

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

YEAR-TWO EVALUATION

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This year-two evaluation provides the School Board and superintendent information about the continued implementation of the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) Academy at Salem High School during the 2005-2006 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 postsecondary 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 2005-2006 school year, the academy enrolled 83 ninth-grade students and 101 tenth-grade students.

FINDINGS

- The academy staff responded positively to recommendations from the year-one evaluation. All recommendations were addressed, and actions regarding some recommendations are ongoing. Improvements were made in staff training and perceptions of opportunities provided to students, and progress was made in planning for future internships.
- The application process involved two components including the application portfolio and the audition. The marketing process appeared to be successful with 237 initial portfolio applications from students in all VBCPS middle schools and several private schools. Auditions were a second key component and were scheduled over several days to accommodate students' needs.
- Of the 237 initial applicants, 176 completed the process by auditioning for at least one strand (74%). Approximately 16 percent of the students auditioned for more than one strand.
- Students and parents had positive perceptions of the application process, and perceptions were more positive than in the first year of the academy. All staff agreed that the audition component was helpful in identifying promising academy students.
- The student selection process included committees that reviewed students' application materials. One change was the separation of the portfolio application and audition scores into two distinct components rather than combined into one rating as was done for the

academy's first year. This allowed the committee to better determine students' areas of talent.

- Of the 176 students who completed the application process by auditioning, 131 were offered admission to the academy (74%). Of these 131 students who were offered admission, 86 new students (66%) enrolled at the beginning of the year. Eighty-three were ninth graders and three were tenth graders. The largest percentage of students who did not enroll chose to enroll in another academy within the school division (44%).
- In addition to the 86 new academy students, 98 students returned for their second year in the academy for a total of 184 academy students at the beginning of the school year. The academy was at 61 percent of its proposed second-year capacity of 300 students.
- Based on students' primary strand, 82 students focused on music (45%), 43 focused on art (23%), 33 focused on drama (18%), and 26 focused on dance (14%). Within the music strand, 46 were instrumental music students (25%), and 36 were vocal music students (20%). Actual numbers varied from the original proposal where 75 students were projected for each strand in the academy's second year.
- The retention rate for all students in the academy during the second year was 93 percent with 12 students withdrawing during the year (7%), usually due to difficulty in maintaining grades or relocating. Based on the student survey, 88 percent of the ninth graders and 84 percent of the tenth graders who completed the year intended to reenroll in the academy during 2006-2007.
- The two-year retention rate for the first group of students from the initial opening of the academy to the end of the academy's second year was 77 percent. Retention rates were 88 percent for drama, 85 percent for vocal music, 81 percent for dance, 70 percent for art, and 67 percent for instrumental music.
- The academy enrolled a greater percentage of females compared to Salem High School or the division. Approximately 72 percent of the academy students were female, and 28 percent were male.
- The academy enrolled a group of students with varied ethnic backgrounds that were relatively representative of Salem High School's and the division's ninth and tenth graders. Overall, approximately 52 percent of the academy students were Caucasian, 33 percent were African American, 9 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, 5 percent were Hispanic, and less than 1 percent was American Indian.
- The largest percentage of ninth-grade academy students enrolled from Salem Middle School (20%) followed by Larkspur Middle School (13%). In addition, the largest percentage of academy students lived within the Salem High School attendance zone (28%) followed by the Green Run (13%) and Bayside (11%) high school attendance zones.

- Approximately 58 percent of the academy students were involved in extracurricular activities, with the largest percentage of activities related to the arts.
- Students enrolled in the academy to expand or improve their talents or knowledge of the arts, because they were interested in an arts-related career, and because they loved engaging in their specific art form such as singing, dancing, or drawing. Parents enrolled their child in the academy because of their child's interest in or love of the arts and to expand or improve their child's talents, skills, or knowledge.
- A total of 11 teachers taught academy classes in year two, with two full-time academy teachers and nine part-time academy teachers. There were two art instructors (one full-time and one part-time), one full-time drama instructor, three part-time dance instructors, two part-time vocal music instructors, and two part-time instrumental music instructors. In addition, one teacher taught the required Global Perspectives humanities class and an elective part-time for the academy. Most teachers taught both academy and non-academy classes.
- Staff development was based on staff members' needs and included curriculum development, curriculum mapping, regular staff meetings, and specialized training for the strands. The majority of teachers who responded to the survey agreed that academy training enabled them to better meet the academy students' needs, helped prepare them to teach academy courses, and enhanced their ability to integrate visual and performing arts-related units/ideas in the curriculum. There appeared to be substantial improvement in ratings compared to year one.
- Fifteen new courses were developed and offered for the academy's second year with two classes offered after school. Twenty-two new courses were developed and approved for the academy's third year in 2006-2007. As of summer 2006, a total of 47 new courses were developed by the academy, and additional courses were being developed for the 2007-2008 school year.
- Overall, academy students enrolled in the required core and academy-related courses. On average, academy students were enrolled in over eight courses each semester.
- The guidelines for the academy's master class requirement of 70 total hours by graduation were refined in year two. A total of 1,559 student attendances at 100 seminars, master classes, or qualified field trip events were recorded. This was more than double the number of events that qualified for master class credit in year one. However, after two years, 58 percent of the tenth graders had fewer than 15 cumulative master class hours towards the required 70 hours to be completed by the end of their senior year.
- Academy students participated in a variety of performances and exhibitions throughout the school year within the academy and also in collaboration with the Fine Arts Department at Salem High School. Several field trips were also offered.
- Salem High School's building capacity did not exceed the 10 percent capacity regulation during year two. However, the school was 9.3 percent over capacity in 2005-2006 and may

need to address capacity as implementation continues. Facility improvements were ongoing during the academy's second year and summer 2006.

- A new hub transportation system was implemented for the VPA Academy and the academy at Tallwood High School. In addition, activity buses were assigned specifically for the academy students' after-school transportation needs. The majority of academy students, parents, and staff agreed that the transportation plan allowed students to participate fully in the academy; although, percentages were somewhat lower than in year one.
- The academy made further progress toward meeting all of the objectives and overall goal. Overall, students made progress toward successful completion of a sequential program of study focused on production and performance, and academy students had higher grade averages than non-academy ninth and tenth graders at Salem High School.
- Overall 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; that they would learn methods of evaluation and critiquing; and that students would familiarize themselves with technology and careers in each art strand. In general, results were more positive than during the academy's first year of operation. However, results for the music strand, including both instrumental and vocal music, were less positive than other academy strands.
- Academy students' passing rates on all applicable Standards of Learning (SOL) tests ranged from 91 to 100 percent. Academy students' passing rates on the mathematics tests were within four percentage points of the passing rates for other ninth and tenth graders at the school and in the division, while passing rates on all science and social studies SOL tests equaled or exceeded those of non-academy ninth and tenth graders at Salem High School and in the division.
- During 2005-2006, most strands made progress in developing partnerships that will facilitate the development of internships. Planning will continue in year three to solidify guidelines and opportunities for students who will begin their internships in summer 2007. In addition, eight partnerships were in operation during year two in an effort to support ongoing program and staff development.
- The largest percentages of students indicated that through enrollment in the academy, they gained specialized strand-related knowledge; experience, opportunities, and exposure to the arts that broadened their horizons; and strand-related skills. Parents most often indicated that their child gained knowledge, experience, or opportunities related to the arts.
- When asked to provide suggestions for improvement to the academy, nearly one-third of the students commented on several aspects of the master class requirement that could be improved. Parents' suggestions also focused on changes to the master class requirements.
- The total cost of the academy during the second year of implementation was 1,055,565 with \$433,784 for one-time expenses and \$621,781 for annual recurring expenses. The annual

recurring expenses were less than proposed, but the one-time expenses in year two were more than proposed mainly due to facility-related costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the implementation process for the Visual and Performing Arts Academy.
- As called for in the original academy proposal, form a committee to evaluate the feasibility of continuing the VBCPS participation in the Governor’s School for the Arts.
- Continue to investigate why some students do not complete the audition process and continue to increase media exposure and publicity to attract potential students.
- Monitor enrollment in each strand throughout the remainder of the academy’s implementation to ensure adequate enrollment in each strand.
- Investigate the balance of staff and staff’s responsibilities within each academy program of study to ensure that academy staffing needs are met.
- Review the survey comments from students and parents regarding the master class requirement and consider whether refinements should be made, including whether annual credit targets should be set.
- Conduct a survey of instrumental and vocal music students at the end of the third year to determine if perceptions improved and document activities to determine if the music strand made progress in meeting the academy’s objectives in year three. Report these findings to the School Board.
- Continue to develop guidelines and opportunities for internships for each strand and opportunities for preferred consideration when applying to specific colleges as proposed.