

# **MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM: OUTCOME EVALUATION**

**VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
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# **MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM: OUTCOME EVALUATION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The purpose of the Middle School Academic Support Program is to provide students with intensive instructional support during the school year to prevent course failures and eliminate the need for summer school remediation. The Middle School Academic Support Program included a before- and after-school tutoring component as well as a support class for students in need of assistance. Students who earned a grade of “E” in any of their core courses at progress report time were recommended to attend before- and after-school tutoring. Students with a grade of an “E” in any core course at the end of the first nine-week grading period (i.e., quarter) were required to participate in an academic support class. The class provided intensive academic support and was held in place of the student’s elective bell. Students were to remain in the academic support class for a minimum of one nine-week period or until the student’s grade improved to a D or higher. There were to be no more than two subjects offered during the academic support class in a nine-week period with priority given to the areas of English and mathematics. Students who failed three or more of their core courses at the end of the nine-week period could be enrolled in the academic class and tutoring in order to address their academic assistance needs. Parents choosing not to have their child participate in the tutoring program must sign a letter stating that they understand the gravity of the current academic situation and the consequences that will follow should the current academic trend continue. Parents do not have the option of pulling their child from the academic support class.

On September 23, 2008, the School Board approved the evaluation plan for the Middle School Academic Support Program. The evaluation plan included a recommendation for a year-one evaluation to be completed during the 2008-2009 school year. In January 2010, the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA) provided a year-one evaluation of the program which examined the operational components of implementing the program, the characteristics of students who participated in the program, the progress made toward meeting the Middle School Academic Support Program goal and objectives, stakeholders’ perceptions of the program, the estimated cost of the program, and a recommendation that the Middle School Academic Support Program undergo an outcome evaluation during the 2009-2010 school year. This outcome evaluation provides the School Board and Superintendent information regarding actions taken in response to School-Board approved recommendations, characteristics of program participants, progress made toward achieving the program goal and objectives, stakeholder perception data, annual cost, and recommendations regarding the continuation of the program.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM FINDINGS

### *What actions were taken as a result of the year-one recommendations?*

- A meeting was held with committee members from the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and School Administration to review two years of baseline data from the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. After reviewing these data, committee members agreed to keep the program targets at the same levels established for the 2009-2010 school year for all program objectives, with the exception of the English: Writing SOL test target. The performance target set for this test was adjusted from a passing rate of 84 percent to a passing rate of 89 percent. Two years of baseline data allowed committee members to recalibrate the performance level of students and set more realistic targets for the program. In addition, the program goal was updated in order to focus on academic support offered during the school year.
- Numerous actions were taken by program administrators to address recommendations from the year-one evaluation. School administrators were provided with additional direction regarding program implementation. Additional program direction included dissemination of a written description of the program, which included the program title, enrollment codes, program purpose, and the selection criteria; meetings with school administrators in order to provide clarity regarding program design and materials needed for program support; and funding for substitutes so teachers had the opportunity for meetings with core teachers.
- Overall, meaningful actions were taken by administrators to address recommendations from the year-one evaluation. Principals expressed improved perceptions related to implementation of the program during the second year of its implementation. This was an improvement over the previous year where teacher “buy-in” to the program was mentioned as a concern by principals.
- According to principals, during the second year of the program, 2009-2010, teachers had less need for direction and support regarding program implementation. A common theme stated during the first two years of the program related to staffing issues, such as the need for additional staff, the need for instructional strategies, and a divisionwide curriculum.
- During the second year of program implementation, 90 percent of teachers providing tutoring services indicated their responsibilities for the program were clear. At least 78 percent of survey respondents agreed that tutoring ran smoothly or was successful overall during the second year of implementation. Regarding student expectations, for the second year of the program, 83 percent of survey respondents indicated that students receiving tutoring services understood what was expected of them.
- During the second year of program implementation, 61 percent of survey respondents who taught the academic support class indicated their responsibilities were clear to them and students in the class understood what was expected. Less than half of the survey respondents (45%) providing instruction for the academic support class indicated that

continued implementation during the second year of the program was successful overall and slightly more (55%) indicated the program implementation ran smoothly during the second year.

- There have been slight increases in agreement among teachers who provided tutoring services related to the continued implementation of the program, clarity of responsibilities, and expectations for students, when compared to the first year of program operation. Survey respondents who offered tutoring services were more likely to rate the tutoring component of the program more positive than those providing instruction for the academic support class. Although there were increases in agreement levels related to the continued implementation of the academic support class during the second year, the agreement levels remained low in the area of continued implementation efforts for the academic support class.
- During the second year of the program, teachers expressed continued concerns related to various aspects of the program. A few of the concerns included the option to separate students who failed a core class due to behavior concerns from those students who failed to demonstrate adequate attainment of course objectives; the desire to provide more input into student selection for program participation; and planning and work schedule-related issues, such as which teachers were assigned to provide instruction for the academic support class.
- According to central office program administrators, during the 2009-2010 school year, building-level administrators were provided with guidance related to the concerns voiced by teachers. Principals were given flexibility to make site-based decisions related to providing separate instruction for students who failed a core class due to behavior concerns from those students who failed to demonstrate adequate attainment of course objectives. Principals were also provided guidelines related to site-based planning and work schedules for staff. Regarding input into student selection, schools were reminded that the criterion for program selection was to be based on failure in a core course.

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

- A total of 3,039 middle school students participated in at least one component of the academic support program during the 2009-2010 school year, which represented approximately 18 percent of all middle school students.
- A larger number of students were enrolled in the before- and after-school tutoring service (2,177) compared to those enrolled in the academic support class (1,650), representing approximately 13 percent and 10 percent of all middle school students, respectively.
- Compared to the division's middle school student population, a larger percentage of the students in the Middle School Academic Support Program were receiving free or reduced lunch services (40%), African American (36%), receiving special education services (17%), and male (57%).

- More than half of the students in the Middle School Academic Support Program received services in the area of mathematics (53%), and a third received support in the area of English (33%). In addition, 27 percent received academic support in science, and 23 percent received academic support in social studies.

***Performance Regarding Middle School Academic Support Program Goal 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.
- Performance data from 2009-2010 revealed that 90 percent of the students participating in the Middle School Academic Support Program were promoted to the next grade at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. While the promotion rate did not meet the 2009-2010 target of 94 percent, the rate did represent a 1 percent increase from the 2008-2009 school year.
- Of the students who received academic support services for English and took the corresponding English SOL test, 78 percent earned a passing score on the English: Reading SOL test, and 87 percent earned a passing score on the corresponding English: Writing SOL test. While the English: Reading SOL passing rate for program participants did not meet the 2009-2010 target of 82 percent, it did represent a 1 percent increase from the 2008-2009 school year. The English: Writing SOL results exceeded the 2009-2010 target of 84 percent and increased by 8 percentage points when compared to results from the 2008-2009 year.
- Of the students who received academic support services in the area of mathematics and took the corresponding mathematics SOL test, over half (56%) earned a passing score. While the middle school mathematics SOL test passing rate for participants did not meet the 2009-2010 target of 58 percent, the rate did represent a 3 percent increase from the 2008-2009 school year. The SOL passing rate for students receiving academic support in Algebra I was much higher at 99 percent, which exceeded the 2009-2010 target of 98 percent by 1 percentage point.
- Academic performance data for the second year of the program indicated an increase in academic achievement for each of the objectives for the Middle School Academic Support Program. Additionally, two results observed for program objectives (i.e., English: Writing SOL test and Algebra I SOL test) exceeded the established performance targets set for the program.
- Program objectives were also analyzed to determine differences in promotion rates and SOL performance by program component. The promotion rate for students receiving tutoring services only (97%) was higher than the promotion rate for students receiving services in academic support class only (84%). The promotion rate for students who participated in tutoring and were enrolled in the academic support class was (85%).

- Students receiving services only for the academic support class scored higher on the SOL English test for both reading and writing than those receiving only tutoring services or services for both tutoring and the academic support class. Students receiving services only for tutoring scored higher on the SOL middle school mathematics test than those receiving services only for the academic support class or services for both tutoring and the academic support class. There were minor differences across each group in passing rates for the Algebra I test.

***Perception Data Regarding Program Impact on Achievement:***

- Overall, survey results from teachers, parents, and students indicated that the Middle School Academic Support Program provided assistance in improving students' academic success by offering services before and after school through the tutoring program and during the school day through the academic support class.
- Tutoring services received the highest level of agreement among teachers, parents, and students regarding the program impact on achievement.
- Among teachers who provided tutoring services during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 86 percent agreement to 65 percent agreement. During the second year of the program, teachers who provided tutoring services were more likely to indicate that their efforts helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class compared to teachers who completed the survey during the first year of the program. Teachers and students were more likely to indicate that tutoring improved students' English, mathematics, and social studies/history skills than parents during the second year of the program.
- Among parents whose child received tutoring services during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 82 percent agreement to 69 percent agreement. A larger percentage of parents during the second year of the program indicated that tutoring services improved students' skills in English, social studies/history, and science compared to the first year. During the second year of the program, parents were less likely to indicate that tutoring improved students' math, social studies/history skills, and that teachers helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class compared to teachers and students.
- Among students who received tutoring services during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 88 percent agreement to 79 percent agreement. During the second year of the program, students receiving tutoring services were more likely to indicate that tutoring improved their English, mathematics, social studies/history, and science skills than teachers and parents.
- The academic support class received lower levels of agreement among teachers compared to parents and students regarding the program impact on achievement.

- Among teachers who provided instruction for the academic support class during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 73 percent agreement to 38 percent agreement. A larger percentage of teachers during the second year indicated that the academic support class improved students' skills in social studies/history, and involved teachers that helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class compared to the first year. During the second year of the program, teachers were less likely to indicate that the academic support class improved students' English, mathematics, social studies/history, and science skills; that teachers helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class compared to parents and students. In addition, teachers were less likely to indicate that the academic support class allowed students to demonstrate academic success compared to parents.
- Among parents whose child participated in the academic support class during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 84 percent agreement to 68 percent agreement. A larger percentage of parents during the second year indicated that the academic support class improved students' mathematics and science skills compared to the first year. In addition, a larger percentage of parents during the second year felt teachers from the academic support class had helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class and a slightly larger percentage indicated that students who received academic support services from the class demonstrated academic success compared to the first year. During the second year of the program, parents were more likely to indicate that the academic support class improved students' science skills; that teachers helped students better understand what they learned in their regular class compared to teachers and students. In addition, parents were more likely to indicate that the academic support class allowed students to demonstrate academic success compared to teachers.
- Among students who participated in the academic support class during the 2009-2010 school year, agreement levels related to the program's impact on achievement ranged from 84 percent agreement to 73 percent agreement. During the second year of the program, a larger percentage of students indicated that the academic support class improved their math, social studies/history, and science skills compared to the first year. During the second year of the program, students were more likely to indicate that the academic support class improved their English and social studies/history skills compared to teachers and parents.

***Annual Program Cost:***

- The cost for the Middle School Academic Support Program was approximately \$189,830 in 2009-2010. The main portion of the program associated with additional costs to the school division was the before- and after-school tutoring services. Staffing costs (i.e., tutors and substitutes) accounted for approximately 97 percent of the cost for the Middle School Academic Support Program, while materials accounted for 3 percent of the cost.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS: MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM**

- **Recommendation One:**

Continue the Middle School Academic Support Program with modifications. (Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and School Administration)

**Rationale:**

*The recommendation to continue the Middle School Academic Support Program with modifications was based on the evaluation finding that the program showed modest improvement in academic achievement based on the promotion rate and SOL results from students in 2009-2010 compared to students in 2008-2009. In addition, while principals, students, and parents offered moderate to high satisfaction ratings for the program, teachers continued to report low levels of satisfaction for the program. As a result of the academic performance of students in the program and varied perceptions regarding program effectiveness among stakeholders, program modifications are recommended.*

- **Recommendation Two:**

Refine the program's purpose, goal, objectives, and indicators used to determine program effectiveness and gather feedback from principals and teachers regarding additional program modifications that are needed to increase the overall success of the program. These modifications should be implemented during the 2011-2012 school year. (Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and School Administration)

**Rationale:**

*The recommendation to refine the purpose, goal, and objectives of the program and the indicators used to determine program effectiveness was based on a meeting held with program managers regarding the results from the year-two evaluation. Initial discussions included revisiting the overall purpose of the program as well as alternative assessment tools that could be used as indicators of program success.*

*The recommendation to gather feedback from principals and teachers regarding what is working with the program and areas for improvement was based on the findings that while principals offered positive feedback about the program, they also had suggestions on how to improve the program. Perception data from teachers indicated concerns related to program implementation of the academic support class and its impact on academic achievement. As a result of these findings, the intent of this recommendation is to provide the opportunity for principals and teachers to offer insight into the daily workings of the program in order to guide program refinement decisions made by program managers.*

- **Recommendation Three:**

Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Middle School Academic Support Program in the fall of 2012 to evaluate changes implemented during the 2011-2012 school year. (Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment)

**Rationale:**

*The recommendation to provide a comprehensive evaluation in the fall of 2012 is based on the assumption that program changes would likely not begin to take full effect until the 2011-2012 school year. The comprehensive evaluation will include information regarding actions taken in response to the recommendations, progress made toward accomplishing the program goal and objectives, and plans for continued monitoring and oversight from the central office.*