive impact on their teachers. They strongly agreed or agreed that teachers learned about new ideas and developments in their academic disciplines (3/10); learned new instructional strategies (1/7); found their jobs more satisfying (3/7); had taken leadership positions in departments, schools, districts or professional organizations (4/6); had been energized as teachers (4/7); benefited from the support of and contact with colleagues in other high schools and with the SLU departmental liaison (1/5); developed a good understanding of what colleges expect students to know and be able to do in the academic discipline of their Concurrent Enrollment class (2/10); felt more connected with their academic disciplines (2/6); found content or pedagogy of the concurrent enrollment program courses useful in non-concurrent enrollment program courses (3/7); established higher standards for student work (4/8); and felt supported by the concurrent enrollment liaison/mentor (1/8).

Worthy of note are two items addressing teacher work load due to the presence of 1818 ACC in the partner schools. Principals disagreed and strongly disagreed that teachers found it difficult to fulfill other school responsibilities (9/2); and that teachers had been released from other school duties, enabling them to give courses and students more time (9/3).
Principals expressed high positive impact on their schools as a result of offering 1818 ACC courses. Principal respondents strongly agreed or agreed that his or her school had progressed toward meeting its goal of providing more rigorous courses for advanced students (3/9); offered prerequisite courses for the CEP courses that are appropriately rigorous (1/12); raised the expectations for student performance in courses preceding the CEP courses (3/9); demonstrated to parents that their students are doing challenging work as juniors and seniors (4/8); and enhanced its prestige and academic reputation (7/3).

Principals’ responses to the question “What is the single greatest impact the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has had on your students?” were split between the opportunity to experience challenging college course work in high school, and the opportunity to earn college credit for that experience – and at a reduced cost.

Principals’ answers to the question “What is the single greatest impact the 1818 ACC Program has had on your teachers?” varied. Responses included “professional development,” “a sense of appreciation of their efforts,” “students who really want to be in their classes.” One particularly articulate principal stated it all in saying, “It has reaffirmed their need for excellence and challenges in their courses.”

All of the principals’ responses to the question of the single greatest impact on their school can be stated in a word, “reputation.”

Analysis of the Responses

Principals’ responses to the “Impact Study” questions came as no real surprise. The Program Director of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program remains in close contact with school principals through electronic and personal communications, professional development days, summer pre-service training, annual Principals Summit, and the 1818 ACC Advisory Board. She regularly solicits feedback on particular topics, and frequently receives unsolicited feedback on issues she may not have known to be issues. The generally positive tenor and tone of the survey responses comes as no surprise.

The scarcity of actual responses also comes as no surprise. The Program Director realized at the time of distribution of the survey that many of the principals would set it aside, to get to it at a “less busy time.” However, everyone who has ever been a high school principal knows that time rarely comes. The Program Director interprets the lack of response as more of a comment on her poor timing of the survey in the last month of the school year, than a commentary on the impact of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program in its partner high schools.

However, the responses to one pair of questions on the survey require immediate consideration. The principals clearly do not adjust their expectations in any way for the time they require of their teachers as high school teachers, and the extra time the teachers need to serve as high school adjunct instructors for Saint Louis University. While the 1818 ACC Program does not require full time duty from the high school adjuncts, the program does exert some additional demands on their time and energy. The topic of “expectation of efforts” clearly needs to be an on-going conversation between the 1818 ACC office and officials in 1818 ACC partner high schools.

Conclusions

The 1818 Advanced College Credit Program has not conducted a formal impact study from among its partner school principals prior to this inaugural study. The program does, however, note and document unsolicited feedback, whether through phone calls, emails or personal contacts. The use of impact studies such as the “Principals’ Impact Study” provides quantifiable feedback that can only serve to aid the leadership of the 1818 Advanced College Credit Program in providing sustainable and continuous quality improvement. Because of the need to comply fully with NACEP standards as part of the accreditation application, the 1818 ACC Program staff surveyed not only principals, but teachers and guidance counselors as well. In the future, these groups will be surveyed on a three-year rotation,
repeating teachers next year (2013), following with principals again in two years (2014), and completing the cycle with guidance counselors in three years (2015).

Respectfully submitted,

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