

Title

4-H Project Achievement: Developing Public Speaking Skills in Youth

Author

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Year

2022

Geographic Scope

County

County

Candler

Unit/Department/Group

4-H & Youth

Summary

Candler County 4-H teaches youth valuable communication skills and provides them the opportunity to practice and be evaluated on the skills they have acquired. These opportunities are presented to youth after they receive training about writing informative speeches and best practices for speech delivery. Students then deliver presentations through various avenues including in-school club meeting presentations and participate in county and district project achievement.

Situation

It is vitally important in today's technologically advanced society that people understand how to use messages to generate meaning with various contexts, cultures and media (Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000). Morreale and Pearson (2008) note that oral communication is a prerequisite for academic, personal and professional success. While youth can vocalize thoughts, the knowledge to construct those thoughts through effective communication has been a basic component of the 4-H program since its earliest days. Competent communication skills can help lead youth to meeting the mission of 4-H as a self-productive and contributing citizen. In order to better prepare youth for oral presentation and communication, Georgia 4-H utilizes Project Achievement for those in grades 4-12. Through this competitive event, participants research a topic of their choice, prepare a speech and visual aids and then present in front of fellow 4-H'ers and judges. While Candler County 4-H has participated in Project Achievement for decades, the current staff and Program Development Team found it to be an area that needed attention for growth in both quality and quantity.

Response

In August 2021, the Candler County 4-H staff and Program Development Team met to implement a new plan for increasing participation in Project Achievement specifically among

4th-6th graders. The Program Development Team wanted to see Project Achievement integrated more into the school, thus increasing participation.

While all students in these grades historically received instruction about public speaking, in the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of 14 youth in grades 4-6 participated in 4-H Project Achievement beyond the classroom. During 2021, 481 students in this age group received instruction from Candler County 4-H staff using the Georgia 4-H Friends "Finding Your Way to Project Achievement" curriculum. Through this curriculum, students were taught about the steps for developing an effective presentation from choosing a topic, to writing an appropriate and educational speech, to creating visual aids that are useful and add value to the presentation. Students interested in pursuing Project Achievement met with 4-H staff and volunteers several times over a two-month period to prepare for the county-level competition. These students received individualized help and feedback. Much of this assistance was provided to students during the school day through partnership with classroom teachers and school administrators.

Junior and Senior 4-H'ers (7th-12th graders), that previously received instruction through the Georgia 4-H curriculum, participated in portfolio workshops, demonstration practices, dress rehearsals and more to prepare for Project Achievement. These 4-H'ers received feedback from volunteer judges and 4-H professionals.

Impact

In February 2022, Thirteen Junior and Senior 4-H'ers (7th-12th graders) competed at Southeast District Project Achievement at Rock Eagle 4-H Center. Twelve of these individuals placed in the top 3 in their category and 6 advanced to State Congress in July.

After participating in District Project Achievement, these 4-H'ers reported the following:

- 100% of students indicated they were better prepared for the workforce because of their participation in Project Achievement.
- 100% of students indicated an increase in confidence in public speaking because of participation in Project Achievement.

On March 15 2022, 63 Cloverleaf 4-H'ers (4th-6th graders) presented their Project Achievement speeches at Candler County's Cloverleaf Project Achievement in front of fellow 4-H'ers, judges and family members. In addition to these participants, nine teen leaders and eleven adults served as either judges or volunteers at the event.

After participating in County Project Achievement, Cloverleaf 4-H'ers reported the following:

- 98% of students correctly identified at least 2 of the 3 parts of a presentation (introduction, body, and conclusion).
- 100% of students correctly identified at least 3 of the 6 things they can do to have a great presentation (make eye contact, practice your speech, use a loud and clear voice, research your topic - learn all you can, say thank you, dress appropriately).
- 84% of students indicated that they were more confident speaking in front of others, with 87% saying they were now better at giving presentations.

- Because of Project Achievement, 89% of students reported they felt better able to prepare a presentation and 98% indicated they learned more about their topic of choice.

Of those participants at Cloverleaf County Project Achievement, 36 advanced to compete at District Project Achievement on March 19, 2022.

Because of the efforts, Candler County 4-H received honors for increases in Project Achievement participation at the district level and saw an increase in the number of 4-H'ers placing in their project areas.

The impact of Project Achievement is best seen for the perspective of the youth that participate. One Candler County 4-H'er stated that participating in Project Achievement taught her how to conduct research and be creative. Another emphasized the confidence and positive thinking that she gained by competing. Many also noted that they were glad to have the experience because they learned even more about something they had an interest in. One parent of a participant also stated "it's amazing to me how much my child has grown through this process and how much more confident she is speaking in front of others even at a young age." A 5th grade teacher commended this program saying, "my students that participated are now stronger at formulating their writing and being more confident as presenters."