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SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION PILOT PROGRAM

PREVENTING DROPOUT

Interactive After-School Tutoring Motivates 9th Grade Completion





Raising Awareness and Support for Completing Basic Education

Tajikistan was at a crossroads.

Youth, who comprise more than half of the country's population, were leaving school during and after the 9th grade, marking the end of their compulsory education with little regard that if they remained in school they would be gaining skills and knowledge that could lead to higher education and better opportunities.

Those students who leave school return home to help their families with housework and to toil alongside their parents in the fields. Some who are unable to find work become discouraged and question whether they should have attended school at all. Others leave Tajikistan, desperate to find a job abroad.

Tajik youth need more out of their education – and the government of Tajikistan recognized that. In its Poverty Reduction Strategy, the government cited education as one of the strategy's "imperative components" and made education reform a priority.

In 2012, Tajikistan's Ministry of Edu-

cation partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development to implement the Student Motivation Learning Program (SMLP) in 83 target schools in the Khulob region of Tajikistan, hoping to convince students to stay motivated and engaged in school. It is one of four pilots implemented by Creative Associates International under the USAID-funded School Dropout Prevention Pilot (SDPP) Program, an applied research program aimed at designing and testing the effectiveness of interventions to reduce dropout. Other countries include Cambodia, India and Timor-Leste.

In Tajikistan, the Student Motivation Learning Program uses an Early Warning System to identify and support Grade 9 students at risk of dropping out and an After-School Tutoring program to give those at-risk students academic support and recreational opportunities.

A shared responsibility

Helping schools identify, track and provide support to at-risk 9th grade students is a shared responsibility that >>

involves not only the school but also the parents and community leaders. That is the message of the Student Motivation Learning Program – but, at first, for many Tajik parents, it didn't sit well.

Parents and teachers disagreed over who was responsible for their children's education. Parents felt the school was responsible for ensuring their children's attendance while teachers felt the parents were responsible for making sure their children came to school.

To address this difference of opinion, the program staff held a series of workshops in the target districts, bringing together parents, teachers and community leaders.

"We just explained that it's not only the school's responsibility. It's not only the parents' responsibility, or the community's. It's all of your responsibility," says Litva Lavozirova, one of the program managers.

That message of shared responsibility is resonating.

Muhammad Davlatyorov, the education director for Vose District, where the program is active in 28 schools, says that "parents and community leaders and religious leaders - they're now feeling responsibility toward the education of their children."

Identifying those at risk

The Early Warning System uses three predictors, known as the "ABC's" of dropout - attendance, behavior and coursework - to identify students likely to leave school. Teachers monitor student attendance, behavior and course performance, making note of any problems the student is experiencing. Through letters, phone calls and home visits, parents of at-risk students are alerted of the situation.

For example, if a student has been absent from school for several days,



the teacher will reach out to the family to ask why their child wasn't in class to better understand the circumstances and remind the parents that attendance is essential to success in school.

Many parents, poorly educated themselves, don't appreciate the importance of education. That was the case in the mountainous Baljuvon District, where parents had a limited understanding of school and its purpose, notes Khamiljon Hassanov, a program team leader. To counter that misconception, "we explain

to them that education is important."

The program also provides parents with tips on how to support their child's schooling and encourages them to get involved in their children's education by attending meetings with their children's teachers and regularly visiting the school.

One mother tells us the program has been life-changing. Her daughter used to stay home from school to help with housework. But the school's outreach efforts convinced the mother to change



The Early Warning System focuses on establishing and strengthening the school's relationships with the parents and broader community. Such a holistic method reinforces the importance of education - and appears to be working.

"As a result of the program... we see there are changes in these students," reports Muborak Safarova, a team leader in Vose District. "They are now eager to continue their education."

For Loiq Soibov, the program has put him on a different path. He and his friends would often cut class, idle away hours in the bazaar and performed poorly in school. He was considering leaving school before the Student Motivation Learning Project was implemented at his school.

"When the program...was established here, we became interested in studying." The after-school tutoring, he said, was more interesting. The student-centered approach was more engaging and inspired Loiq and his friends to participate in classroom activities.

Without the program, he suspects he would still be wandering the streets. Instead, Loiq is studying accounting and computers at a vocational college with the goal of becoming an accountant. ■

Produced for USAID by Creative Associates International. Written by JC Finley with reporting by Jennifer Brookland in Tajikistan. Photos by David Snyder.

her behavior, and she encouraged her daughter to go back to class.

Like other parents who experience home visits, this mother has become actively invested in her daughter's education. She now reviews her daughter's homework and attends meetings at the school where she checks in with her daughter's teachers.

Toward a promising future

"The School Dropout Prevention Pilot Program will contribute practical guidance and models for host country governments to actually design programs that will help them reduce school dropout in their countries," explains USAID's Rebecca Adams, who oversaw the SDPP program from 2010 to 2014.



After-school programming makes learning fun for Tajik youth



Laughter rings out from the classroom. Inside this school in remote Tajikistan, a group of 9th graders are gathered around as two of their classmates perform a skit comparing modern schools in Tajikistan to school systems of the past.

The palpable joy in this classroom is itself a turning point for an education system more accustomed to a “chalk and talk” approach to teaching. It is now seeking to create a learning environment where students want to complete the compulsory 9th grade and transition to upper secondary school.

Students in Tajikistan typically stop short of completing secondary school so that they can work to help support their families. But doing so curtails their education and limits future economic opportunity. Some—when they reach the age of 16 and can get a work

permit—abandon their grade 9 studies and leave in search of work.

Aware that a workforce with limited education can have repercussions for the economy, Tajikistan’s Ministry of Education partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development to introduce a Student Motivation Learning Program (SMLP) into 83 target schools in the Khulob region of Tajikistan, hoping to convince students to stay motivated and engaged in school.

“The program changed the relationship between teachers and students,” says Shoev Niyozmuhammad, a District Education Director in Danghara, and “has also improved the quality of education and teaching in these schools.

The Student Motivation Learning Program identifies the causes of dropout,

generates awareness among stakeholders and use activities to engage children and motivate them to complete their education.

Two interventions were developed in collaboration with educators, parents and experts: an Early Warning System to identify and support 9th graders at risk of dropping out and an after-school program that combines tutoring and recreational activities. These interventions give at-risk students the academic support they need to succeed in school and have fun while learning.

Training Effective Teachers

The tutoring program reinforces regular class lessons in an engaging learning environment that motivates students to stay in school and interested in their classes.



“When we speak with the students, they say that one of the reasons they like the tutoring class is that they can freely express their opinions,” says Muborak Safarova, a team leader in Vose District.

Gone is the lecture-based format that limited student participation. Instead, the program’s tutors use a student-centered, interactive approach that encourages self-expression and collaboration.

The tutoring program is held five days a week for two hours after school with the first hour devoted to tutoring. Tutors use visual aids and have the students work in groups, encouraging them to participate, move around the classroom and speak up.

English teacher Dilshod Sharipov sees the effect the interactive teaching methods are having on the students, even those who were initially resistant to the program.

One 9th grade boy, he recalls, didn’t want to go to tutoring but was urged by his parents to “just try it.” It wasn’t long before he was hooked, says Dilshod, and the boy asked if he could continue attending the after-school sessions.

The formerly disinterested student is now one of the more actively engaged students at his school and has no plans of dropping out.

Discovering the joy of learning

The tutoring program is so popular that it draws students from other grades as well. “We have extra chairs for them,” notes teacher Rahimov Khuja Navaivich.

At one school in Tajikistan’s remote Khovaling District, there are 20 students enrolled in the tutoring program but five extra students routinely show up because lessons like these are so much more interesting than their usual classes.

The renewed interest and enthusiasm for learning doesn’t only take place in a school setting. Students are sharing what they’re learning at the tutoring program with siblings at home, a practice that reinforces the lessons learned.

“We practice some of the activities learned in the tutoring program back home and teach my sisters,” boasts 9th grader Mahinai Emmuddin, who dreams of becoming a doctor. She sees a difference in her younger siblings. “They pay more attention and are more interested in school.”

“The students have really changed,” says one history tutor. “Before, they were practically dumb - not speaking.” But the interactive approach to tutoring draws out the students, and the change is evident. “We let them feel at liberty to work and talk, and we don’t force them.”

Shifting the focus from the teacher to the student

“The teachers’ attitude toward us has changed,” observes 9th grader Noziguli Shamsullo, who participates in the tutoring program. “We have good relations now.”

Students say the program has helped them relax in class, express themselves more confidently and enjoy learning.

“I feel more comfortable in the school,” says Munirai Qurbonail, who describes herself before the program as a “very weak

student.” Attending the tutoring classes changed her. “I improved.” She now holds a leadership position at her school and attends intellectual competitions known as Olympiads.

Students aren’t the only ones enjoying the new interactive approach to learning. Teachers too say the new method is easy to implement and welcome the shift in student-teacher dynamics.

“The student-centric class means students do more of the work,” explains history tutor Khalifaev Safarali, who jokes that “it’s made our life easy!”

And it seems to be working. Teachers say the students are more engaged and are attending classes more regularly. Schools where an Early Warning System and Tutoring Program were implemented have seen students become more emotionally engaged with their schoolwork.

The positive results of the tutoring program have inspired some teachers to apply the interactive teaching method to their regular classes.

School administrators have also observed the results of redirecting the emphasis toward learning, not simply instructing.

“The teachers feel freer to focus on the students, who should be the focus,” says Mahmadsarif Nurov, a School Director in the Bolgawan District of Hatlam Province. ■

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Why Students Drop Out of School in Tajikistan

Academic:

15% of child respondents cited poor academic performance.

12% of at-risk students and 14% of dropouts said they were unable to keep up with their lessons.

52% of at-risk students and 53% of dropouts have missed more than 15 consecutive days of school.

Economic:

40% of the at-risk students, dropouts and dropouts' parents/guardians cited the need to supplement income through household chores/domestic work.

56% -59% of the child respondents and 70-76% of the parent respondents cited school-related expenses.

Source: USAID Situational Analysis



Chronic absenteeism is a major contributor to dropout.