

## Orientation That Brings Students Back

### Promising Practices 1

#### Program Puzzler

Aspire Program X begins orientation by giving students the Student Registration Form, the Release Forms, the goal sheet, and the learning style inventory to complete. After paperwork is completed, students are assessed. After the instructor conducting the orientation explains program rules and class schedules, students are allowed to leave. The program director is pleased that the paperwork requirement is gotten out of the way when students first come to the program, but she is concerned that a large number of the students never return for instruction. What changes can be made in the orientation process to encourage more students to return for instruction?

#### Peer Perspective

##### Information Offered

- Begin by designing activities that focus on the program’s purpose so that potential students make informed decisions about participation.
- Inform students of all services offered (e.g., postsecondary education preparation, General Educational Development [GED] practice/testing) and partner services (e.g., childcare, transportation, career preparation).
- Thoroughly explain the purpose and importance of assessment and your program’s testing process.
- Have representatives from postsecondary education programs and local employers speak to students to inform them of opportunities. This would be particularly helpful for students whose long-term goals extend beyond the GED.

##### Orientation Process

- Allow students to be active in and provide input to the process.
  - Avoid teachers talking “at” students to maintain student engagement.
- Use icebreakers to help make students feel a part of the process. This tactic can encourage students to get to know and rely on each other for support.
- Choreograph the orientation so that activities are varied.
  - Alternate form completion with other group activities.
  - Talk through each form and its purpose before moving on to other activities. This supports students in form completion, making orientation more than a paperwork session.
  - Have student create a timeline of where they have been and where they hope to be. This could be part of the goal-setting process.

#### Timely Tips

Share Annual Performance Report (APR) information with potential students to demonstrate your program’s successes and students’ successes from the previous year. Showing students the number of successful students can help them see that their own success is possible.

Invite a graduate to talk to the students. The former student could talk about his/her experience in the program, achievement toward goals, and current situation.

Use student success stories to “sell” the program!

- Take a team approach. This allows students to meet multiple staff members and may help to create a personal connection that will transfer when moving from orientation to the classroom






### Added Insights

Creating connections between students can go a long way to improving retention in your program. Make sure to allow time for students to get to know each other. Allow them to create their own learning community in your classroom.

A variety of suggestions are offered in the literature concerning student orientation. Specifically, successful orientation includes building support systems and relationships in the classroom, discussing goals and concerns, and getting acclimated to the program. In addition, engaging students with other students is key. Programs should consider asking current students to act as role models and mentors for incoming students. Or, programs may consider having new students work in small groups on activities that explore learning strategies and interests, perceptions of learning/school history, and short- and long-term goals. The *Program Administrator's Sourcebook* (National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2005) offers each of the following suggestions:

- Find out about students' purposes for attending during orientation and connect these purposes to their specific and broad goals. Help students recognize how achieving their goals is a step toward succeeding at their broader purposes for participating in the program.
- Ask students to identify benchmarks for success. During orientation or the first weeks of class, establish ways for students to determine how they will know that they are successful and how they will document their progress.
- Help potential students consider goals and life demands that might stand in the way of reaching their goals. Discuss plans they feel they need to make in order to participate. If some feel their life demands are too great for participation, discuss what may need to happen before they feel they will be able to enroll in the program. Help students rethink goals to make them more realistic or to secure the support services they believe they will need before they can attend.
- Provide enough information so that potential students can make an informed decision about enrolling. Communicate what students might expect to gain by participation with what kind of time requirements and level of commitment.

### AspireLink Accompaniments

-  Attendance by Class by Month
-  Attendance by Site by Class by Month
-  Students Without Attendance In The Last 90 Days
-  Students Who Left Before 12 Hours and Reasons Why
-  Students With Less Than 12 Hours by Site