

**PLAZA MIDDLE SCHOOL
MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM (MYP)
ACADEMY**

Year-Two Evaluation

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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**PLAZA MIDDLE SCHOOL
MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM (MYP) ACADEMY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This evaluation presents the School Board and superintendent with second-year information on the Middle Years Program (MYP) Academy housed at Plaza Middle School (PMS). The academy is a specialized school-within-a-school designed for students who have an interest in pursuing a rigorous academic curriculum with a holistic approach to education as specified by the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program. During the 2003-2004 school year, the Plaza MYP Academy enrolled 100 sixth-grade students and 87 seventh-grade students.

FINDINGS

- The MYP Academy responded positively to the year-one recommendations. A partnership with the military was established, academy staff continued to participate in high-quality internal and external staff development, the academy continued to recruit highly qualified staff from both inside and outside of the division, new academy students in seventh grade helped fill available seats, and academy staff explored ways to attract greater numbers of minority students to the academy. Staff chose not to make recommended adjustments in the summer orientation program, but staff did consider other survey results and comments in planning for improvements to the academy.
- A steering committee was formed with MYP Academy staff and staff from the IB Diploma program to plan for the MYP students' transition to the ninth and tenth grades at Princess Anne High School. In addition, Princess Anne staff who will be teaching academy students in the ninth and tenth grades participated in staff development activities with MYP staff.
- The marketing of the academy, application process, and student selection followed the academy proposal. All rising sixth graders in the division were informed of the academy opportunity, and 281 students from most of the division's elementary schools applied for the 100 seats.
- The academy's sixth-grade cohort was at full capacity and the seventh-grade cohort was at 87 percent capacity at the beginning of 2003-2004. The retention rate throughout the school year was 92 percent for sixth graders and 99 percent for seventh graders.

- Parents enrolled their child in the academy because of the academic challenge, the holistic approach to education including intercultural and community service components, and because they felt the experience would benefit their child in the future.
- A greater percentage of academy students were female. In addition, compared to the division's middle school students, a greater percentage of academy students were Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander, while a smaller percentage were African American. The percentage of academy students who received free or reduced lunch was noticeably lower. The academy enrolled students from each of the division's middle school attendance zones.
- Students took VBCPS prescribed courses in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and health and physical education. In addition, students completed MYP prescribed courses in a modern foreign language, visual and performing arts, and computer and design technology which was embedded in the other courses. Of academy seventh graders, 48 percent completed Algebra I, and 70 percent completed either Spanish II or French II.
- The three IB MYP concepts of intercultural awareness, holistic education, and communication, along with the five areas of interaction, were embedded in each of the subject areas as well as being part of enrichment activities in which academy students participated. The majority of sixth graders (76%) and seventh graders (78%) met or exceeded the 50-hour community service requirement.
- Overall, students, parents, and faculty agreed that the academy provided a challenging curriculum, introduced students to the five areas of interaction, and required students to think critically. They also agreed that it was a rigorous program that promoted community involvement through service learning, fostered intercultural awareness, improved conceptual learning, and required students to solve problems in creative ways. Faculty also showed high levels of satisfaction with staff development activities.
- Students gained many positive experiences and skills from enrollment in the academy. These included an academically challenging environment, appreciation and respect for others through intercultural awareness and community service, critical thinking skills, study habits and related skills, and positive social outcomes, such as new friends with similar interests, increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of pride. Numerous comments indicated that students and parents felt the academy experience would benefit the child in the future.
- A lower percentage of all students and parents agreed that the academy provides a flexible learning environment. Sixth-grade students were also less likely to agree that they received enough information prior to making their decision to enroll in the academy and that the summer orientation/picnic helped them to make a smooth transition. Seventh graders were less likely to agree that their responsibilities as an academy student were clear to them.
- Most students, parents, and teachers provided overwhelming praise for the academy staff's dedication and the academic challenge of the program and were thankful for the availability of the program. However, numerous comments indicated that the homework load was too heavy. Students felt that the homework load affected their ability to engage in other

activities, although the majority did participate in extracurricular activities at PMS. In addition, parents along with teachers noted the need for more communication.

- Academically, academy students overall were successful in meeting the objectives of the grade six and grade seven history SOL tests, the grade eight math SOL test, the Algebra I SOL test, and the grade eight science SOL test. At least 98 percent of the academy students passed each applicable test with a relatively high percentage of students scoring in the advanced ranges.
- Based on mean grade averages, sixth-grade academy students had approximately a B average in their sixth-grade year, while seventh-grade academy students had slightly below a B average in their seventh-grade year. This was mainly a result of grades earned in core academy courses where both sixth and seventh graders earned mainly B and C grades rather than exploratory courses where students earned A and B grades.
- Qualitative and quantitative data provided evidence that the academy has been successful overall in meeting each of its objectives, and it also appears that the academy has been successful at this point in meeting its goal of providing students with expanded instructional opportunities that will serve as a foundation for and acceptance into the IB Diploma program or other highly rigorous program of study.
- The actual expenditures for academy preparation and two years of operation were approximately \$1,595,415 compared to the proposed budget of \$2,026,460 in the School Board-approved plan. Overall, the actual expenditures were \$431,045 less than the proposed budget. This was due to an overestimation of transportation costs which are difficult to estimate in advance of knowing which students will be attending the academy from various areas in Virginia Beach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider holding a focus group with current academy students to learn what types of information they wish they would have known prior to enrolling in the academy in order to help new academy students make a smooth transition to the academy and adjust to the new academy experience, and determine the appropriate venue for communicating the information.
- Analyze data comparing teachers' estimates for time needed to complete homework and actual student work time to determine if estimates are correct and if daily homework time is reasonable for MYP middle school students.
- Review survey responses and comments to determine if there are changes necessary given that parents and teachers suggested improvements in communication.

- Review academy students' academic achievement in core courses in relation to the rigorous expectations for the academy including discussions with students regarding their performance in the academy, and determine if there is an appropriate balance between program and student needs.
- Continue planning for the academy's transition to Princess Anne High School in 2005-2006 when the first MYP students enter ninth grade.
- Survey parents to determine expectations for their students' enrollment in ninth and tenth grades of the MYP Academy to gauge future plans, and work with parents and students regarding the students' goals following the eighth-grade year of the program.