Southport Family University

Empowering Families, Elevating Student Success

Lessons Learned

- **Unpredictable Attendance & Interest Disconnect:** Turnout varied significantly by topic (e.g., *Online Safety* drew 53 families, *Mental Health* drew 33, while *Vaping* drew 2). Topic relevance to parents does not always align with staff assumptions.
- **Partner Coordination:** Engaging external partners required significant lead time and then poor follow through at times.
- **Language & Access Barriers:** Up to one-third of district families spoke languages other than English, requiring robust translation support but you also need your team to help provide context for cultural understanding.

Key Solutions

- **Provide Accessibility Supports:** Offer complimentary childcare and translation in top district languages for every session. We really would like to run buses for our families.
- **Target At-Risk Populations First:** Launch with a "Refresh Night" specifically inviting families of academically, behaviorally, or emotionally at-risk students. They really appreciated the extra TLC.
- **Responsive Topic Selection:** Pivot topics based on real-time family feedback (e.g., adding a dedicated *Mental Health Night* directly in response to caregiver requests).
- **Digital Resource Hub:** Publish session recordings, slides, and quick-reference guides on a central website for families unable to attend live.

Impact & Outcomes

Data from the inaugural year of the Southport Family University demonstrates significant positive outcomes:

100% Caregivers reported feeling better informed after attending
100% Caregivers expressed a desire for more school connection point
0 Major conduct reports among students of attending families
5 Direct mental health/community referrals generated per event

- **Improved Student Metrics:** Attending families experienced higher student attendance, improved academic engagement, and fewer behavioral issues.
- **Strengthened Community Ties:** Increased utilization of school-linked services and enhanced visibility for PTO.

Roadmap for Replicating SFU in Your School

- **Conduct a Needs Assessment:** Survey parents and staff to identify primary pain points (e.g., technology platforms, mental health, study skills).
- **Assemble Your Team:** Secure commitments from counselors, social workers, ELL coordinators, and community partners.
- **Establish Logistics Early:** Set dates, reserve space, and line up childcare and language translators.
- **Launch with an Initial Evening:** Target at-risk student cohorts or quick win.
- **Get Flexible:** Finding space in the community outside of the school may increase success.
- **Gather Feedback & Iterate:** Use short post-event surveys to adjust topics, refine timing, and continuously improve engagement.

Reflection Questions:

- What specific opportunities currently exist for families to engage with our school beyond traditional events (e.g., open houses, parent-teacher conferences)? Which family demographics are most and least represented at these events?
- What primary barriers (e.g., language differences, work schedules, transportation, childcare, digital access) prevent families from actively participating in school initiatives, and how are we currently mitigating them?
- What are the top areas where caregivers express needing guidance or support (e.g., navigating student technology platforms, supporting mental health, academic/study strategies, post-secondary planning)?
- Which staff members, departments, and external community partners can be leveraged to lead family learning modules and support sessions?
- Which communication channels have proven most effective for reaching our hardest-to-reach families, and how can we use them to advertise family engagement offerings and gather continuous feedback?