



How to Increase Graduation Rates of Students With Disabilities



Hispanos Unidos para Niños Excepcionales (HUNE) Mission

HUNE empowers and supports parents of children and youth with exceptionalities in obtaining a quality public education, so that the students will lead rich, active lives and attain future success.

HUNE's youth programs include an After-School Program and a Summer Program which operate year round. The youth programs use several interventions to assist students in overcoming challenges associated with their disabilities in order to increase graduation outcomes. The major interventions implemented through HUNE's youth programs provide individual/family counseling, family trainings, and community/school outreach through transitional support.

The youth programs foster collaborative relationships with students' principals, teachers, and special education professionals within the school. HUNE works with school staff to provide supports such as homework assistance, counseling with students or students' families to focus on core challenges affecting students who are in need of interventions. HUNE finds that working together as a team, comprised of the student, the student's family, and school personnel allows for a more integrated system of communication to develop over time. This practice has proven to be one of the major strengths in helping students with disabilities overcome the challenges they face in maintaining satisfactory academic performance, resulting in higher graduation rates.

After-School and Summer Youth Programs

The mission of HUNE's After-School and Summer Youth Programs is to empower youth 14 to 21 years of age to stay in school, graduate, and become contributing members of society.

The goals of the programs are aligned to the Pennsylvania State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) by including the following outcomes:

- Increase on-track factors that impact high school graduation (i.e., attendance, behavior, and course performance)
- Create a safe, culturally responsive place for students with and without disabilities
- Improve students' social skills
- Increase participation within the community
- Increase school retention
- Increase the level of graduation rates

Counseling

Counseling is offered to students and their families during their participation in HUNE's youth programs. Prior to intake, HUNE reviews the student's IEP and most recent psychological evaluations. Upon intake, counselors discuss current IEP goals and develop new ones, as necessary, with the student and their family's input.

Staff working directly with students have received Safety Care and Pennsylvania Mandatory Reporting training. Counseling is provided on a case-by-case basis depending on individual needs (student, student and family, and individual caregivers).

Family Engagement

HUNE empowers and provides supports to families of children and youth with disabilities so that students can obtain a quality public education and lead rich, active lives, attain future success and graduate on time.

Continued on reverse . . .

HUNE partners with schools, community organizations, and institutes of higher education to increase on-track factors that impact high school graduation.



Completion for All Pennsylvania Students

Do you know a student who is considering dropping out of school?

**We can help!
(215) 425-6203**

Families are informed of their rights and responsibilities so that they are better able to make sound choices while working more effectively with the school team. Families identify their needs based on a needs assessment survey, followed by securing professionals to address the families' needs through modeling and mentorship.

Families and youth participate jointly in monthly planned activities. The youth are included in the planning, preparation and hosting of these activities, which may involve a culinary, or art activity or the preparation of a PowerPoint presentation. In addition, these meetings promote conversations centered on interactions and behavior improvement both at home and at school.

As part of the After-School Program activities, families are encouraged to attend so that they can participate actively in their children's education. HUNE maintains ongoing communication with school personnel and serves as a liaison between families and schools. For example, when school personnel inform HUNE that a specific student has been attending class and completing homework assignments, HUNE conveys that information to the family.

Partnerships With Schools and Community Organizations

- Work with schools on academic issues (i.e., extra homework help, problem-solving strategies, and behavior management)

- Partner with schools on a variety of individualized emerging situations
- Attend school meetings, such as interagency meetings and Individualized Education Program meetings
- Share updated information about the academic and behavioral performance of students participating in HUNE youth programs
- Build positive relationships with teachers, counselors, and other stakeholders, who are working with HUNE Youth Program students
- Maintain a partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVR)
- Participate in travel training (e.g., a mentor will teach the youth how to use public transportation to independently attend HUNE's activities)
- Participate in community events, such as Neighborhood Clean-up and Recycling Day and El Día de los Niños

Partnerships With Institutions of Higher Education

- HUNE partners with local universities, allowing students to participate in site visits and college orientation.
- The Office of Disabilities works with youth in providing career and college counseling; determining what each individual student will need to attend university.

- HUNE youth take part in a planning committee forum at a local university advocating for the rights of students with disabilities in mainstream universities.
- In one instance, youth were provided a forum to discuss personal issues of importance such as:
 - Wheel chair accessibility,
 - Environmental/structural barriers,
 - Language/cultural barriers, and
 - Academic scaffolds/supports

Youth Engagement in the Community

- Volunteer in community agencies, schools, and businesses that match students' interests
- Participate in student apprenticeship programs

Resources for Families

- HUNE, www.huneinc.org
- PaTTAN, Increasing Graduation Rates and Decreasing Dropout Rates Initiative, www.pattan.net
- PaTTAN, Parental Engagement Initiative, www.pattan.net
- PaTTAN, Parent Information, www.pattan.net
- PYLN, Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network, www.pyln.org
- The PEAL Center, www.pealcenter.org



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