



WINGS FOR KIDS

When WINGS Leaders Fly High, So Do Children

When children feel more connected to school, they're more likely to attend, work hard, do well, and remain in school. For children at high risk of school failure, school connectedness can be the difference between getting along with others and repeated suspensions, attending school regularly and being chronically truant, and ultimately, graduating high school and dropping out.

What, then, drives school connectedness? WINGS for kids—which has delivered stunningly positive results—has found that it's all about strong social and emotional skills: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills.

The first cohort of WINGS kids graduated at a remarkable 40% higher rate than comparable students. In fact, WINGS kids are three times less likely to be chronically absent from school and less than half as likely to have disciplinary referrals.

But, without highly competent staff in place, none of this is possible.

Quality of Staff = Quality of Program

At WINGS for kids, social and emotional learning is baked into three hours of daily programming. WINGS leaders—college-age after-school teachers—lead activities ranging from teaching a social and emotional learning curriculum to fun electives, quality homework time, and community service around the school. They are required to model the

skills they teach in everything they do, identify teachable moments, and provide one-on-one, supportive coaching to students—the WINGS way—every time.

WINGS programming, in other words, is as good as the WINGS leaders delivering it.

So WINGS managers practice disciplined people-focused management. First, they hire the most competent college students. Second, everyone goes through extensive training on the WINGS model. Third, managers provide intentional on-the-job coaching, because the organization recognizes that implementing lessons from training requires practice and support for continuous improvement.



Wings for Kids

Locations: Charleston, SC; Charlotte, NC;
Atlanta, GA

Field: Out-of-school time social and emotional learning

Budget: <\$10 million

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— Cheryl Hollis
Regional Operations Director of the Carolinas
WINGS for kids

Disciplined, People-Focused Management in Action

Cheryl Hollis, regional operations director of the Carolinas, shared the example of WINGS Leader Juan, who needed to improve in four out of five skills. He argued with the kids, let situations outside of his control bring down his energy, and reacted defensively to feedback. “For Juan to be successful, I needed to evoke change in him,” she said.

Cheryl started by helping him become aware of his own behavior. She identified a child who shared many of Juan’s characteristics. They talked about the child and their interactions. Seeing himself in the child helped Juan acknowledge both the positive and negative behaviors they had in common.

Cheryl provided continuous feedback, positive and corrective, every day—on the spot and in informal conversations. “My coaching included helping Juan set small goals, so he could achieve small successes and reflect on progress at the end of each day,” said Cheryl. “I wanted him to get into the habit of goal-setting and learn to look back at his accomplishments.” Juan also received

feedback in more formal ways, through frequent competency assessments and monthly evaluations.

Soon, Juan started to receive more “Caught in the Act” (CIA) cards, which detailed how he had displayed a skill well. When WINGS staff receive five CIA cards, they get incentives like a gift card or a “leave-two-hours-early” pass.

Over the course of a few months, Juan began modeling all five skills. It helped his students, too. The children were learning the WINGS “Creed” (the kid-version of the social and emotional skills being taught) by heart, and they were increasingly able to cite examples of how they had made use of each of the skills. Juan completed the school year successfully, stayed for another year, and was then promoted to a position as team lead of other WINGS leaders for another two years.

Juan isn’t an isolated example. Cheryl and other managers coach all WINGS leaders to become effective instructors, because staff competencies translate into child outcomes—and teaching children the skills they need to succeed in life is priority number one.



Performance in Practice

This story is part of the Leap Ambassadors Community Performance in Practice series, which features stories about organizations on the path to high performance—different in size, location, mission, and maturity, but with a shared commitment to getting better at getting better. Find additional stories at

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