

FIRST COLONIAL HIGH SCHOOL LEGAL STUDIES ACADEMY

Year-Three Evaluation

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Department of Accountability
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FIRST COLONIAL LEGAL STUDIES ACADEMY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In September 2004, the Department of Accountability provided a year-two evaluation of the Legal Studies Academy located at First Colonial High School. One of the recommendations made following the year-two evaluation was to continue the evaluation of the academy for two additional years. The purpose of this report is to provide the School Board and superintendent with information on the continued implementation and progress of the Legal Studies Academy.

FINDINGS

- The Legal Studies Academy leadership addressed all of the recommendations at least partially if not completely during the third year of the academy's operation. The leadership team demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement through the active dissemination of the year-two evaluation report to academy stakeholders and the development of an academy-specific plan for improvement.
- Marketing activities were successful as evidenced by 259 applicants for the 2004-2005 school year. The Student Selection Committee followed the approved application and student selection process. Students selected to attend the academy matriculated from all of the division's comprehensive middle schools.
- During the fall of 2004, the academy leadership held meetings with academy students, parents, and teachers to discuss the results of the year-two evaluation of the academy. The leadership team discussed the actions they were taking to address the recommendations and solicited feedback from the stakeholders.
- The academy enrolled rising tenth and eleventh graders in addition to rising ninth graders to address the attrition issues reported in the year-two evaluation. As of the start of the 2004-2005 school year, the academy enrolled 100 ninth graders, 89 tenth graders, and 76 eleventh graders for a total of 265 students.
- The attrition rate for ninth graders in 2004-2005 was less than the attrition rate observed among ninth graders during the previous year, but slightly higher than the rate observed in 2002-2003. Based on the attrition patterns, it appeared that the further along students were in the program, the less likely they were to withdraw from the academy.
- A number of staffing changes occurred before the start of the 2004-2005 school year and throughout the school year. Nine additional teachers were assigned to teach academy

classes in 2004-2005, and the academy hired a new coordinator when the original academy coordinator transferred to a new position.

- The academy-related staff development activities were evaluated using the VBCPS Activity Evaluation Form. Staff members rated the activities as beneficial, and some cited specific ways that they intended to apply the information gained. Staff members did express a desire for additional training that would enhance their ability to integrate more law-related information into their courses.
- During the 2004-2005 school year, the academy leadership simplified the strand structure of the academy from four strands to two. Instead of choosing between Pre-law, Administration of Law, Law Enforcement, and Corrections, students had the choice of the Law strand, which encompassed the Pre-Law and Administration of Law strands, or the Administration of Justice strand, which encompassed the Law Enforcement and Corrections strands. Approximately 55 percent of the academy sophomores and juniors chose to pursue the Law strand and 45 percent chose to pursue the Administration of Justice strand.
- In 2004-2005, nine new academy courses were approved by the School Board. Four of the nine courses involved dual enrollment agreements with Tidewater Community College, providing students the opportunity to earn college credit while attending the academy.
- Many of the courses originally proposed for students interested in becoming a court reporter or a legal office assistant require dual enrollment agreements that have not been established; however, the academy leadership reported that they plan to continue in their attempts to secure agreements for these courses.
- As recommended in the year-one and year-two evaluation report, the objectives of the Legal Studies Academy were revised in 2004-2005 and more closely mirrored the objectives of the other academies in the division.
- As of the end of the 2004-2005 school year, all of the academy juniors completed their job-shadowing requirement, and 90 percent of the academy sophomores had job shadowing placements scheduled. In addition, by the summer of 2005, all but one of the academy juniors completed their internship requirement.
- In response to the recommendation to offer a variety of field trips and seminars to more students in the academy, the Legal Studies Academy leadership team offered seminars to students during class and after school to accommodate more students' schedules. Two new field trips were also added in 2004-2005. However, students and parents recommended additional field trips and seminars as a means of improving the academy.
- Academy students performed well during the third year of the academy as evidenced by involvement in extracurricular activities, pursuit of the advanced studies diploma, and

earning higher grade averages and higher pass rates on the end-of-course SOL tests when compared to non-academy students.

- The academy leadership team was involved in ongoing conversations with various colleges and universities; however, no formal articulated agreements currently exist between the academy and institutions of higher education. The ongoing conversations with colleges and universities have resulted in informal agreements to provide assistance to the academy in the form of internship placement, panel discussions, and visiting a law school.
- Students in the academy in 2004-2005 appeared to express more positive perceptions of the academy compared to students enrolled during the first two years of the academy's operation.
- The students from the original cohort of students (i.e., ninth graders in 2002-2003) expressed less positive perceptions about the academy from their first year in the academy, and their responses remained relatively unchanged over time. However, subsequent cohorts of academy students expressed more positive perceptions of the academy when compared to the original cohort of students.
- Based on the figures provided in the original academy proposal, the projected costs for the third year of the academy's operation totaled \$616,564. The actual costs for operating the academy in 2004-2005 were \$570,296, representing a difference of \$46,268.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to monitor academy attrition and pursue strategies for retaining students in the academy.
- Continue to offer a variety of field trips and seminars to all of the students in the academy at each grade level. As part of the academy marketing, provide students and parents with a description of the nature and number of seminars and field trips students should expect to be offered while in the academy.
- Continue to provide students and parents with up-to-date information on academy meetings and activities throughout the school year.
- Secure dual enrollment agreements for the elective courses that still require these agreements, particularly those courses associated with careers such as court reporting and legal office administration.
- Continue to offer and evaluate staff development activities that are based on identified needs and that enhance academy teachers' ability to integrate law-related units/ideas in the curriculum.
- Continue the evaluation of the Legal Studies Academy for one more year as recommended in the year-two evaluation report.