

Blog Posts for New Schools

If you are starting a new UIL A+ Academics program at your school, we encourage you to read the following blog posts from our [UIL A+ Blog](#). These posts are designed specifically with new schools in mind. You can read them in any order, but the sequence provided here offers a logical flow:

1. Unlocking Success: Starting a UIL A+ Academics Program at Your School
2. Program Structure and Roles Demystified
3. What Events to Start With: A Guide for New Schools

Unlocking Success: Starting a UIL A+ Academics Program at Your School

Posted by Mark Niles on 7/7/2023 1:00:00 AM

Embarking on the journey of establishing a UIL A+ Academics program at your school is an exciting opportunity for students to showcase their skills and talents in various academic competitions. This guide will provide you with some instructions and general guidelines to help you navigate the process successfully. Each step is tailored to help you create a thriving program that meets your school's unique needs.

Step 1: Reach out to HISD's UIL Department

HISD is unique in having its own dedicated UIL department, providing valuable support to schools interested in participating. Get in touch with your UIL specialist, who will guide you through the process and provide assistance along the way. Additionally, HISD hosts six tournaments each year, and you can select the number of tournaments your school wishes to attend by purchasing a suitable UIL package.

Step 2: Learn about What's Offered

Develop a basic understanding of the UIL events by reviewing the available competition categories. Consider scheduling a meeting with your UIL specialist, who can provide detailed insights into the program and its offerings. The tournament schedule typically runs from October to May, so plan ahead to determine which tournaments your school will attend. Access HISD's **A+ Information Packet**, a valuable resource available on HISD's UIL webpage or through the UIL specialist.

Step 3: Embrace the Individuality of Your School

Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to establishing a UIL A+ Academics program. Each school is unique, with varying squad sizes and event preferences. Some schools may have large squads participating in a wide variety of events, while others may focus on mastering a

smaller number of events. Avoid comparing your program to others and instead focus on what works best for your school's resources, interests, and student body.

Step 4: Campus Buy-In and Help from Others

Building a successful UIL A+ Academics program requires collaboration and support from various stakeholders. Engage with your principal and other campus leaders to share your plans and seek their advocacy. Involve parents who can contribute as event coaches or chaperones, enhancing the success of the program. Seek assistance from other teachers who can help coach events, recruit students, and refer families to your program. Remember, a collective effort is vital to establishing and sustaining a thriving UIL program. Don't forget to manage expectations and seek support from the UIL specialist when needed.

Step 5: Recruit Students

Effective student recruitment is essential for the success of your UIL A+ Academics program. Utilize various strategies, such as promoting the program's benefits, offering incentives like food, and providing recognition for participation. Collaborate with other teachers to spread the word and generate interest among students. Schoolwide announcements, posters, setting-up an information table during lunch, and visiting different teacher's classrooms individually are all viable recruitment methods. Remember, starting with a small group is perfectly fine, as it allows you to focus on quality and individual growth.

Step 6: Communication

Establish clear lines of communication with all stakeholders to ensure everyone is informed and engaged. Regularly send out communications via email, utilizing platforms like Remind.com to keep parents and students up to date. Collect and maintain phone numbers for easy communication. Open and consistent communication is key to the success of your program.

Step 7: Practice and Planning for Your First Tournament

Prepare your students for their first UIL tournament by conducting practice sessions and explaining the rules of the events they will be participating in. Utilize past tests and materials provided by UIL for practice. Consider transportation arrangements and obtain any necessary permission forms. Ensure you have the required materials such as pencils, pens, papers, dictionaries, calculators, etc., as most materials are not provided by UIL. Bring snacks, board games, and other entertainment options to keep students engaged when not competing. Distribute schedules to students and ensure they are aware of event locations.

Step 8: Attend Your First UIL Tournament

Approach your first UIL tournament as a learning experience for both your students and stakeholders. Prioritize your presence and availability, ensuring you can support your students throughout the event. Emphasize that winning may not be immediate, but the experience gained from witnessing the event in person will provide valuable insights and opportunities for improvement. Remember to register your students on time using SpeechWire.com and be prepared with necessary documentation.

Step 9: Celebrate Achievements and Promote Growth

Take the time to celebrate your students' achievements and recognize their hard work. Highlight their successes through newsletters, announcements, or school assemblies to inspire and motivate others. Utilize these accomplishments to generate interest and promote the growth of your UIL A+ Academics program, attracting future participants and potential sponsors.

Conclusion:

Establishing a UIL A+ Academics program at your school is a rewarding endeavor that nurtures student engagement, personal growth, and academic excellence. Remember, the journey is one of continuous improvement, and with dedication, perseverance, and the support of the UIL department, your UIL A+ Academics program will unlock the potential of your students and pave the way for their success.

Program Structure and Roles Demystified

Posted by Mark Niles on 8/20/2023

When it comes to the world of UIL Academics, questions often arise about the role of the UIL Coordinator and how to structure a school's UIL squad. With the intricacies involved in managing and organizing these programs, it's crucial to have a clear understanding of how everything fits together. In this article, we'll delve into the core aspects of UIL program structure and the multifaceted responsibilities of a UIL Coordinator.

The Role of the UIL Coordinator:

The UIL Coordinator is instrumental in ensuring the successful functioning of the program. Appointed by the school principal, UIL Coordinators play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the school community and HISD's UIL Academics Department. While each school is mandated to have at least one coordinator, some schools opt for multiple coordinators. However, it's important to remember the adage "too many cooks in the kitchen." While multiple coordinators can offer benefits, harmony and careful consideration of potential issues are essential.

The UIL Coordinator's Responsibilities:

The UIL Coordinator holds a significant responsibility in fostering smooth communication and efficient organization within the UIL program. Here are some key duties that fall under the umbrella of the UIL Coordinator:

- Communication and Liaison: Acting as a vital link between the school community and the UIL Academics Department, the coordinator ensures a seamless flow of information.
- Rule Adherence: Upholding the integrity of the program, coordinators ensure that their school strictly adheres to all the rules and regulations set forth by the UIL.
- Logistics Management: Coordinators take charge of organizing transportation plans, ensuring that students are well-prepared to travel for competitions.

- Scheduling and Deadlines: Disseminating tournament schedules to all participants, teachers, and parents, coordinators guarantee that everyone is aware of deadlines and competition times.
- On-Ground Tournament Support: Attending tournaments is crucial for coordinators to monitor their school's participation and serve as the conduit between students, parents, and the Tournament Director. If you are not able to attend an event, please make sure a principal-approved adult (ideally a school employee) is ready to serve in this role on tournament day.
- Resource Management: Coordinators facilitate access to past study materials and tests, helping students prepare more effectively for competitions. The UIL department can grant access to these materials.
- Event Familiarity: Coordinators acquaint themselves with the rules and procedures of the specific events their students will be participating in.
- Recruitment and Coaching: While not expected to be experts in all events, coordinators recruit teachers and parents to coach students in different categories. Collaboration is key to success.

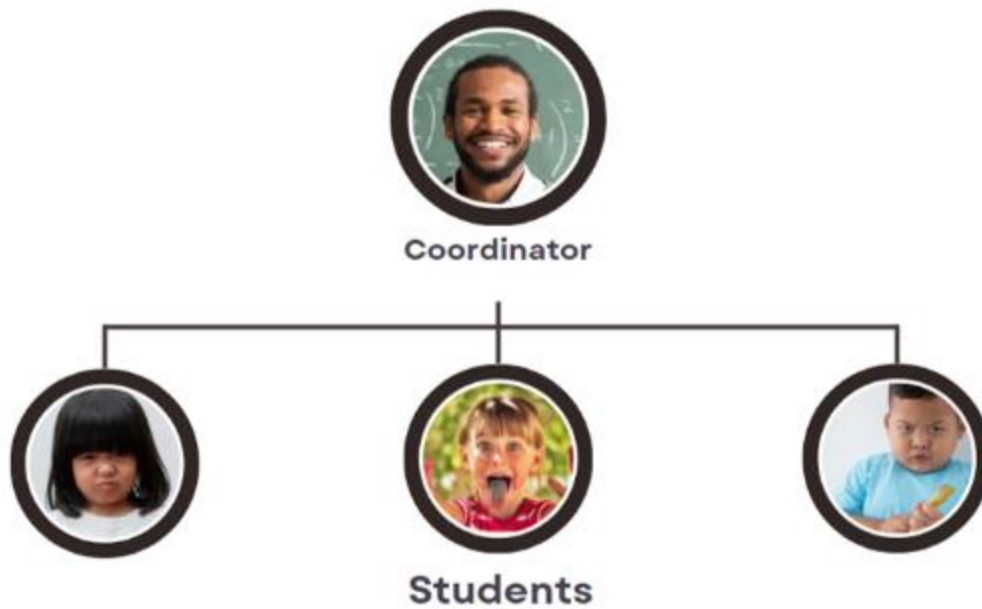
You Don't Have to do Everything:

UIL offers nearly 20 different events for students to compete in. Recognizing that no one person can master all the events, the role of the coordinator extends beyond direct coaching. Instead, they tap into the expertise of teachers and parents within the school community to assist in preparing students for various events. This delegation not only ensures that students receive the best guidance but also strengthens the sense of unity within the school.

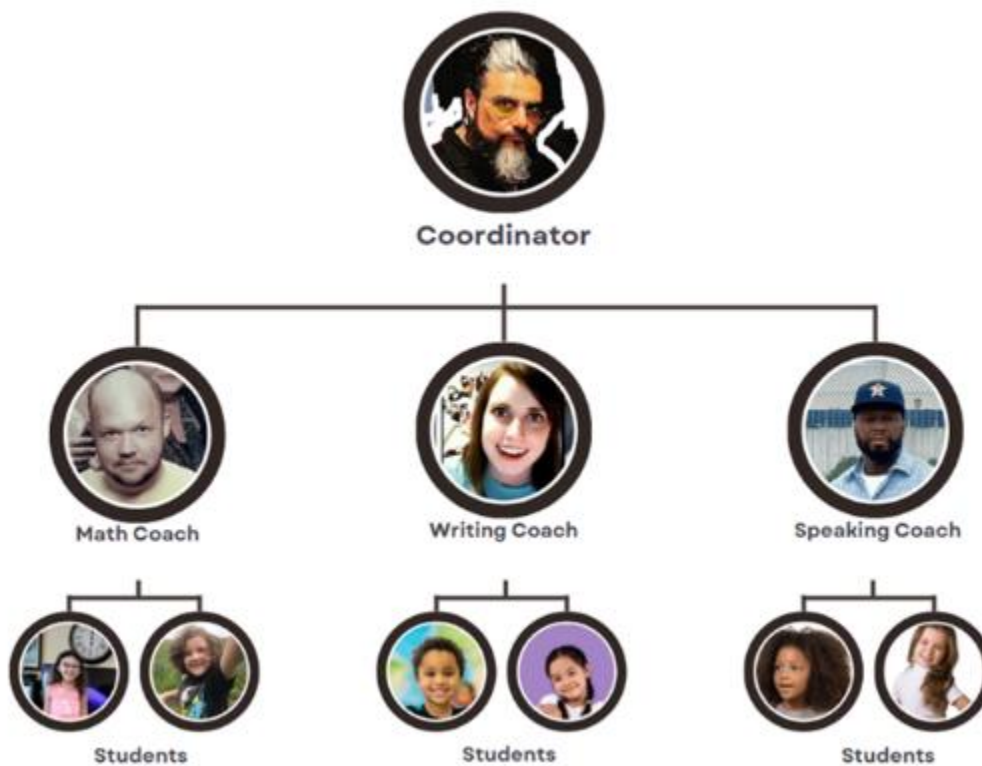
Structural Models for UIL Programs:

Two predominant organizational structures are prevalent in UIL programs:

Small Squad Structure: Ideal for smaller programs or those in their initial stages, the coordinator often doubles as the coach. This is especially effective when a limited number of events are involved, reducing the workload.



Large Squad Structure: In more extensive programs, a shared coaching responsibility becomes necessary. Coordinators recruit coaches specialized in different events, sharing the coaching load and fostering expertise.



Conclusion:

As you navigate the world of UIL, understanding the structure and the role of the UIL Coordinator is paramount. From ensuring effective communication to orchestrating logistics and fostering collaboration, the coordinator's role is a linchpin in the program's success. By embracing the power of delegation and choosing the right organizational structure, schools can cultivate thriving UIL programs that enrich students' academic journeys.

What Events to Start With: A Guide for New Schools

Posted by Mark Niles on 9/25/2024 1:30:00 PM

In A+ UIL Academics, we offer a wide variety of events for students to participate in. Trying to decide where to begin can feel overwhelming, especially with so many options. But don't worry—starting small and building from there is perfectly okay! Here are a few questions to consider when choosing events for your school:

- **Do you have any students that have participated in UIL before?**
If so, what events did they enjoy or excel in? Building on past experience can give you a head start.
- **What subject matter expertise does your UIL Coordinator or Coach have?**
Their skills and interests will play a huge role in preparing students, so aligning event choices with their strengths is a good starting point.
- **What events in your district have a high level of competition?**
Some events attract a lot of strong competitors, while others might be easier for beginners to break into.
- **What is your school known for academically?**
Do you have a strong arts program? Is your math team well-regarded? Use these strengths to guide your entry into UIL

Understanding UIL Events

Before diving deeper into these questions, let's take a look at the events offered. These are broken into categories to make things more manageable:

5. Writing & Language Arts

- Ready Writing
- Creative Writing (ES Only)
- Editorial Writing (MS Only)
- Spelling

6. Speech & Public Speaking

- Impromptu Speaking

- Modern Oratory
 - Oral Reading
 - Storytelling (ES Only)
7. **Math & Calculation**
- Calculator Applications (MS Only)
 - Mathematics
 - Number Sense
8. **Fine Arts & Music**
- Art
 - Music Memory
9. **Science & Social Studies**
- Science (MS Only)
 - Social Studies
10. **Logic & Analytical Skills**
- Chess Puzzle
 - Maps, Graphs & Charts
 - Dictionary Skills
 - Listening

How to Decide Where to Start

One of the most important questions is "**What subject matter expertise does your UIL Coordinator or Coach have?**" Since coaches play a vital role in preparing students, leveraging their strengths is a smart strategy. Here are a few suggestions based on different types of teachers:

- **If your Coordinator is an English teacher:**
The **Writing & Language Arts** category is an obvious place to start. English teachers often excel in helping students prepare for events like Ready Writing and Spelling. Additionally, they tend to do well coaching **Speech & Public Speaking** events, which involve many of the same language skills.
- **If you have a math teacher:**
Starting with **Math & Calculation** makes sense. Events like Number Sense and Mathematics require a strong math background. You might also explore the **Logic & Analytical Skills** category, as many math teachers find success here too.

- **If your school has a strong fine arts program:**
Events in the **Fine Arts & Music** category—such as Art and Music Memory—can be a good fit. These events typically have lower participation, making them easier to break into.

Understanding Competition Levels

Another important factor to consider is the level of competition in your district. Some events are highly competitive, while others are easier to break into. Here are a few insights based on what we've seen across the HISD UIL program:

- **Competitive Events:**
 - **Math & Calculation:** Many schools dedicate significant time to practicing these events, so competition is stiff. I recommend balancing your students' participation in these events with others that might be easier to succeed in early on.
 - **Speech & Public Speaking:** While there are strong competitors in this category, it's relatively easy to get involved—especially for students who are naturally gifted speakers. It's also fun and builds confidence, which can motivate students.
- **Mid-Level Competition:**
 - **Writing & Language Arts:** This category tends to have a mix of strong competitors and newcomers, making it a good place for students of varying skill levels. Creativity and writing ability play major roles in success, so it's a great category for imaginative and thoughtful students.
 - **Science & Social Studies:** These events attract a broad range of participants and usually present a moderate level of competition. Students with a strong foundation in these subjects can perform well, but they don't tend to be as highly competitive as the Math & Calculation events.
- **Easier to Break Into:**
 - **Fine Arts & Music:** Events like Art and Music Memory tend to have fewer participants, giving your students a better chance to stand out.
 - **Logic & Analytical Skills:** While **Chess Puzzle** can be highly competitive, events like **Listening** and **Dictionary Skills** often offer early success for students.

Disclaimer: The categorization of events and their corresponding competition levels is based on our experiences with the HISD UIL program and reflects our opinion. You may have different perspectives on these events.

Start Small and Build

It's okay to start small and focus on just a few categories or events at first. You can always expand as your program grows and as more teachers become interested in coaching additional events. Early success, even in smaller or less competitive events, can boost your team's motivation and excitement, setting a positive tone for future competitions.

Encourage your students to participate in both challenging events and those where they might find easier success. This balance will help them grow academically while also giving them multiple opportunities to win awards.

Conclusion

Choosing where to begin with UIL Academics doesn't have to be overwhelming. By considering your students' past experiences, your coaches' strengths, and the competition levels in your district, you can create a successful plan. Remember, it's perfectly fine to start small and grow from there. The goal is to challenge students while also giving them opportunities to succeed and build confidence.