

Ohio Registry of Effective Practices

The Freedom Project

Schools: Lima City Schools

Partnering Agencies: Family Resource Center, Allen County Family & Children First Council, Allen County Juvenile Court, Allen County Children Services, Allen County Job & Family Services, Allen County Health Partners, SAFY, Ohio Youth Advocates, Trinity United Methodist Church, St. Rita's Medical Center, State Support Team 6, The Ohio State University, Rhodes College, Help Me Grow, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, UMADAP, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Liam Recreation Department, United Way, Food Bank, Y-Child Care Connections, Inter-systems/Wraparound

South Middle School
755 Saint Johns Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
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Available for Program Consultation: Yes

Available for Presentations/Workshops: Yes

General Program Overview:

The Freedom Project is a collaborative effort between Freedom Elementary school staff, community agencies, and parents focused on strengthening behavioral health for all students. This collaborative effort has been guided by two main models or planning processes, the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) and the Ohio Integrated Systems Model (OISM). The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) is "a planning process that helps schools address the needs of those students who come to school unprepared for achieving academic success due to various non-academic barriers" (OCCMSI, 2008). Specifically, the OCCMSI "helps schools and districts look at what school- and community-based resources and supports they already have in place, measure successes and outcomes associated with these various strategies, ascertain gaps in necessary programs and services, and develop strategies to address these gaps through efficient, practical, and focused collaboration with community partners." (OCCMSI, 2008). The Ohio Integrated Systems Model (OISM) is a "tiered model of prevention and intervention aimed at closing the achievement gap among students with disabilities, at-risk learners, and the rest of the student body. The OISM integrates school-wide positive behavior support (PBS) and literacy improvement activities to improve the performance of learners" (OISM, 2008).

The Freedom Project utilizes these two models in unison to identify behavioral health needs among students and families, build a community table for addressing the needs, developing a focused plan, implementing the focused plan, and then evaluating this plan. Evidence-based prevention and intervention services that target academic and behavioral health needs are organized in a tiered framework: universal, strategic, and intensive. Specifically, at the universal tier, school wide prevention and consultation services are provided. At the strategic tier, a more defined subset of the students and families receive services in small group settings, and at the intensive level, individual

supports are utilized. Case management, wraparound services, and leadership within the project are handled by a collaborative team of school personnel and community partners. The following outlines the current services offered to students, families, and staff as part of the Freedom Project at each level.

Student Supports

- *Universal:* Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, Positive Behavioral Intervention Support rules and behavioral matrix, quarterly youth development opportunities.
- *Strategic:* Case management, social skills classes, 21st Century Community Learning Center, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Urban 4-H
- *Intensive:* Homebuilders, intensive social skills classes, tutoring/mentoring, Wraparound/Inter-systems

Family Supports

- *Universal:* entrance, exit, and mid year parent conferences, student performances, parent outreach activities (open house, celebrations, etc.), intervention materials for home use, Lima City Schools web page, daily homework folder
- *Strategic:* parenting classes, case management, focus group activities (grill and chill), grade level topics, mentor training, community table meetings
- *Intensive:* Homebuilders, case management, Incredible Years parenting classes, community presentations

Staff Supports

- *Universal:* PATHS refresher training, diversity/cultural competence training, Family Resources Center training regarding mental health topics, parent engagement training, building retreats, Excel training, Universal Behavioral training topics
- *Strategic:* Grade level trainings on developmentally appropriate practices, grade level retreats, weekly staffing of referrals for case management, monthly data reviews, participation in youth development sessions
- *Intensive:* Intervention Assistance Team, Peer Coaching, Clinical Supervision, Partnership Table representative

Each year the Freedom Project works to evaluate their overall plan and assess current tiered intervention strategies. Dependent on success, these strategies are continued or eliminated in an effort to best serve the behavioral and academic needs of their students and families.

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Evidence of Effectiveness:

The effectiveness of the Freedom project has been measured in several ways, including Local Report Card data, outcomes for students, parents, and staff, and progress toward meeting project goals. Since beginning The Freedom Project, steady improvement has been demonstrated in academic outcomes for students:

- In 2005, before the start of the program, Freedom Elementary was in a state of Academic Emergency with a 69.7 performance index and only one of eight indicators met. Two years after implementation in 2007 Freedom had moved to a state of Continuous Improvement with an 88.5 performance index and four of 6 indicators met. Freedom has currently moved to Effective School Status.
- In 2007, Freedom achieved the distinction of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Effectiveness has also been measured by tracking outcomes for the goals (related to service access and delivery and behavioral and academic outcomes) identified through the planning process when the Freedom Project was begun in September 2006. Data collected in June 2007 indicated:

- **Goal 1:** To serve 115 youth and families
 - Outcome: 89 students/families served (77% of goal met)
- **Goal 2:** To access behavioral health services less than 7 days
 - Outcome: 71 students (81%)
- **Goal 3:** To increase parent involvement
 - Outcome: 50 parents actively participate in IAT's, team meetings, parenting classes, and/or parent teacher conferences throughout the year (56%)
- **Goal 4:** To improve school success for all students
 - Outcome: 51 students showed behavioral improvement based on school reports (57%)
 - 55 students showed academic growth based on STAR Reading and Math Pre and Post test (62%)

Outcomes related to students, community, and staff include:

- **Student outcomes**
 - 75% or more of 3rd and 4th graders passing OAT
 - 93% or higher student attendance
 - Reduced referrals and suspensions
 - Each student participates in at least one youth development activity
- **Parent/Community outcomes**
 - School climate is rated at a positive level by parents
- **Staff outcomes**
 - 50% of staff attends professional development opportunities outside the school system
 - Improved cultural competence practices

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Capacity and Resources:

Since the Freedom Project is an ongoing strategic planning process, utilizing the OCCMSI and OISM frameworks, the main resources needed are leadership, school staff and teacher support, and a community table. This planning process is led by the school principal, school staff, and community partners. Together, this group blends funding and resources necessary to provide the services needed for children and families within their community.

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Family Partnerships:

Freedom Elementary stresses the importance of family involvement and facilitates this in multiple ways:

- Parents are strongly encouraged to be a part of their child's educational experience through a number of parent outreach activities like Open House, Celebrations, and Make It Take It.
- Entrance and exit conferences are held with each child's parents or guardians at the beginning and ending of every school year to ensure that they are kept up to date on and involved in their child's progress. If any issues arise during the school year parents are brought in for meetings to aid in intervention programs
- Parent academy and parenting classes are provided to develop parenting skills to aid in the children's growth and education.
- Intervention materials are made available to parents for use at home
- Daily parental involvement is encouraged through the use of a Daily Homework Folder and up to date Lima City Schools Web Page
- If there are problems that the family must deal with that are beyond the scope of what the school staff can help with, referral services to community partners are available.

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Community Partnerships:

Freedom holds quarterly Community Table meetings to ensure that its community members are kept up to date and involved with the happenings at the school. Planning and maintenance for current programs as well as brainstorming for new ideas for the upcoming school year are a large part of these meetings. Community Partners include: Family Resource Center, Allen County Children First Council, Allen County Juvenile Court, Allen County Children Services, Allen County Health Partners, SAFY, Ohio Youth Advocates, Trinity United Methodist Church, Ohio State University, Rhodes College, Help Me Grow, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, UMADAP, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Lima Recreation Department, United Way, Food Bank, Y-Child Care Connections, Inter-systems/Wraparound.

This extensive community network is integral to the success of The Freedom Project. Developing and maintaining strong community relationships has allowed Freedom to break down many of the non academic barriers to learning and provide students the services they need, including access to housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment, healthcare, recreation, higher education, community development, child development and mentorship.

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Sustainability Plan:

The dialogue and planning conducted for Freedom Project and its sustainability functions through a core leadership team comprised of members of their community table. Their core leadership team includes the Principal, School Social Worker, School Nurse, School Improvement Coach, Director of Family Resource Center, Case manager from Family Resource Center, Director of Allen County Juvenile Court, Director of Allen County Diversion Services, and Director of Allen County Family and Children First Council. The process of this team involves shared leadership and transparent accountability.

The key word to sustainability for the Freedom Project is relationships. The Community Table provides a process to match agency missions to school missions. Both service the same populations and are striving towards the same outcomes. Sustainability revolves around leverage and utilization of current resources of school personnel and community agencies to do the work at hand. The school provides the facilities and practices shared responsibility with community agencies for delivery of services. At the universal and strategic levels, school staff deliver programs as an integrated part of their daily tasks, and community partners are available to provide services across the tiers of prevention/intervention. The intensive level of service is provided by Family Resource Center (FRC). FRC is able to bill through Medicaid and Insurance to support the mental health services provided including case management, counseling, and parenting groups.

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