

BEST PRACTICES PROJECT

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Department of Accountability

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005-2006, personnel in the Department of Accountability completed a five-year trend analysis of Standards of Learning (SOL) achievement from 2000 through 2005. The analysis examined the progress made by all division schools in increasing achievement and in closing achievement gaps for subgroups of students. The analysis revealed schools that exceeded the division in increasing achievement and in closing achievement gaps. Researchers in the Department of Accountability conducted a qualitative case study to determine what factors impact overall achievement and what practices/strategies impact achievement in the identified elementary schools in Virginia Beach. Interviews were conducted in three elementary schools to discover what strategies were being used to increase achievement and close achievement gaps. The overall strategies are noted below along with a description of each strategy.

STRATEGIES

Strategy 1: Set high expectations

Administrators and teachers set high expectations in the form of measurable goals for themselves and the students. The expectations are clear and clearly communicated to the teachers and the students. The administrator communicates a belief that all teachers and students can find success.

Strategy 2: Work as a schoolwide team to promote student success and achievement

The entire school, with the principal as the school leader, shares the same clearly defined goals for student success. Teachers work together in a collaborative manner to promote achievement and take responsibility for the academic success of all students. The school reflects an attitude of “what can we do to help students succeed.”

Strategy 3: Involve parents, students, and the community

School staff plans enticing and interesting activities that bring parents and students to the school. Staff members make parents feel comfortable with non-threatening activities and positive interactions. Staff members communicate often with parents, especially when a child has been successful. If parents cannot come to school, then staff members meet them in their homes to discuss ways to work together. Students are also involved in tracking their own achievement and setting personal goals for success.

Strategy 4: Provide facilities and resources that promote success

School buildings are warm, bright, and clean, and resources are provided. The appearance and condition of school buildings make parents, students, community members, and teachers feel welcome. When students feel welcome, safe, and happy, they want to come to school. A desire to come to school leads to improved student

attendance. Along with facilities, resources in the form of materials, training, or people are provided to augment instruction to meet students' needs.

Strategy 5: Build a culture of respect and support

Respect and support emanate from school principals to teachers. The culture of respect and support filters from teachers to the students and to parents. Professional and positive relationships foster collegiality among and between teachers. Staff members provide support for students and families with community and school resources.

Strategy 6: Optimize learning time

Learning time is optimized with universal instructional strategies, common grade-level and cross-grade level planning time, positive behavior management, differentiated instruction, and the inclusion of students with special needs (either special education or gifted) in classroom instruction. Resource teachers support classroom instruction and extend learning by being involved in grade-level planning sessions. Staff members receive training in and use common instructional strategies. Administrators use instructional arrangements that benefit all students, such as team teaching, looping, and inclusion.

Strategy 7: Facilitate data use and analysis

Teachers are trained in data use and analysis. Time is scheduled for teachers to analyze and discuss data and the implications for instruction. Assessment, attendance, and behavior data are presented in a user-friendly and understandable format. Data, presented at the beginning of each school year, help teachers set benchmarks and “drive” instruction for the year.

Strategy 8: Monitor instruction and student engagement in learning

Principals and/or other administrators are visible in the school and in the classrooms. This allows them to monitor instruction on a formal and informal basis. Observations note instructional practices and student engagement in learning so that ongoing feedback can be given to teachers. Teachers set instructional goals for students. Administrators and teachers collaboratively monitor progress toward attaining goals.