

Breaks That Bring Students Back

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Program Puzzler

Your program is a week away from closing for a three-week winter vacation and you are concerned that some students may not return after the break. What can you do to encourage students to return to your program?

Peer Perspective

- Give small homework assignments to maintain engagement (incentive for completion).
 - o Use Flashmaster or some handheld tool that encourages practice in a fun way.
 - o Clarify that effort before holiday should translate into progress when tested after.
- Follow up after holiday if student does not return.
- Give students a list of websites that apply to their assignments so that they can research additional information while the program is closed.

Timely Tips

Put together a booklet of “a little something for every day” to help students keep their skills sharp while they are away from class.

Added Insights

Literature suggests that monitoring student information can help to identify trends in persistence and guide improvement in services to better meet student needs and increase retention. Items to monitor include:

1. persistence—participation beyond initial sessions;
2. attendance—hours offered versus hours student attended;
3. completion—of levels or program in general; and
4. achievement—extent to which student goals are met.

It is also good to track students who do not return and their reasons for leaving.

The above information can be used to understand:

1. what the program is doing that helps or inhibits persistence;
2. characteristics of students who persist;
3. characteristics of those who leave or who do not return;
4. obstacles to participation;
5. when in the program students are most likely to withdraw;
6. when in the program students are most likely to reach learning plateau; and
7. the effectiveness of the support service interventions being used by the program.

In addition, methods have been suggested for increasing persistence. These include:

1. increasing self-efficacy through a supportive environment and belief in students’ ability to be successful;

2. having a good orientation process where schools acknowledge the doubts, hesitations, or anxieties of students and encourage them and convey belief in their ability to learn; and
3. providing constructive feedback on performance, addressing students' identified needs, recognizing students' successes, and providing support services.