

SUMMER SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT: PROGRAM EVALUATION

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On September 23, 2008, the School Board approved the evaluation plan for the summer school programs serving the largest numbers of students and the new middle school program model where academic support was delivered throughout the school year. This evaluation is based on the School Board-approved plan and includes a comprehensive evaluation of the following 2009 summer school programs: Elementary School Remedial Summer Program for language arts and mathematics, Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas, and the High School Summer Course Program for Course Repeaters and First-Time Course Takers. In addition, an implementation evaluation of the academic support delivered during the school year at middle schools is included. This evaluation examined the operational components of implementing the programs, the characteristics of students who participated in the programs, the progress made towards meeting the summer school program goals and objectives, the performance of middle school students participating in academic support during the school year, stakeholders' perceptions of the programs, and the estimated cost of the selected programs.

PART I: SUMMER SCHOOL FINDINGS

Operational Components of Implementing Summer School:

- The purpose of the Elementary School Remedial Summer Program is to provide remedial instruction to students in kindergarten through grade five in the areas of language arts and/or mathematics so they will succeed at the next grade level and pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The program is mandatory for students in grades two through five who meet the criteria for participation, although parents may sign a waiver if they decline to allow their child to participate.
- The purpose of the Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas is to provide students in grades six, seven, and eight the opportunity to meet the middle school promotion standard during the summer if they did not meet the promotion standard during the regular school year. Courses were offered in Language Arts/English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

- The High School Summer Course Program serves two purposes. One purpose is to provide students opportunities to repeat courses that they did not successfully complete during the school year. A second purpose at the high school level is to provide students opportunities to complete high school level credit-bearing courses for the first time, which generally allows them to accelerate their program of study. Courses were offered in English, Algebra, Geometry, Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, Oceanography, Virginia and US Government, Virginia and US History, World Geography, Health and Physical Education, and additional elective options.
- Information about the Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) summer programs was communicated to parents in *Apple-A-Day*, the school division's parent newsletter, and by the schools. In addition, summer school program guides published by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction were distributed to parents and were posted on the school division's website.
- The summer school guides published by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction provided students and parents with information about the opportunities that were offered, the summer school schedule, summer school locations, registration procedures and time lines, transportation options for summer school, attendance and conduct policies during summer school, tuition and refund procedures for the middle and high school programs, as well as specific descriptions about the programs offered.
- There were no charges or fees for students who attended the Elementary School Remedial Summer Program. The Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas was a tuition-based program with tuition ranging from \$0 to \$140 depending on the students' economic status. The High School Summer Course Program for Course Repeaters and First-Time Course Takers was also a tuition-based program. Depending on the students' economic status, tuition for high school level courses ranged from \$40 to \$200 for a 70-hour semester course and \$75 to \$300 for a 140-hour year course (two summer semesters).
- Bus transportation was provided to the designated summer school sites from neighborhood pickup locations within the cluster of schools assigned to each particular summer school site.
- The elementary school remedial program for language arts and mathematics was offered at 16 sites, the middle school program for core subject areas was offered at 2 sites, and the high school program for course repeaters and first-time course takers was offered at 3 sites with six additional classes offered online.
- The elementary school session totaled 23 days, the middle school session totaled 13 days for each session (26 days total), and the high school session totaled 14 days for each semester, including exam days (28 days total). Summer school was held Monday through Thursday beginning at 8:00 a.m. for elementary school, 8:45 a.m. for middle school, and 7:15 a.m. for high school.

- For one-credit high school courses, students repeating a course were able to earn credit by completing a minimum of a 70-hour program of study, while students taking a course for the first time were required to complete a minimum of a 140-hour program of study.
- Information about applying for summer school employment was posted on the VBschools.com website, and applicants completed online applications. According to the summer school teacher survey, the percentage of teachers who were satisfied with the teacher selection process ranged from 89 to 95 percent depending on the school level (i.e., elementary, middle, or high).
- On average, elementary and high school summer school teachers had 12 years of teaching experience, and summer school teachers at the middle school level had 10 years of experience. Most summer school teachers had prior teaching experience in Virginia Beach.
- At each school level, lower percentages of summer school teachers held graduate degrees and the average number of years of teaching experience was lower compared to all instructional staff at that level during the 2008-2009 school year. At the elementary and middle school levels, a lower percentage of summer school teachers were new to VBCPS compared to all instructional staff at the respective levels during 2008-2009.
- When asked to indicate on the summer school teacher survey why they chose to teach summer school, the most common reason at all school levels was for financial reasons. The second most prevalent reason was that teachers enjoyed teaching or helping students.
- When asked about what occurred instructionally during the elementary summer school program, teachers and students in language arts mentioned the Ticket to Read online reading program, while teachers and students in mathematics mentioned the mathematics games. Teachers most frequently noted that an instructional difference during summer school compared to the regular school year was the smaller class sizes which allowed them to spend more time with students in one-on-one or small group settings.
- At the middle and high school levels, teachers most often noted the shorter time frame or accelerated pace of the summer school class when asked about the instruction during summer school. The faster pace and more compressed instruction was also among the most prevalent responses from students in middle and high school courses when asked about their summer school experience.
- At the middle and high school levels where students provided more detailed written responses about what occurred instructionally during summer school, the overall tone of the largest percentages of students' comments was positive in nature with many students describing their summer school experience as one that provided a "better" experience compared to regular school where it was "easier" for them to learn and understand the information. The comments revealed that this perception of summer school was due to students' positive perceptions about the quality of the instruction they received, their teachers' ability to explain information so they could understand, and the individual attention and help they received in smaller class sizes. Some students found their summer school class to be more interesting or fun. In

addition, students enrolled in high school classes also noted that their attention was focused on only one class in most cases.

Characteristics of Students Participating in the Programs:

- Nearly 10 percent of the elementary students enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade at the end of the 2008-2009 school year participated in the Elementary School Remedial Summer Program in summer 2009. Approximately 3 percent of the middle school students participated in the Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas, while nearly 11 percent of the high school students participated in high school level courses during the summer program.
- Compared to the percentages for the school division at each school level, greater percentages of the students enrolled in the elementary and middle school programs and the high school program for students repeating a course were receiving free or reduced lunch services, African American, male, and receiving special education services. Students in these summer programs were also less likely to be identified as gifted. Data showed that students enrolled in a high school level course for the first time during summer school were more similar in terms of demographic characteristics to the overall group of high school students in the school division.
- According to high school students who responded to the summer school survey, the largest percentage of students taking a course for the first time during summer school chose the option to “get ahead,” including students who wanted to graduate early or advance in a particular subject area (42%). Other students (23%) who were taking the course for the first time were attempting to “catch up” by completing credits for graduation or to graduate on time with their class. Approximately 21 percent were taking the course for the first time during summer school in preparation for their course schedule in the upcoming school year where they wanted to enroll in other courses or have a study hall or lunch period.

Performance Regarding Summer School Program Goals and Objectives:

- The primary goal for the elementary, middle, and high school programs (for course repeaters) that were the focus of this evaluation was to ensure that students who receive academic support demonstrate academic success.
- Program objectives for the Elementary Summer Remedial Program for language arts and mathematics focused on students meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in the subject area in which they received assistance in summer school as of the first quarter of the next school year, as well as students’ Standards of Learning (SOL) passing rates and promotion status at the end of the subsequent school year. Performance on the Developmental Reading Assessment was also the focus of one objective for first through third graders.
- Results showed that of the elementary students who received academic support in language arts and attended the majority of the 2009 summer school session, 68 percent met or exceeded grade-level expectations in reading, while 69 percent met or exceeded grade-level

expectations in writing based on report card grades as of the first quarter of the subsequent school year (fall 2009). These percentages were higher than the comparable percentages based on the 2008 summer school students. Forty-four percent of the rising first through third graders who received language arts assistance in summer school 2009 met the grade-level benchmark for the Developmental Reading Assessment as of fall 2009.

- Of the elementary students who received academic support in mathematics and attended the majority of the 2009 summer school session, 78 percent met or exceeded grade-level expectations in mathematics based on report card grades as of the first quarter of the 2009-2010 school year (fall 2009). This percentage was higher than the comparable percentage based on the 2008 summer school students.
- Of the elementary students who received academic support in language arts and attended the majority of the 2008 summer school session, 66 percent passed the English: reading SOL test in grades three through five and 75 percent passed the English: writing SOL test in grade five at the end of the subsequent school year (spring 2009). Of the students who received academic support in mathematics during the 2008 summer school session, 59 percent passed the mathematics SOL test in grades three through five at the end of the subsequent school year (spring 2009). Results for summer 2009 students will be available after spring 2010 testing.
- Of the elementary students who received academic support in language arts or mathematics and attended the majority of the 2008 summer school session, 95 percent were promoted to the next grade level at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Results for summer 2009 students will be available after the 2009-2010 school year.
- Program objectives for the Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas focused on students passing their summer school course and being promoted at the end of summer school upon passing the applicable course(s).
- Of the middle school students who attended summer school in 2009 for academic support, 96 percent passed their English course, 96 percent passed their mathematics course, 96 percent passed their science course, and 98 percent passed their social studies course. Across all subject areas and grade levels, the middle school summer school passing rate was 97 percent. The percentage for social studies was higher in 2009 than the comparable percentage from the 2008 summer school session, while course passing rates in other subject areas were up to 3 percent lower than in 2008.
- Of the middle school students who attended summer school in 2009 in order to be promoted to the next grade level, 96 percent were promoted at the end of summer school. This was 1 percent lower than the rate after the 2008 summer school session.
- Program objectives for the High School Summer Course Program for Course Repeaters focused on students passing their summer school course, students passing the applicable SOL test if a test was associated with their course, and seniors graduating at the end of summer school. Students were defined as course repeaters if the students' course history provided

evidence that they had previously been enrolled in the same or similar course for the entire course.

- Of the students who repeated a high school level course during summer school in 2009, 90 percent passed their English course, 86 percent passed their mathematics course, 85 percent passed their science course, and 92 percent passed their social studies course. Across all subject areas and courses included in the evaluation, the high school summer school passing rate for course repeaters was 88 percent. The percentage for mathematics was higher in 2009 than the comparable percentage from the 2008 summer school session, while course passing rates in other core subject areas were between 4 and 9 percent lower than in 2008.
- Of the students who repeated a high school level course during summer school in 2009 and took the related SOL test because they had not previously passed the test, 34 percent passed their English SOL test, 47 percent passed their mathematics SOL test, 47 percent passed their science SOL test, and 54 percent passed their social studies SOL test. Across all subject areas and courses with associated SOL tests, the SOL passing rate for course repeaters was 45 percent. The percentage for mathematics was higher in 2009 than the comparable percentage from the 2008 summer school session, while SOL passing rates in other subject areas were between 1 and 19 percent lower than in 2008.
- Of the seniors at the end of the 2008-2009 school year who repeated courses during summer 2009 to meet graduation requirements, 91 percent had a status as a summer graduate following the completion of summer school. This percentage was lower than the comparable percent after the 2008 summer school session (95%).
- The second goal for the High School Summer Course Program focused on students who enrolled in summer school courses for the first time. The goal for first-time course takers was to provide students with opportunities to accelerate their learning through the successful completion of summer school course offerings.
- The program objectives for the high school program for first-time course takers focused on students passing their summer school course and obtaining a passing score on the applicable SOL test if one was associated with their course. Students were defined as first-time course takers if the students' course history did not provide evidence that they had previously been enrolled in the same or similar course for the entire course.
- Of the students who took a high school level course for the first time during summer 2009, 97 percent passed their English course, 88 percent passed their mathematics course, 97 percent passed their science course, and 92 percent passed their social studies course. The course passing rate for other courses (e.g., Health and Physical Education) was 98 percent. Across all subject areas and courses included in the evaluation, the high school summer school passing rate for first-time course takers was 94 percent. The percentage for English was higher in 2009 than the comparable percentage based on the 2008 summer school session, while course passing rates in other subject areas were up to 4 percent lower than in 2008.

- Of the students who took a high school level course for the first time during summer 2009 and also took the related SOL test, 93 percent passed their English SOL test, 88 percent passed their mathematics SOL test, 100 percent passed their science SOL test, and 89 percent passed their social studies SOL test. Across all subject areas and courses with associated SOL tests, the SOL passing rate for first-time course takers was 91 percent. The percentages for English, mathematics, and science were higher in 2009 than the comparable percentages based on the 2008 summer school session, while the SOL passing rate for social studies was 2 percent lower than in 2008.
- In determining whether high school students were repeating a course or taking it for the first time for the evaluation of students' performance, data showed that both first-time course takers and course repeaters were enrolled in online courses. In some cases, students who were repeating a course were enrolled in the course number specified for first-time course takers. In a small number of cases, students who appeared to be first-time course takers (i.e., had not previously enrolled in and failed the course) were enrolled in the course number specified for course repeaters.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Summer School Programs:

- Surveys were administered to summer school teachers, students, and their parents following the 2009 summer school session. The survey response rates for summer school teachers ranged from 46 to 49 percent, response rates for students ranged from 45 to 80 percent, and response rates for parents of summer school students ranged from 12 to 16 percent depending on the school level. Summer school principals were provided an opportunity to provide feedback through open-ended survey questions.
- Overall, comments from elementary summer school principals were positive and mentioned the quality and dedication of the teachers as a strength of the program, while student attendance was noted as a challenge. At the middle and high school levels, summer school principals indicated that positive aspects of the program were the teachers who assisted the students and the variety of course offerings from which students can choose to “catch up” or “move ahead,” respectively. Challenges at the middle and high school levels included not having access to the school division database during registration and the beginning of summer school and additional issues with summer school registration at the high school level.

Summer School Teachers:

- Of the survey respondents, 74 percent of the elementary teachers, 85 percent of the middle school teachers, and 79 percent of the high school teachers indicated that they had taught summer school in VBCPS before 2009.
- From 85 to 99 percent of the elementary summer school teachers, 65 to 95 percent of the middle school teachers, and 60 to 93 percent of all high school teachers agreed with each survey statement about various aspects of summer school implementation and teacher preparation.

- Given the information teachers received about various aspects of summer school operation, the largest percentages of elementary teachers were satisfied with the information about the daily schedule (99%) and the calendar and teacher hours (98%). The largest percentage of middle school teachers was satisfied with the information about the calendar and teacher hours (100%). At the high school level, the largest percentages of teachers were satisfied with information about course examinations (93%) and the calendar and teacher hours (92%).
- Although teachers' satisfaction with the information they received about various aspects of summer school was relatively high, the largest percentages of elementary teachers were dissatisfied with information about student absences (11%); assessment, scoring, and interpretation (9%); and curriculum materials and supplies (8%). The largest percentages of middle school teachers were dissatisfied with information about student absences (15%), recordkeeping (15%), curriculum materials and supplies (10%), and grading and report card distribution (10%). The largest percentages of high school teachers were dissatisfied with information about recordkeeping (31%), curriculum materials and supplies (26%), class rolls (25%), and grading and report card distribution (24%).
- When asked about the best thing about summer school, elementary teachers most frequently noted the staff and/or supportive atmosphere at the school site, the students, the small class sizes, and the summer school hours and/or schedule. Middle school teachers most frequently mentioned the students and the opportunity to see their academic and personal growth, the four-day summer school schedule, the small class sizes allowing one-on-one instruction, and support from the administration. High school teachers most frequently mentioned the motivated and diverse group of students, seeing students benefit from summer school, and the four-day summer school schedule.
- When summer school teachers were asked if they would teach summer school again based on their experience in 2009, 97 percent of the elementary teachers, 95 percent of the middle school teachers, and 88 percent of the high school teachers indicated that they would teach summer school again.

Summer School Students:

- Of the survey respondents, 59 percent of the elementary students, 67 percent of the middle school students, and 60 percent of the high school students indicated that they had attended summer school before.
- From 73 to 92 percent of the second- through fifth-grade summer school students, 79 to 97 percent of the middle school students, and 79 to 95 percent of all high school students agreed with nearly all survey statements about their summer school experience, indicating that they held positive perceptions.
- Middle and high school students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the various components of summer school operation. The largest percentages of middle and high school students were satisfied with instructional aspects of summer school (e.g., academic assistance they received from the teacher, classroom learning activities, instructional materials). Lower

percentages were satisfied and higher percentages were dissatisfied with bus transportation (middle and high school students) and the registration process (high school students).

- When asked about the best thing about summer school, elementary students most frequently wrote about reading or the “Ticket to Read” online reading program, playing mathematics games, and the teachers. Middle school students most frequently mentioned meeting and socializing with friends and having the opportunity to learn or gain a better understanding of the subject matter. High school students most frequently mentioned learning or understanding new information, meeting new people and being with friends, and their teachers.
- When students were asked about what could be done to make summer school better, the most frequent response from elementary and middle school students was that no improvements were needed. The most frequently mentioned improvement from high school students focused on the break, where most of the students suggested a longer break. High school students also suggested changes to the summer school schedule, such as having it start later in the morning. However, a relatively large percentage of high school students also indicated that no improvements were needed.
- When summer school students were asked if they would recommend summer school to their friends if they needed assistance or if they needed to take a class, 75 percent of the elementary students, 69 percent of the middle school students, and 78 percent of all high school students indicated that they would recommend summer school.

Parents of Summer School Students:

- Of the survey respondents, 45 percent of the elementary parents, 48 percent of the middle school parents, and 42 percent of the high school parents indicated that their child had attended summer school before.
- From 87 to 99 percent of the elementary school parents, 87 to 95 percent of the middle school parents, and 85 to 96 percent of all high school parents agreed with nearly all survey statements about their child’s summer school experience, indicating that they held positive perceptions.
- Parents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the various components of summer school operation. The largest percentages of elementary and middle school parents were satisfied with the registration process, the academic assistance their child received from the teacher, and the learning activities. The largest percentages of parents of high school students were satisfied with the academic assistance their child received from the teacher, the instructional materials, and the learning activities. At all school levels, lower percentages of parents were satisfied and higher percentages were dissatisfied with bus transportation. In addition, lower percentages of high school parents were satisfied and higher percentages were dissatisfied with the registration process.
- When parents were asked to indicate the best thing about summer school, elementary parents most frequently mentioned their child’s academic improvement, the opportunity for their child to receive additional help, their child’s teacher or summer school staff, and that their child

enjoyed learning or had fun at school. Parents of middle school students most frequently mentioned the instruction their child received which helped them learn and understand the content and that their child had the opportunity to attend summer school and be promoted to the next grade. High school parents most frequently indicated that the best thing was that their child passed their summer school class which allowed them to “get ahead” or stay on pace to graduate on time. High school parents also offered positive feedback regarding the summer school instructors.

- When parents of summer school students were asked if they would recommend summer school to other parents if their child needed assistance or needed to take a class, 90 percent of the elementary parents, 85 percent of the middle school parents, and 89 percent of all high school parents indicated that they would recommend summer school.

Cost of Selected Programs:

- The estimated cost to VBCPS of the largest elementary, middle, and high school summer school programs, which were the focus of this evaluation, accounted for approximately 74 percent of the total unreimbursed cost of all VBCPS summer school programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMER SCHOOL

- Continue the Elementary School Remedial Summer Program for language arts and mathematics, the Middle School Summer Program for Core Subject Areas, and the High School Summer Course Program for Course Repeaters and First-Time Course Takers with modifications.
- Form a committee to review the summer school registration procedures at the high school level with the goal of improving the registration process, including ensuring the availability of the VBCPS database during registration and monitoring registration to ensure students are enrolled in appropriate high school level courses, especially first-time course takers. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction, including Office of Guidance and Student Records; Department of Technology; Schools; Summer School Principals)
- Assess the extent to which improvements can be made to bus transportation for the elementary, middle, and high school summer programs and implement feasible improvements during the 2010 summer school session (e.g., location/number of bus stops, punctuality of buses). (Office of Transportation Services)
- Review summer school students’ performance data from the 2008 and 2009 summer school sessions and revisit the goals and objectives and the performance target-setting process during the 2009-2010 school year to make any needed adjustments. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Department of School Administration; Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment; 2010 Summer School Principals)
- In planning for the 2010 summer school session, incorporate any changes or enhancements that are needed to reach the performance targets in 2010, especially regarding elementary

students and SOL test passing rates in summer school for students repeating a course at the high school level. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction; 2010 Summer School Principals)

- Provide an update to the School Board in winter 2010-2011 regarding the progress towards meeting the summer school program goals and objectives in 2010 and the actions taken regarding the recommendations approved by the School Board. (Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment)

PART II: MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM FINDINGS

Operational Components of Implementing the Middle School Academic Support Program:

- The purpose of the Middle School Academic Support Program was to provide students with intensive instructional support during the school year to assist them in passing core content areas without having to attend summer school. The program included academic assistance in the form of before- and after-school tutoring and an academic support class. Students with an “E” in any core courses at progress report time were to participate in the tutoring services, and students receiving an “E” in a core course at the end of a nine-week grading period were to be enrolled in the academic support class during the school day. Although support was offered in all core content areas, the areas of English and mathematics were the primary focus of the program.
- The before- and after-school tutoring sessions were generally conducted 90 minutes per day beginning with the first nine-weeks with sessions before and after school Monday through Friday.
- The academic support class replaced the students’ elective bell and met for no fewer than 50 minutes per day for a minimum of one nine-week period or until the students’ grade improved. Generally, two models of delivering instruction to students in the academic support course were implemented in 2008-2009. In one model, teachers provided instruction to their own students, and in the other model, teachers provided instruction on a rotating basis. In addition, some schools offered the academic support class on a daily basis while others offered the class 2-3 times during the week.
- Parents were notified of the Middle School Academic Support Program by telephone, fliers, letters, or a combination of these methods depending on the school. Parents had the option of declining the tutoring services on behalf of their child but could not decline participation in the academic support class. Both portions of the program (i.e., tutoring and the academic support class) were provided at no additional cost to students.
- According to comments made in response to surveys and interviews, the Middle School Academic Support Program generally involved one-on-one instruction, review and reinforcement of classroom content, completion of homework assignments, the use of

technology as a learning aid, practice tests, and educational games used to review course content.

Characteristics of Students Participating in the Middle School Academic Support Program:

- A total of 3,286 middle school students participated in at least one component of the academic support program during the 2008-2009 school year, which represented approximately 19 percent of all middle school students.
- A larger number of students were enrolled in the before- and after-school tutoring service (2,309) compared to those enrolled in the academic support class (1,570), representing approximately 14 percent and 9 percent of all middle school students, respectively.
- Compared to the division's middle school students, a larger percentage of the students in the Middle School Academic Support Program were receiving free or reduced lunch services, African American, receiving special education services, and male.
- More than half of the students in the Middle School Academic Support Program received services in the area of mathematics (55%) and a third received support in the area of language arts (33%). In addition, 26 percent received academic support in social studies, and 24 percent received academic support in science.

Performance Regarding Middle School Academic Support Program Goals and Objectives:

- The primary goal for the Middle School Academic Support program was to ensure that students who received academic support demonstrated academic success as indicated by promotion rates and performance on applicable English and mathematics SOL assessments.
- Baseline data from 2008-2009 revealed that approximately 89 percent of the students participating in the Middle School Academic Support program were promoted to the next grade at the end of the 2008-2009 school year.
- Of students who received academic support services for English, 77 percent earned a passing score on the English: reading SOL test, and 79 percent earned a passing score on the English: writing SOL test.
- Of the students who received services in the area of mathematics, just over half (53%) earned a passing score on the middle school mathematics SOL test. The SOL passing rate for students enrolled in Algebra I who received academic support was much higher. Nearly all of the Algebra I students who received academic support for mathematics passed the Algebra I test at the end of the school year (98%).
- Of the 3,214 students who participated in the Middle School Academic Support Program in 2008-2009 and were enrolled as of the end of the school year, approximately 10 percent of the students subsequently enrolled in summer school. These students accounted for 58 percent of the students attending summer school in the summer of 2009.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Middle School Academic Support Program:

- Middle School Academic Support Program surveys were administered to teachers, students, and their parents at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Building administrators also had the opportunity to participate in a survey or interview. The response rate was 86 percent for principals, 49 percent for teachers, 73 percent for students, and 19 percent for parents.

Middle School Academic Support Program Principals:

- The criteria used to select and exit students from the academic support class varied among schools with some schools using other criteria to select students and exit them from the program.
- Some principals reported that there was a lack of clarity among students and teachers concerning the purpose of the program and the services to be provided as part of the program.
- Principals perceived the strengths of the program to include teachers taking a deeper interest in struggling students and the opportunity it provided for additional instructional time in a small group setting during the school day. The services were also perceived to provide students with the opportunity to master more of the material and provide immediate assistance to struggling students.
- According to the principals, challenges of implementing the program included staffing and scheduling issues as well as students' attitudes concerning the loss of an elective for the support class. Principals indicated that some teachers were reluctant to participate in the program because it reduced the amount of planning time available to the teachers. Scheduling was also difficult because of the small window of time available to develop the master schedule for students identified for the academic support class at the end of the nine-week grading period. Other challenges mentioned included teachers working with students that they did not teach, the academic support class competing with other electives, difficulty in securing tutors given the middle school time slot for social studies and science, and ensuring that tutors provided instruction in a small group setting.
- Suggestions for improving the program included providing additional resources (i.e., staffing and materials) as well as assigning grades to the academic support class so that students would take the class more seriously. Other suggestions included creating a more "user-friendly" schedule for the program and requiring every core teacher to teach the support class daily rather than every other day.

Middle School Academic Support Program Teachers:

- Overall, teachers participating in the before- and after-school tutoring service expressed higher levels of agreement to the survey items compared to those teachers participating in the academic support class. At least 76 percent of the teachers providing tutoring services agreed that their responsibilities were clear, the implementation was well planned, the implementation was successful, and students receiving support understood what was expected

of them. Seventy percent of the teachers providing services in the academic support class agreed that their responsibilities were clear, while approximately 60 percent thought that students understood the expectations, and less than half thought the implementation was well planned and successful.

- For teachers involved in before- and after-school tutoring, at least 76 percent agreed that the services helped to improve students' skills in English, mathematics, and social studies. At least seventy-five percent also agreed that the teachers helped students better understand what they learned in their regular classes and that students demonstrated academic success. Approximately 68 percent of the teachers involved in tutoring agreed that the tutoring services improved students' skills in the area of science. In contrast, less than half of the teachers who indicated providing services in the academic support course agreed that the services improved students' skills in English, social studies, and science. Less than half of these respondents also agreed that the students receiving services demonstrated academic success. However, 69 percent of the respondents agreed that the class improved students' skills in mathematics, and 64 percent agreed that the teachers helped the students better understand what they learned in their regular classes.
- Teachers indicated that the most successful aspects of the program included providing students with the opportunity to receive additional assistance, review concepts, reinforce strategies, as well as offering instruction on a one-on-one basis or in a small group setting. Teachers also mentioned improvement in quarterly grades and improvement in SOL test scores as indicators of success. In addition, a few respondents perceived the tutoring services as successful because of the increased motivation level of the students.
- Teachers' suggestions for improving the program included revising the student selection process, allowing teachers to teach their own students as part of the academic support class, and developing a citywide curriculum for the academic support class. Teachers also mentioned the need for more coordination between teachers involved in the academic support class as well as including more subject-area teachers involved in providing instruction to students in the class. Other suggested improvements included more direction from administration as to how to implement the academic support class, additional resources (i.e., books and videos for English and mathematics), parental involvement (i.e., ensuring that students complete homework assignments), and assigning a grade to the academic support class to encourage students to take the class more seriously.

Middle School Academic Support Program Students:

- Approximately 86 percent of the students agreed that the academic support class teacher helped them to better understand what they learned in their regular classes, and at least 75 percent of the students agreed that the class helped improve their skills in mathematics, English, and social studies. The item with the lowest percentage of agreement among students was the item addressing the improvement of skills in the area of science (66%).
- When asked to indicate the best things about the academic support class, students mentioned the interactive, fun, and educational activities that focused on reviewing concepts discussed in

the regular classroom. They also mentioned the additional assistance they received, the opportunity to complete homework assignments and make up tests, improvement in grades, and the interpersonal qualities of teachers (i.e., nice, supportive, helpful).

- Most of the students indicated that no improvements were needed for the academic support class. Some students suggested having more fun, creative, and interesting educational activities including educational games and videos. Other students mentioned having more opportunities to do work on the computer, more focused instruction geared towards the needs of each individual student, more review of classroom concepts, and the opportunity to enroll in electives.

Middle School Academic Support Program Parents:

- At least 70 percent of the parents responding to the survey agreed that the services provided as part of the Middle School Academic Support Program helped to improve students' skills in the areas of English, mathematics, and social studies. In addition, at least 70 percent of the parents responding to the survey agreed that the teachers helped their child better understand what he or she learned in his or her regular classes and that their child was able to demonstrate academic success after participating in the program.
- When asked about the most successful aspects of the program, parents mentioned improvements in grades and test scores, the opportunity to obtain extra assistance before a student was in jeopardy of failing, and overall improvement in students' understanding of the content. The fact that the tutoring services were provided at no charge to parents and were offered at convenient times was also mentioned by parents as successful aspects of the program.
- Parents with a child receiving tutoring services also suggested offering the service at additional times and for longer hours, while others suggested the need for more teachers to serve as tutors. Parents from both program components indicated improvements in the program should include progress reports outlining the status of the student's progress and more of a focus on areas where the child is struggling.

Middle School Academic Support Program Cost:

- The cost to VBCPS for the Middle School Academic Support Program was approximately \$161,376 in 2008-2009. The main portion of the program associated with additional costs to the school division was the before- and after-school tutoring. Staffing costs (i.e., tutors and substitutes) accounted for approximately 95 percent of the cost for the Middle School Academic Support Program, while materials accounted for 5 percent of the cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS: MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM

- Continue the Middle School Academic Support Program with modifications.
- Review the performance data of students participating in the Middle School Academic Support Program from the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years for the purpose of revisiting the goals and objectives and performance target-setting process to make any needed adjustments for the 2010-2011 school year. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Department of School Administration; Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment)
- Formalize the programmatic components of the Middle School Academic Support Program by clearly outlining and communicating the official title of the program, purpose of the program, the student selection and exit criteria, the expectations regarding the services provided, as well as the degree of flexibility that schools have to implement the program. (Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Department of School Administration)
- Review the suggestions made by stakeholders for the purpose of identifying areas where improvements could be made and strategies for addressing the areas identified (i.e., issues related to master scheduling, need for additional resources, issues related to data entry, assigning letter grades for performance in the academic support class, and a school board-approved policy regarding opting out of the academic support class). (Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Department of School Administration)
- Provide the School Board with the results from the previously scheduled evaluation of the Middle School Academic Support Program in the fall of 2010. The evaluation will include information regarding the progress towards meeting the Middle School Academic Support Program goal and objectives in 2009-2010 and the actions taken regarding the recommendations approved by the School Board. (Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment)