SABES Program Support PD Center: Guide to Recruiting, Onboarding, and Enrollment Strategies

Overview of This Guide, Acknowledgements
These "tips" for meeting enrollment targets are compiled from panelists who presented at the May, 2021 ACLS Directors' Meeting session: **The Key to Success? Flexibility!** These programs met or exceeded their enrollment targets for FY21, and we gratefully acknowledge their time and effort to openly share their programs' challenges and their efforts to turn them into opportunities.

- Jen Brunelle, Worcester Public Schools
- Nancy Labonte, Bristol Community College
- Marianna Geraskina, Catholic Charities/El Centro

Overarching Themes
While every program situation is unique, there are several common themes that emerged among all of these programs:

1. They *focused on the most important* part of our mission: *Serving our students well*.
2. They were *flexible, creative, and re-imagined* many aspects of their programs in response to uncertain times and unanticipated challenges.
3. The *engaged their entire teams* with an "All hands on deck" and "We're all in this together" philosophy.
4. They *acknowledged that it was hard*, that some of what they would try might not work, and that they'd need to continuously adapt to emerging realities in order to meet their students' needs.
5. They understood that meeting enrollment targets isn't just about recruiting new students. It's equally important to *implement effective retention strategies* that help keep the student you already have.
6. There was *no quick fix*. Multiple strategies that addressed multiple aspects of the program were imagined and adopted. Many aspects of the program changed.

How to Use this Guide
We have categorized these strategies into four overarching topics, understanding that many cross multiple areas: Program Design, Staff, Students, and Technology. As you review the strategies, try to identify new ideas that you can adopt or adapt.

You might use this ranking scale to consider each strategy:

 1: We hadn't thought about this. Might be worth exploring.
 2: We do this but could increase our attention/more fully explore this idea.
 3: We already do this well!

When you're done, prioritize which "1" or "2" areas might be the most feasible and impactful to explore with your teams.

1. Program Design Strategies

Strategy	Ranking (1-3)
Revisit Program Design and Class Models	
1. Be flexible and think outside the box. Don't assume the current/old model is going to work in our new reality.	
2. Reconfigure classes (days, times, length of instruction, hybrid or fully remote) according to student availability. One program offered classes at 9 p.m.; another on Saturday. What might not have worked in the past might work now.	
3. Offer different options (pure distance, hybrid, in-person) to reach a broader audience of students, including those who cannot attend traditional in-person classes.	
4. Leverage lessons learned about how distance education removes barriers (transportation, child care, odd/changing work schedules) for many students.	
5. If you can't get students to come to your current classes, reconsider your program design and who needs serving in your community.	
6. Options like independent/asynchronous distance education help a lot with enrollment	
7. Persistence is important to reduce the need to continually recruit new students. Make sure you use multiple instructional resources that make content relevant to students' lives. Textbooks alone cannot do that.	
8. Hold a Saturday "tech basics of online learning" class.	
9. Students at the beginner level need more support, even more so online. Consider keeping beginner level classes smaller to allow for more individualized instruction and personalized attention.	
10. Use volunteers, especially bilingual, to help one-on-one as teacher assistants: • Provide each teacher with 2 or 3 volunteers for personalized support. • Start conversation groups that serve as feeders to the program. • Help with Google classroom tech support.	
Space	
11. Repurpose building spaces too small for in-person classes with social distancing for one-on-one or small group intake, assessment, onboarding, advising, etc.	
12. Conduct intake, assessment, and orientation outdoors in parking lots by running extension cords.	
13. Offer one-on-one testing in person/socially distant, especially for beginner level learners who might struggle with the tech.	
Thoughts/Notes about These Strategies	

2. Staff-Related Strategies

Strategy	Ranking (1-3)
Leadership and Support	
14. Make teacher support a priority and create a supportive environment. Be transparent and recognize how stressful this time has been; acknowledge that it's hard.	
15. "All hands on deck". Everyone has a role to play, an opportunity to influence change, and shared accountability.	
16. Expect teachers to have learning curves and support the growth the need.	
17. Every new idea is on the table and everyone learns together.	
18. Support the time for collaborating, brainstorming, PD, and new learning.	
19. Reconsider staff assignments/roles, including creating new ones.	
20. Acknowledge progress. Take pride in what you've learned and celebrate accomplishments.	
21. Use new COVID relief and available $ to increase time for staff. In one program, all new funding went to increasing staff time.	
Teachers Helping Teachers: Shared Ownership and Accountability	
22. Staff open to flexing their roles.	
23. Advisors have been key in the program. In keeping with the idea of staff flexing their roles, many teachers have assumed advising work. ("Everyone is an advisor now.")	
24. Buddy up teachers: Identify those who are comfortable and effective using technology (champions/early adopters) and make them lead teachers. Pair them with teachers who are not comfortable and need support.	
25. Change teaching assignments; identify who is best suited to teach via distance. Establish a process for reviewing which teachers teach which types of classes based on effectiveness, not just status quo.	
26. Monthly meetings/teacher sharing groups to share challenges and what's working; sharing PD. With technology, these meetings overcome barriers (multi-sites, different schedules) that previously prevented staff from meeting as a group.	
27. Hold weekly staff meetings to report on student issues. It takes more time but allows for networking and brainstorming. Everyone benefits from shared understanding about what's happening with students and finding solutions together.	
28. Add one-on-one office hours for meeting with students, advising, class follow-up, etc.; in person or using cell phones	
29. Offer technology boot camp for teachers.	
Thoughts/Notes about These Strategies	

3. Student-Focused Strategies

Strategy	Ranking (1-3)
Recruitment and Communication: Creating a Welcoming Environment	
30. Go where potential students go, e.g., nail salons, churches, restaurants.	
31. Use social media platforms that students know and use to engage potential learners in a welcoming community, e.g., Facebook, twitter, Instagram. If you aren't sure, ask your current students.	
32. Work the waitlist.	
33. Reach out to former students.	
34. Streamline processes and make information about and access to the program more widely available at any time by putting it online. Be sure promotional materials point to your website.	
35. Incorporate videos to make it more engaging.	
36. Especially at the beginner level, have bilingual teachers, volunteers, and former/current students available to help new learners, especially during the recruitment/ onboarding/orientation process, including onboarding to students to technology.	
37. Resolve to keep communicating with students every day and support their participation.	
Assessment	
38. Designate one person to be responsible for overseeing and coordinating assessments.	
39. Schedule a tech person to work when administering online assessments for students who need tech support.	
Persistence	
40. Assign one person to follow up with students every day to find out why they're not attending. Don't let time pass without connecting to absent students. If it's a tech issue, get it resolved immediately.	
41. Help students navigate systems. After an avalanche of unemployment claims, one program created a guide to help students navigate the process. While specific to unemployment, students also learned a lot about navigating systems, a valuable skill that helps them now and in the future.	
42. Provide opportunities for students to study together online.	
43. Keep talking about next steps with students to keep students thinking about them. The message for students is that life continues {in spite of the pandemic}. Encourage students by reassuring them that even making slow progress is better than stopping.	
Thoughts/Notes about These Strategies	

4. Technology

Strategy	Ranking (1-3)
Access and Devices	
44. Recognize and address the inequities resulting from students' lack of access to devices and connectivity.	
45. Change approach to loaning devices: Loan devices (Chromebooks, IPADs, headphones) to all students.	
46. Created a tech-lending policy.	
47. Purchase and loan hot spots for accessibility.	
48. Purchase devices to loan specifically for assessment purposes (i.e., that meet the tech requirements for NRS testing).	
49. Provide a mini, tech boot camp onsite for students during registration, intake, or orientation. Make sure students: • Have or are loaned the devices they need • Have a current email and password • Can get online and access the platforms/programs you will be using for instruction, advising, etc. • Can use the tools/apps that your program will use to communicate with them	
50. If needed, provide headphones/ear buds to help with assessing students remotely so others (e.g., children, other family members) in the room can't overhear questions and chime in with answers.	
51. Record Zoom classes and post them online via Google Classroom or other method.	
Digital Literacy	
52. Recognize that access to devices alone isn't enough. Students need to develop digital literacy skills. Intend to continue having students use their Chromebooks when in-person classes continue.	
53. Limit tech choices: Pick one or two tools and make sure teachers and students can use them really well. Note that sometimes purchasing a paid version is worth it for the added features (examples included Remind, WhatsApp).	
54. Pick communication tools that are user-friendly, easily accessible, and that allow you to communicate with both groups of students and individual learners. When possible, use tools that are already familiar to students.	
55. Cameras on! Helps to build community, engage students, and get teachers to know students better.	
56. Use group texting.	
Thoughts/Ideas about These Strategies	