

**SALEM HIGH SCHOOL
VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS
ACADEMY**

YEAR-ONE EVALUATION

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This year-one evaluation provides the School Board and superintendent information about the implementation of the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) Academy at Salem High School during the 2004-2005 school year. On February 17, 2004, the School Board approved the proposal for the VPA Academy to be implemented in September 2004. The academy is a specialized school-within-a-school designed to provide students with specialized, intensive training in the arts and to prepare them for post-secondary advanced studies or for faster entry into arts-related occupations. The academy is organized into four strands including art, dance, drama, and music. The music strand includes a vocal or instrumental concentration. During the 2004-2005 school year, the academy enrolled 120 ninth-grade students.

FINDINGS

- Later than planned approval of the academy proposal and hiring of the academy coordinator led to delays in some implementation tasks. However, staff worked to prevent delays from having a negative impact on the academy, and all components were in place for the academy's opening.
- The marketing process appeared to be successful with 238 initial applications from students in all VBCPS middle schools and several students from private schools.
- The application process generally followed the School Board-approved process with the audition serving as a key component. Two auditions were held to accommodate students' scheduling needs. This allowed more students to complete the application process. A total of 180 of the 238 initial applicants completed the process by auditioning (76%).
- Students and parents generally had positive perceptions of the application process. However, it appeared that some students and parents would have preferred more information about the academy prior to making the decision to enroll.
- The student selection process generally followed the School Board-approved process. A larger than proposed committee was needed to review application materials, and the committee composition differed slightly from the proposal. The selection committee appeared to have followed the approved procedures for reviewing and rating each applicant's

application portfolio. Of the 180 students who completed the application process, 130 students were qualified and offered admission to the academy (72%).

- At the beginning of the year, 120 ninth graders enrolled in the academy with 49 percent in the music strand, 19 percent in the art strand, 18 percent in the dance strand, and 14 percent in the drama strand.
- The academy opened at 60 percent of its proposed capacity of 200 students. The retention rate for students in the academy during the year was 93 percent with eight students withdrawing during the year (7%). Approximately 78 percent of the academy students who completed the year intended to reenroll in the academy during 2005-2006.
- The academy enrolled a greater percentage of females compared to Salem High School or the division. Approximately 69 percent of the academy students were female, and 31 percent were male.
- The academy enrolled a group of students with varied ethnic backgrounds that appeared to be most representative of the division's high school students. One exception was the percentage of African-American students which was more reflective of the percentage of African Americans at Salem High School. Overall, approximately 56 percent of the academy students were Caucasian, 33 percent were African American, 8 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 percent were Hispanic, and 1 percent was American Indian.
- Academy students enrolled from all VBCPS middle schools with the largest percentage from Salem Middle School (25%). In addition, the largest percentage of academy students were within the Salem High School attendance zone (33%) followed by the Green Run High School attendance zone (13%).
- Approximately 87 percent of the students planned to earn an advanced studies diploma, and 61 percent were involved in extracurricular activities. The majority of activities were related to the arts.
- Students enrolled in the academy to expand or improve their talents or knowledge of the arts. Others enrolled because they loved engaging in their specific art form such as singing, dancing, or drawing. Some were interested in an arts-related career.
- The staff selection process followed the School Board-approved process with the academy coordinator selected first. The academy coordinator interviewed teachers for the academy positions and made recommendations to the principal who approved the recommendations. Staff selection appeared to be based on criteria in the proposal.
- Staff development was based on staff members' needs and included curriculum development and course work, workshops, and conferences related to specific strands. However, low percentages of staff agreed that the academy training helped prepare them to teach academy courses, enhanced their ability to integrate arts-related units/ideas into the curriculum, or enabled them to better meet the needs of academy students.

- As proposed, the program of study was organized into four strands including art, dance, drama, and music, with music organized into two concentrations: vocal and instrumental. Overall, academy students enrolled in the required core and academy-related courses and academy electives. On average, academy students were enrolled in nearly eight courses each semester.
- Ten new courses were developed and offered for the academy's first year with one course offered as an after-school ensemble class. Fifteen new courses were developed and approved for the academy's second year.
- During the year, students attended multiple activities. A total of 636 student attendances at 41 different seminars, master classes, or qualified field trips were recorded as students began to meet the required 70 hours of study through topic seminars. Academy students also participated in several performances and exhibitions.
- By participating in seminars, field trips, and academy activities, students gained knowledge, skills, exposure to different strands, the ability to experience art in the "real world," and exposure to career opportunities. However, survey comments noted the need for more field trips, seminars, and performances including opportunities designed specifically for each of the five programs of study.
- Other operational components were implemented as proposed. Salem High School's building capacity did not exceed the 10 percent capacity regulation during year one. Some building alterations were accomplished prior to and during the school year, but facility-related work was ongoing during summer 2005. The transportation plan appeared to allow the students to fully participate in the academy, and program monitoring occurred as proposed.
- When asked about the learning environment, opportunities provided by the academy, and the academy course work, staff perceptions were most positive followed by parents and then students.
- The largest percentages of students agreed that the academy provided opportunities for performance (82%) and opportunities to expand their knowledge (79%). However, less than 57 percent of students agreed that the academy provided a challenging curriculum, that course work required them to think critically or solve problems in creative ways, that course work was more advanced, and that the academy provided a flexible learning environment. Less than 40 percent agreed that the orientation helped them understand the academy. Parents' perceptions were more positive, but the items with less parental agreement were similar to the items with less student agreement.
- The academy made progress toward meeting most of the objectives and overall goal. Students made progress toward successful completion of a sequential program of study focused on production and performance. Academy students had higher grade averages than non-academy ninth graders at Salem High School. Although course data showed that some

students had difficulty in Algebra I, the academy offered tutoring, and the Algebra I SOL passing rate for academy students was 98 percent.

- Survey results showed that progress was made toward meeting the academy's objectives that students would examine the history, periods, genres, and theories found in art and that they would learn methods of evaluation and critiquing.
- Survey results suggested that while some progress was made toward meeting the academy objective that students would familiarize themselves with technology and careers in each art strand, more opportunities should be available. This was particularly the case for familiarizing students with technology in the arts.
- Academy students earned passing rates on the applicable SOL tests that were higher than non-academy Salem High School or the division's high school students. Academy students performed favorably with passing rates ranging from 95 to 100 percent except for a passing rate of 87 percent on the World Geography test.
- Progress was made toward developing partnerships to support ongoing program development. Three partnerships were established during year one. However, progress toward the academy's specific objective of establishing partnerships with academic institutions and the business community for internships and mentorships did not occur in year one because these opportunities are primarily for juniors and seniors. Establishing partnerships for internships and mentorships is expected to begin in 2005-2006.
- The cost of the academy during the planning year and year one was higher than the projected cost in the original academy proposal. Facilities-related costs were higher than proposed, and projected transportation costs were not included in the original proposal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the implementation process for the Visual and Performing Arts Academy.
- Investigate ways to attract or recruit more applicants for the academy, especially in strands that have lower enrollments, in order to reach the academy's capacity.
- Monitor enrollments in each strand as the academy is implemented to ensure that enrollment is adequate to support the strand.
- Determine if the audition component may be impeding qualified students from completing the application process, and consider offering additional information and assistance to students in preparing audition materials.
- Document academy teachers' staff development needs and develop or support training specific to those needs including the development of outcomes and evaluation of the outcomes as training occurs.

- Gather and document student input on the types of activities, such as field trips, seminars, or performances, that students would find beneficial for their strand and attempt to incorporate students' suggestions in planning for activities during year two.
- Provide more opportunities for students to familiarize themselves with the technology and possible careers in each art strand.
- Develop opportunities and partnerships for internships or mentorships and explore opportunities for dual enrollment courses, the use of distance learning, and preferred consideration when applying to specific colleges during year two as proposed.
- Continue the development of partnerships to support both program development and staff development during year two.
- Review survey results and comments to address respondents' suggestions for improvement or areas that received less positive responses.