

# PROJECT X-CD PROGRAM UPDATE

**VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
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# **PROJECT X-CD PROGRAM UPDATE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The Project X-CD program, a program for academically at-risk general education middle school students, has been offered at several middle schools in Virginia Beach since 1998-99. Project X-CD was originally implemented as a “school-within-a-school” alternative education program with reduced class sizes in core content areas. In October 2008, the first comprehensive evaluation of the program was presented to the School Board. The results of the comprehensive evaluation revealed that the program was partially meeting expectations in the areas of program implementation, program scope, program effects, and stakeholders’ perceptions and also highlighted several program areas that required further attention (e.g., measurable goals and objectives aligned with program activities, program entrance and exit criteria, communication, and program monitoring). This report serves as an update to the comprehensive evaluation and describes the actions that were taken regarding the School Board-approved recommendations from the October 2008 evaluation and progress made toward meeting the program’s goals in 2008-09.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- The Project X-CD program continued to operate during the 2008-09 school year at the three program sites.
- When asked what, if any, changes were made to the program’s operation during the 2008-09 school year, administrators at Corporate Landing reported implementing a transitional class at each grade level of the program that did not include Project X-CD students. According to the administrators, the transitional class was intended as a placement option for Project X-CD students demonstrating sufficient academic progress, and a few of the Project X-CD students were eventually moved to the transitional class. The extent to which the Project X-CD teachers viewed this modification as having a positive or negative impact varied by grade level. No major changes were made to the Project X-CD program at Larkspur and Plaza during the 2008-09 school year.
- As of the fall of 2008, each of the three program sites were operating below program capacity. The program capacity ranged from approximately 66 percent at Corporate Landing to 85 percent at Larkspur and Plaza.
- Relative to the characteristics of all middle school students in 2008-09, a larger percentage of the Project X-CD students were African American and economically disadvantaged compared to the overall middle school student body.

- The student selection process used at the program sites appeared to identify students who could benefit from the program. A review of **prior** academic characteristics revealed that Project X-CD students had lower SOL passing rates and lower final grades when compared to other students at the program sites.
- During the 2008-09 school year, the future of the Project X-CD program became uncertain as work on amending the Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2009-10 occurred. Initially, funding for the program for 2009-10 was removed from the budget but was restored by March 3, 2009. Following the approval of the amended operating budget, meaningful actions were taken in response to the recommendation to refine the program based on the results of the 2008 comprehensive evaluation of the Project X-CD program. Changes were made to the purpose and goal of the program, the criteria for selecting students and for exiting students from the program, program staffing, communication, and oversight. The following table provides an overview of the revisions to the Project X-CD program for the 2009-10 school year.

<b>Program Component</b>	<b>Overview</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	To provide scaffolded academic opportunities to selected students to identify and address their academic weaknesses while building on their strengths.
<b>Goal</b>	To improve student learning to ensure successful transition to grade-level performance as measured by the percentage of students qualifying to exit the program and the percentage of students demonstrating progress with respect to exit criteria.
<b>Student Placement Criteria</b>	Students with a failing Standard of Learning (SOL) score in reading and/or mathematics are candidates for the program. Additional academic indicators (i.e., SOL performance in history or science, a core course grade below C, performance on other standardized tests, and teacher recommendations based on observations) are used to determine which of the students represent priority placements.
<b>Program Exit Criteria</b>	Exit decisions are made at the end of the school year and are based on students' level of performance on the SOLs, teacher and parent ratings of students, course grades, and other standardized test data. Students do not have to meet all of the criteria to be exited from the program but must meet a specified minimum.
<b>Staffing and Hiring Decision</b>	One Project X-CD teacher at each grade level at each site is to serve as a lead teacher on an annually rotating basis. The hiring and staffing decisions are to be made by the school principal with oversight from the Department of School Administration.
<b>Program Communication</b>	Parents are notified of student selection for the program through use of a standard letter used by all three Project X-CD sites. The description of the Project X-CD program will be posted on the website of each of the three program sites. Communication about the program to feeder schools will occur throughout the school year.
<b>Program Oversight</b>	The program will operate under the purview of the assistant superintendent for middle school education with assistance from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

- The process of revising the Project X-CD program occurred later in the school year than anticipated; therefore, outcome data associated with the revised goal of the program could not be assessed by the end of the 2008-09 school year. Consequently, only goal-related outcome data consistent with the information presented in the comprehensive evaluation of the program was examined.
- The student achievement results observed at the sixth-grade level revealed that a higher percentages of Project X-CD students passed the mathematics and history SOL assessments and earned final core-course grades of C or higher when compared to similar peers who did not participate in the program.
- Results from individual program sites revealed that Project X-CD students at Larkspur outperformed their non-Project X-CD peers in the comparison groups with respect to pass rates on each of the three SOL assessments (i.e., reading, mathematics, and history) and final grades in each of the core content areas. Project X-CD students at Plaza outperformed their comparison group in all but one SOL assessment (i.e., reading) and also outperformed the comparison group with respect to final course grades. At Corporate Landing, the only comparisons favoring Project X-CD students were those involving final grades received in core courses.
- The student achievement results observed at the seventh-grade level revealed that overall, higher percentages of Project X-CD students passed the SOL assessments and earned a final course grade of C or higher when compared to similar peers who did not participate in the program.
- Results from individual program sites revealed that Project X-CD students at all three sites outperformed their peers in the comparison groups with respect to pass rates on each of the three SOL assessments administered at the seventh-grade level. Project X-CD students at Corporate Landing and Larkspur outperformed their comparison group with respect to final course grades in each of the four core content areas, while Project X-CD students at Plaza outperformed the comparison group in science only.
- The achievement-related results observed at the eighth-grade level revealed that with the exception of science, SOL passing rates observed for Project X-CD students were less than or equal to the passing rates observed for students in the comparison group. The results also revealed that higher percentages of Project X-CD students earned a final core-course grade of C or higher compared to similar peers who did not participate in the program.
- Results from individual program sites revealed that Larkspur Project X-CD students outperformed their comparison group peers on the reading, writing, and history SOL assessments. At Corporate Landing, science was the SOL assessment area in which Project X-CD students outperformed students in the comparison group. With the exception of the content area of history at Corporate Landing, higher percentages of Project X-CD students received a final grade of C or higher in their core courses relative to students in the comparison group.

- Across the three grade levels, Project X-CD students overall performed better than all other students in the given comparison group on approximately 69 percent of the goal-related outcomes in 2008-09 which is the same percentage observed for the 2007-08 school year. An examination by grade level revealed that Project X-CD students at the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade levels performed better than students in the given comparison groups on 70, 80, and 58 percent of the goal-related outcome measures, respectively.
- An examination of the goal-related outcomes by program site revealed that across the grade levels in the program, the percentage of comparisons favoring Project X-CD students was approximately 55 percent at Plaza, 56 percent at Corporate Landing, and 81 percent at Larkspur.
- Surveys of Project X-CD teachers, students, and parents were used to assess program effects. The survey response rates for Project X-CD students, teachers, and parents were 96, 84, and 18 percent, respectively. The survey response rate among parents in 2008-09 was the same rate observed among parents in 2007-08.
- Project X-CD teachers, students, and parents appeared to have perceived the program to have more of an impact in the area of grades than attendance or behavior. More than 85 percent of the teachers across the three program sites provided an effectiveness rating of a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale when responding to the goal of accelerating students to grade-level competency. In addition, more than 60 percent of the Project X-CD students and more than 70 percent of the all parents who completed the survey indicated that students' grades had improved.
- All of the Project X-CD teachers completing the survey and approximately 84 percent of the parents completing the survey agreed that the Project X-CD program academically benefited students.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Project X-CD program is currently scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2011 which means that without direct action by the School Board, the program will cease to operate at the three program sites. It is expected that the decision to maintain, revise, or remove the sunset provision from the Project X-CD program will occur prior to this date and will likely be informed by data gathered during the 2009-10 school year and presented in the fall of 2010. For this reason, it is recommended that the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment provide the School Board with an update on the program in the fall of 2010 that includes the following information:

- Program capacity as of the end of September 2009 and at the end of each of the nine weeks during the 2009-10 school year.
- Student demographic and academic characteristics.
- The percentage of Project X-CD students demonstrating improved academic performance as indicated by scores on the program entrance/exit matrix.

- The percentage of Project X-CD students meeting the criteria to be exited from the program.
- Teachers' and building-level administrators' perceptions of the extent to which their roles were clearly defined and they received sufficient support and oversight from the central office.
- Parents' perceptions concerning the adequacy of the communication provided about the Project X-CD program and their satisfaction with the program.
- Students' perceptions of the classroom environment and the extent to which teachers provided them with scaffolded academic opportunities as well as their satisfaction with the program.