

FIRST COLONIAL HIGH SCHOOL LEGAL STUDIES ACADEMY

Final Evaluation

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In September 2004, the Department of Accountability provided a year-two evaluation of the Legal Studies Academy and recommended that the evaluation continue 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 through the fourth year of the academy's operation.

FINDINGS

- The Legal Studies Academy Leadership Team addressed all of the recommendations of the year-three evaluation report during the academy's fourth year of operation and demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Marketing activities were successful as evidenced by the number of applicants (281) for the 2005-06 school year. Students selected to attend the academy matriculated from all of the division's comprehensive middle schools.
- The academy enrolled rising tenth graders in addition to rising ninth graders to address attrition issues reported in previous evaluations of the academy. As of the start of the 2005-06 school year, the academy enrolled 111 ninth graders, 90 tenth graders, 73 eleventh graders, and 69 twelfth graders for a total of 343 students.
- Overall, the academy experienced a relatively low rate of attrition during the 2005-06 school year with less than 4 percent of the students withdrawing before the end of the school year. The attrition rate for ninth graders in 2005-06 was lower than the attrition rate observed among ninth graders in the three previous years.
- Very few changes were made to staffing before the start of the 2005-06 school year, and all of the academy teachers were licensed and held the appropriate teaching endorsements.
- The academy-related staff development activities were formally evaluated and staff members rated the activities as beneficial. More than 85 percent of the academy staff reported that they received sufficient training and that the training they received enhanced their ability to teach academy courses and integrate law-related units into the curriculum.

- Several of the dual enrollment electives that were offered for the first time in 2005-06 as part of the academy's Administration of Justice strand did not have sufficient enrollment. The academy coordinator is currently pursuing strategies for promoting the courses based on feedback gathered from academy students.
- The academy coordinator assessed student interest in the areas of court reporting and legal office assistance and found that very few students expressed an interest in these areas. The academy leadership team has committed to adding elective courses in future years as they continue to gauge students' interests.
- As of the end of the 2005-06 school year, all of the academy juniors participated in job shadowing and internships. In addition, all but one of the academy seniors completed the requirements necessary to earn an academy seal on their diploma.
- A large majority of the academy seniors completing the exit survey (> 71 percent) indicated that their experience in the academy increased their understanding of the law; helped them to become engaged citizens; focused on critical skills, knowledge, and technology associated with the legal system; and challenged them academically.
- Academy students performed well during the fourth year of the academy as evidenced by involvement in extracurricular activities, earning higher grade averages, and achieving higher passing rates on nearly all of the end-of-course SOL tests when compared to non-academy students.
- Nearly 94 percent of the academy seniors completing the exit survey agreed or strongly agreed that they had opportunities to participate in career-oriented law-related activities and that these activities helped them to understand the reality of the careers associated with the legal system.
- Based on responses to the senior exit survey, approximately 90 percent of the students rated the criminal investigations, job shadowing experience, and internship as somewhat or very useful learning activities.
- Nearly two-thirds of the seniors rated the senior project as a somewhat or very useful learning activity, and several students wrote comments suggesting changes to the senior project. The academy leadership plans to revise the project based on relevant staff development and lessons learned during the first year of implementation.
- The academy leadership team continued to establish contact with local colleges and universities to expand the educational opportunities of academy students. During the 2005-06 school year, the academy leadership team secured an articulation agreement with Tidewater Tech, which would allow students enrolling in the paralegal program to receive credit for two of the Legal Studies courses.
- In response to the recommendation to offer a variety of field trips and seminars to students, the academy leadership offered seminars to students during class and after

school to accommodate student schedules. In addition, students at each grade level were offered field trip opportunities.

- The extent to which the academy offered a variety of field trips and seminars was also reflected in stakeholders' perceptions of the academy program. Compared to the three previous years, larger percentages of students and parents expressed agreement in response to the item addressing the extent to which the academy program provided opportunities outside of class for students to explore law-related interests.
- Based on the figures provided in the original academy proposal, the projected costs for the academy in year four, including start-up costs and operating costs, totaled \$704,736. The total cost for year-four start-up and operating costs was \$665,824, representing a difference of \$38,912.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to offer and evaluate staff development activities designed to support the integration of law-related units into the curriculum.
- Continue to establish partnerships with colleges, universities, and community partners that enhance students' learning opportunities and provide them with a broader scope of law-related education and career options.
- Continue the communication efforts initiated over the past several years to keep students and parents informed of the activities and opportunities available through the academy.
- Build on the progress made over the past two years and continue to solicit frequent feedback from students, staff, and parents to offer a dynamic program designed to meet student interests and needs.
- Continue the Legal Studies Academy program as a part of the standard program at First Colonial High School.