O’Neill Online 2023: Southwest Dubois County School Corp in conjunction with the Center for Rural Engagement at Indiana University

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O’Neill Online Week is pleased to offer a rewarding client-based consulting opportunity focused on strengthening early childhood education in Dubois County.

Southwest Dubois County School Corporation: Within our district there are two elementary schools, each serve grades PK-5 but contain very different student populations.

Community Project: O’Neill Online in conjunction with the Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement are partnering with to provide the services below. The design of the project is to aid Dubois County with developing and implementing strategies to support high quality early childhood education. The project will focus on up to four projects to increase early learning capacity, serve more families and therefore minimize significant achievement gaps. This problem is particularly acute given the low-number of early childhood education providers and the disproportionate number of low-income and minority children experiencing enhanced risks and adversities.

Center for Rural Engagement: The Center for Rural Engagement reimagines the relationship between Indiana University Bloomington and nearby rural communities in Southwest Central Indiana. The center calls on the research, expertise, teaching, and service of IU Bloomington faculty, staff, and students to find solutions to the challenges these communities face and to enhance opportunities identified by the communities themselves.

Facts About Dubois County

- The median household income for Dubois County (~$58,000) is approximately $4,000 higher than the state average. There is a notable wage disparity between women and men in the county, with women earning approximately $15,000 less than men on average. Twenty-two percent of Dubois County residents are below age 18.
- Dubois County has a strong manufacturing economy with a number of nationally recognized brands.
- Eighty-nine percent of Dubois County residents are high school graduates.
- Dubois county has higher levels of diabetes, smoking, physical inactivity and obesity than the state average.
- The elementary schools in Dubois County are not 48% Hispanic with rising levels at lower grades.
- The community has strong leadership, supportive organizations and a network dedicated to strengthening the community.
Potential Projects

Student in the O’Neill Online Residency Week class will undertake the following projects based on enrollment.

**Innovation Benchmarking Study:** In order to develop an appropriate response to the shortage of early childhood education centers, Dubois County would like to better understand how similarly situated communities are addressing their shortages. As part of this initiative, the innovative benchmarking group will seek to produce a report on exemplar programs in rural communities. In particular the project will deliver:

1. Identify a list of similarly situated communities.
2. Identify common or cutting-edge programs and services found in these communities that address early childhood education. The report may also consider staffing, funding and other administrative benchmarks.
3. Evaluate the suitability of these programs as models for implementation in Dubois County.
4. Make recommendations for future implementation.

**Survey Design:** It is difficult to know what the future needs of the district entail. There is not a strong sense of how many future students are in the pipeline and what their level of preparation and needs entails. This group will develop a strategy for identifying future students (e.g. using county birth records or other public/private data) and then develop a survey and administration strategy to assess their needs. A survey design project would:

1. Develop strategies to identify students who are likely to enroll in the district.
2. Develop a strategy by which to contact and survey future students.
3. Create a scientific survey which would inform the organizations strategic programs. In particular, questions would address population needs and level of preparation.

**Policy Briefing:** [This could potentially be one or two projects]. This project focuses on the development of new programs for the district. This program could be a developmental/transitional kindergarten and/or a dual language pre-school. In the case of the developmental kindergarten, attention should be paid to how this aligns with current dual language programs. The project would include the following steps:

1. Investigating best practices in developmental kindergarten/dual language pre-school.
2. Conduct an analysis of the feasibility of the program for the school district.
3. Make recommendations to guide implementation if appropriate.

**Stakeholder Analysis and School Strategy Report:** This project will seek to identify stakeholders who are interested in early childhood education in Dubois County. This will begin with the Dubois County Childcare Task Force, but expend to consider a wide range of public, private and nonprofit organizations with a shared interest in building an early childhood pipeline.
It will then develop strategies for engagement with this community to strengthen the level of preparation for students entering the school system. The project will include:

1. Identify stakeholders who are or could be partners in the advancement of early childhood education.
2. The development of a plan by which to mobilize interest and advocacy toward organizational goals.
3. The creation and identification of strategies to engage and capitalize on community initiatives.

The above tasks are not merely academic exercises. Students will ultimately provide real, actionable insight to the client to help them be successful. While it is important to satisfy the instructors’ requirements for the presentation and report, your most important audience is the client.

This O’Neill Online course begins remotely no later than July 1, when students will receive materials (videos, readings, etc.) they can consume at their own pace in preparation for residence week in Bloomington from July 30th through August 4th. Residence week will consist of meetings with leaders from the Center for Rural Engagement and Dubois County leaders (including a day spent in the field with community members), lectures focused on the project’s issue areas, and intensive team-based collaboration culminating in a presentation of recommendations to regional leadership on the final day. Students will then incorporate feedback from the presentation into a final report and executive summary to be delivered to the client and the instructors approximately one week following residence week.