The Impact of School Voucher Programs: Implications for Durham Public Schools

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DPS Partner: Heidi Carter, Chair, Durham School Board of Education

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**Voucher programs**

- **Vouchers** are state-funded scholarships to families that allow eligible students to attend private schools
- Twelve states and Washington D.C. have school voucher programs
- Other forms of school choice include charter schools and education tax credits (ETCs)
  - **Education tax credits** are given to:
    - Parents for education-related expenses
    - Individuals and corporations for their donations to private non-profit organizations that issue vouchers

**Key design features of voucher programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student eligibility</td>
<td>Low-income Special needs Attending failing school In foster care or military family Without access to public school Currently or previously enrolled in public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating private schools</td>
<td>Institutional accreditation required Administer state assessments Report performance of voucher students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding considerations</td>
<td>Limited caps to unlimited Set value or percentage of state per-pupil spending for public school education (depending on targeted students, set values range from $4,500-$20,000, percentage values range from 50-250%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Political debate surrounding vouchers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Benefits for students and base schools</td>
<td>• Benefits of vouchers are overstated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents should have choice</td>
<td>• Families who use may be more motivated and students less at risk than ideal targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competition for students will force low-performing public schools to improve</td>
<td>• Creates funding disparities between public and private schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of public dollars for religious schools considered unconstitutional</td>
<td>• Use of public dollars for religious schools considered unconstitutional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legal debate**

- Many state constitutions prohibit the transfer of government funds to religious affiliated schools
- Cases ruled against voucher programs
  - *Owens v. Congress of Parents (Colorado)*
  - *Bush v. Holmes (Florida)*
- Cases ruled in favor of voucher programs
  - *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (Ohio)*

**Impact on voucher recipients**

- Evidence of positive effects on student achievement is limited
- One randomized study (Howell & Peterson, 2002) of students in New York, Dayton, and Washington D.C. did not find consistent improvements in achievement
- African American children improved on math and reading tests at some sites only and not in all years examined
- Possible positive effect on graduation rates (but many other explanations)
- In 2009-2010, the graduation rate among voucher recipients in D.C. program was 94%; the graduation rate in public schools that year was 76%
- Conclusions from majority of research limited because of no control group; comparison groups often biased by sample characteristics (e.g., parents using vouchers may be more motivated)

**Impact on public schools**

- No clear evidence of any positive effects on achievement of voucher programs on public schools
- Improvement in achievement seen in failing Florida schools may be due to scrutiny associated with label, not the provision of vouchers (Greene, 2001)
- Usage rates of vouchers are lower than offer rates – some schools see no or very small reductions in enrollments
- Research is also limited by uncontrolled explanations for any improvements seen (e.g., sample bias)

**Impact on racial and economic integration in public schools**

- Limited research and inconclusive findings
- Some indication that:
  - If only a small number of students use vouchers, effect on public schools will likely be small
  - Levels of racial segregation may be lower in private schools than public schools, although the role of vouchers in this trend is unclear

**Parent perspectives**

- Some studies find higher levels of satisfaction with schools among parents of voucher recipients; others find similar levels
- Parents (n=12) at local charter school expressed:
  - General concerns about traditional public schools
    - Emphasis on testing
    - Unwelcoming environment (lack of communication, few opportunities for parent involvement, bullying)
    - Lack of resources
    - Lack of flexibility (teaching style, rules, and curriculum)
  - Factors considered when choosing a charter school
    - Teaching style and school staff
    - Small class size
    - Opportunities for parent involvement
    - Freedom to innovate
    - Emphasis on the child

**Economic consideration**

- Findings are mixed and inconclusive because funding varies by program design
- Economic impact is difficult to evaluate given other costs: transportation, assessment, special education, and administrative

**Potential Legal Challenges**

- Separation of church and state: Of approximately 30 private schools in Durham County, almost 2/3 are religiously affiliated schools.
- If religious schools are excluded, the private school options in Durham would be limited.

**Student Outcomes**

- Research suggests that expectations for improved student achievement should be low
- Other methods of improving achievement may be more effective

**Student Selection**

- The percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch varies in DPS schools from 20% to 96%
- Due to large number of potentially eligible students, what would criteria be?
- Families who use vouchers may not be those who are most in need

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Acknowledgements

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**Orange County Schools’ 1:1 Program**

**Methods**
- A survey evaluating teachers’ perceptions of the laptops was administered in March 2013 to Orange County middle and high school teachers.
- 178 out of 302 eligible teachers completed the survey.
- Topics addressed include teacher self-efficacy, relationships with administrators, professional development, comfort and skill levels with laptops, frequency of laptop use, and classroom management challenges.

**The Results**

The following figure depicts mean responses for the question: “How much do you think each of the following groups of students benefit from the use of laptops? (1 indicates ‘these students do not benefit at all’ and 5 indicates ‘these students benefit the most’)”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher achieving students</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower achieving students</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with prior computer experience</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with limited prior computer experience</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table shows responses for the question: “On average, how helpful do you find your laptop for providing classroom instruction?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not helpful</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers were asked, “In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of having laptops in the classroom?” The most common responses fell into the following themes:

- Teachers have not been given strong training on laptop use and management.
- Students trying to find ways around the school’s firewall.
- Spending more time keeping students on task than teaching material.
- For upper-level math courses, Moodle and other programs we use do not have Greek letters, for example, for students to use.

**Additional Findings**

- 66% of teachers reported that having laptops in the classroom has allowed them to differentiate students by learning style.
- 52% of teachers report they are able to cover more material in class when laptops are used.
- 65% of teachers agree that having laptops in the classroom has increased their expectations of students’ work.

**Recommendations**

- Orange County Schools should examine ways to help lower achieving students derive equal benefit from the laptop program as higher achieving students.
- Provide teachers with several professional development opportunities to enhance their laptop capabilities.
- Create a stronger Internet firewall against websites deemed inappropriate by teachers.
- Teachers may need instruction in effective methods for keeping students on-task, given how frequently this was noted to be a problem.
- Include more advanced software on laptops to accommodate teachers’ needs.

**Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been possible without the support and guidance of Angie Veitch, Director of Technology & Media for Orange County Schools, and my advisors, Drs. Rabiner and Gifford.
**What is Read to Achieve?**
- Passed in 2012 by NC General Assembly
- Beginning in 2013-2014, students who do not pass reading EOGs will enter process of retention
- Parents can send their children to remedial summer camps (6-8 weeks long, 4 or 5 days a week, with 3 hrs per day of instruction)
- If student passes alternative assessment at the end of camp, they will be promoted to 4th grade
- If student does not attend the camp or pass the alternative assessment, that student will be placed in transition class that combines 3rd and 4th grade curriculum

**Goal: Ascertain cost-effective yet efficient methods of improving third graders’ literacy in a remedial summer program/transition classes**

**Key Characteristics of Successful Short-Term Remedial, Reading Programs**
- Trained instructors (using 1-2 day workshops conducted by literacy specialists) prior to program’s start in methods which would be used in program (small group management, repeated reading method)
- Provided a versatile curriculum to maintain student interest (a block of small group instruction, paired reading, writing activities, independent reading)
- Emphasize student choice and motivation by allowing them to choose appropriately challenging/matched books that match their personal interests
- Set foundation for long-term reading gains by training parents (in an evening/weekend workshop conducted by literacy specialist) in tutoring their children post-intervention

**Recommendations for Summer Program**
1. Assess students’ needs/deficiencies to determine appropriate curriculum. Because students attending the program are at various reading levels, DPS should analyze students’ reading needs to determine which areas of reading to target.
2. Establish a one day intensive workshop prior to start of summer camp conducted by a literacy specialist to train instructors/instructional assistants in methods used during summer program (small group management, repeated reading method).
3. Incorporate the “Repeated Reading” (RR) method into the curriculum to improve children’s reading fluency.
4. Emphasize cost-effective small-group instruction (3-5 students a group) in summer program. Allocate a 40 minute block to small group instruction.
5. Actively foster maintenance of reading gains following summer reading camps by training parents in remedial, reading methods.
6. Establish a one day workshop evening/weekend for parents in guided, one-on-one tutoring before end of camp to facilitate transition from camp.
7. Provide students with choice of appropriately challenging books to read at home at end of summer program. Subsequently mail books home on a biweekly basis through summer.

**Recommendations for Transition Classes for Retained Students**
- Recommendations for intensive, remedial summer programs should be used in transition classes e.g. small group instruction, professional development in remedial, repeated reading method
- Allocate a 30 minute block for individualized/one-on-one tutoring (by instructor or teaching assistants), particularly for students who were not remediated in summer program
- Encourage parental collaboration by sending children’s progress reports home on a monthly basis as well as instructional guides for tutoring at home

**“Read to Achieve” in Durham**
- 2,656 third graders in 2011-2012
- 57.6% passed the 3rd grade reading EOG
- LEP students (7.1%) and students with disabilities (11.8%) are exempted from retention-based initiative
- Thus, over 900 students would qualify for summer reading camps (exempting LEP students and students with disabilities)

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**North Carolina's “Read to Achieve” Literacy Program: Effective Methods for Implementation in the Durham Public Schools**
Shelby Hart-Armstrong
Advisor: Ann Skinner, M.Ed
Community Partner: Natalie Beyer
Best Practices for Assessing Social-Emotional Learning at the Central Park School for Children

Blake O'Connor, Duke University
Faculty Advisor: Ben Goodman, PhD, Center for Child and Family Policy
School Research Partner: John Heffernan, Central Park School for Children

Overview
As a Peaceful School, the Central Park School for Children (CPSC) prioritizes social and emotional learning (SEL) to prevent bullying and teach nonviolent conflict resolution. In order to measure SEL growth across students and grade levels, CPSC seeks a standardized and self-reflective form of SEL assessment. To address CPSC needs, this research project:

1. Conducted a comprehensive literature review of bullying and its impacts on well-being
2. Conducted teacher focus groups to document current SEL assessment strategies at CPSC
3. Analyzed existing, empirically valid SEL assessments to determine which would best meet the needs of CPSC.

Evaluation of SEL Assessment Measures

Eligibility: In order to be examined, a SEL assessment had to apply to elementary school children, incorporate student self-reflection, and assess the “relationship skills” construct.

Evaluation: The five eligible assessments were evaluated by training requirements, continuum placement results, cost, similarity to current practices, administration time, and SEL constructs measured.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Continuum Placement</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Administration Time</th>
<th>Comprehensiveness</th>
<th>Weighted Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)</td>
<td>No formal training, only manual</td>
<td>Yes - behavior level descriptions</td>
<td>$250 (handscore), $330 (scannable)</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Relationship skills, Self-management, Responsible decision-making</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/Teacher/Parent Rating Scale</td>
<td>No formal training, only manual</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$234 for all materials</td>
<td>&lt; 20 minutes</td>
<td>Relationship skills, Self-management</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant Empathy Scale for Children</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public domain</td>
<td>5 - 10 minutes</td>
<td>Relationship skills, social awareness</td>
<td>4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociometric Ratings and Nominations</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Author request</td>
<td>10 - 20 minutes</td>
<td>Relationship skills</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Report Measure of Prosocial and Aggressive Behavior</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public domain</td>
<td>&lt; 20 minutes</td>
<td>Relationship skills</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommended Assessments

1. Social Skills Rating System. This measure requires minimal training, has a short administration time, places student SEL on a developmental continuum, and provides the most comprehensive assessment of SEL.
2. Bryant Empathy Scale. If the SSRS is cost-prohibitive for CPSC, the Bryant would serve as an excellent low cost alternative, although it does not place children on a developmental continuum.
3. Low-cost, hybrid strategy. If cost is a primary concern, the Bryant Empathy Scale could be used in combination with the Self-Report Measure to capture student, parent, teacher, and peer perspectives on SEL development.

Next Steps
After analyzing five SEL assessments and identifying those most likely to benefit CPSC, it is recommended that CPSC proceed by testing the selected assessment on a small scale before moving toward school-wide implementation. For the more costly recommended assessments—SSRS and CRS—a small scale pilot program may assist CPSC in weighing the benefits against the higher costs of acquiring these measures.

Regardless of the measure chosen by CPSC, the addition of a standardized assessment to the portfolio would provide a more comprehensive portrait of where a child is in their SEL process. Most importantly, an assessment would assist the teachers and faculty of CPSC in carrying out its Peaceful School goals of instilling social values and philosophies, preventing the bully-victim-bystander power dynamics, and equipping students with tools for nonphysical conflict resolution.
Orange County School’s 1:1 Technology Program: Student Perceptions of the First Year

Student: Lindsay Rosenthal
Faculty Advisors: Dr. Elizabeth Gifford and Dr. David Rabiner

The 1:1 Laptop Program

- In August, 2012, Orange County Schools began implementing a 1:1 laptop program.
- All teachers and students in grades 6-12 received a laptop to use in school and at home.
- The main goal of this initiative is to increase student achievement and project-based learning.

The Study

- A survey was developed in order to assess student perceptions of the laptop program.
- It was administered to all middle and high school students in Orange County; a total of 1,717 students responded to the survey.
- The survey included multiple choice, forced choice, and open-ended questions.
- The survey responses identify the students’ opinions regarding the 1:1 laptop program, including advantages, disadvantages, and potential areas for improvement.

The Results

Please indicate how often you use your laptop to do the following at school:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several A/M</th>
<th>Weekly or Less</th>
<th>Rarely or Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements about your laptop:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

How would you rate the laptop program at your school overall?

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Additional Findings

- 92% of students have Internet access at home.
- 69% of students would rather use their laptops for assignments and projects rather than a pencil and paper.
- About 10% of respondents stated that the Internet at school is often slow and sometimes crashes, causing students to lose their work.
- The most common disadvantage of the laptops, indicated by 12% of respondents, is that they are very distracting – the Internet, games, and social media sites are always at students’ fingertips.

Recommendations

- Minimizing Distraction from the Internet: Schools should work with teachers to identify strategies that help students stay on task.
- Managing Technical Difficulties: Schools should provide students with the knowledge of how to handle problems such as when their laptop freezes or malfunctions, and help students develop strategies for backing up their work.
- Assessing Achievement: Since a majority of the students believe that the quality of their work has improved (60.5%), Orange County Schools could examine whether there is actual evidence of improved student achievement.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Angie Veitch, Director of Technology and Media for the Orange County School District, for her support of this study.

I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Gifford and Dr. David Rabiner for their continuous assistance and support.
C.A.T.C.H: Evaluating Carrington Middle School's Peer Tutoring Program

Alli Smalley, Psychology Major, Duke University

Advisors: Ashley Corra and Jeff Quinn, Center for Child and Family Policy

DPS Partners: Terri Mozingo, Ph.D., and Nancy Cox

Background

**CATCH**
- Initiated in 2010 by Jeff Whitt, a Language Arts teacher and athletic coach at Carrington Middle School
- Pairs middle-school peers in a mentor-mentee relationship
- Strives to offer exclusively one-on-one tutoring
- Offered in class and after school twice a week, and on certain Saturdays (with free transportation for students)
- Trained roughly 170 middle-school mentors, matching them with 114 mentees needing academic assistance

**Benefits of Peer Tutoring**
- **Academic**
  - Students who were peer-tutored outscored their control group peers on state EOGs, unit tests, and weekly quizzes [1-3]
  - Increases in state exam scores and grades have been found for tutees and tutors [4].
- **Socio-emotional & Behavioral** [1, 5-7]
  - Greater self-confidence for tutors and tutees
  - Reduced behavioral problems and increased on-task behavior

**Rationale**
- Durham Public Schools (DPS) offers a variety of peer tutoring programs
- Aim to assist and better engage underachieving students
- DPS seeks to make these programs more consistent, effective, and available throughout the district
- CATCH has the potential to meet these needs
- By evaluating CATCH, DPS can assess best practices and determine which programs and program elements should be spread throughout the district

**Prior Evaluations & Methods**

Most peer tutoring programs employ a mixed-methods approach that:
- Assesses students' grades, perspectives on the program, in-class behavior; and other social/emotional gains
- Includes student surveys, scores on weekly quizzes, end-of-year exams, and student grades, with respect to a comparison group [2, 3, 9, 10].

Practical approaches focus on pre- & post-test results, observations, interviews, and surveys [10].

Key Evaluation Components

**Academic Gains**
- End-of-grade Exams: Compare achievement levels before and after participation in CATCH
  (Data available in November 2013)

**Socio-Emotional & Behavioral Gains**
- Interviews with Mr. Whitt and the Exceptional Children teacher (Spring 2013)
  Interviews focused on:
  - Leadership role
  - Challenges with implementation
  - Implementing CATCH in other schools
  - Suggestions for evaluating CATCH

- Observations of CATCH (Spring 2013)
  Designed to assess:
  - Facilitator accessibility
  - Group dynamics
  - Tutor efficacy
  - Tutee engagement

- Surveys for tutors and tutees (Fall 2013)
  Developed to examine:
  - Student views on the CATCH program
  - Tutor-tutee relationship
  - Impact of CATCH on academic and non-academic factors

**References**

Preliminary Results

**Interviews**
- Need a passionate leader to run a program like CATCH
- The tutor-tutee relationship fuels social and academic gains
- Exceptional Children (EC) students often respond better to feedback from peers than from teachers

**Observation of CATCH Saturday Session**
- Forty-three students; roughly 17 groups
- Three groups had a consistent one-to-one tutor-tutee ratio
- Exhibited high levels of on-task behavior and engagement; more on-task than peers working in larger groups

**Observation of CATCH In-class Session**
- Thirteen students: 8 mentees in the Exceptional Children (EC) Language Arts class & 5 mentors
- Students appeared much more engaged and on-task when doing group-work led by mentors compared to the teacher-led lecture in the first half of class

**Mean Results for 8 Groups on Group Dynamics Section**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To a small extent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To a moderate extent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To a great extent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

This evaluation plan seeks to:
- Assess academic and social/emotional gains for students in CATCH
- Provide DPS with a potential model of a peer-tutoring program to utilize throughout the district

Evaluating CATCH and other existing programs is vital in determining best practices that other schools can and should implement.

**Acknowledgements:**

A special thanks to the Duke SRP program; my advisors at the Center for Child and Family Policy; Ashley Corra and Jeff Quinn; and my community partners, Dr. Mozingo, Nancy Cox, and Jeff Whitt.

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Evaluating the Implementation of the 1:1 Laptop Program in Orange County Schools

Student: Kirsten Osborne
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Gifford

Background

• Giving students a laptop to use in class increases student engagement and achievement test scores (Bebell & ODwyer, 2010).
• Teachers report adopting new teaching practices and classroom management strategies.
• Students are able to conduct independent research and collaborate with peers (Warschauer, 2008).
• A learning curve is often present in 1:1 initiatives, which means results may not be seen for several years.

The Orange County Schools Initiative

ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOLS

1:1 Initiative

• Starting in the 2012-2013 school year, the Orange County schools have implemented a 1:1 laptop program.
• All teachers and students in middle and high school received a laptop in the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, and 4th and 5th graders will receive theirs next year.
• Their main objective is to increase student learning.
• Measures of success will include positive results on tests, increased attendance and graduation rates, and an overall better academic climate.

References


Theory of Change

The following is an outline of the theory of change behind a 1:1 laptop initiative, and specifically of the Orange County Schools initiative:

Input of resources (laptops, professional development opportunities, etc.)

Changes in teaching strategies and classroom management

Enhanced capabilities among students to conduct independent research and collaborate with peers

Improved student engagement

Enhanced student achievement

Methods

• Phone interviews were conducted with four Orange County middle and high school teachers.
• The teachers’ subjects were visual arts, Latin, biotechnology, and special education.
• The questions asked for their perspective on professional development opportunities, perceived level of student engagement, and challenges they’ve encountered in the classroom, among other aspects.

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Teacher Feedback

Input of resources (professional development)

• Professional development opportunities have been surface-level and not tailored to teachers’ individual needs

Changes in teaching strategies and classroom management

• Many students are off-topic, which is a challenge to monitor
• Teachers often have to teach basic typing and email skills

Ability to conduct independent research

• Student learning is more independent
• Students research topics on their own and report back to the class
• New online resources encourage collaboration: Moodle, Google Doc, and Schoology

Student engagement

• Students are excited about laptops
• However, teachers are unsure whether they are more engaged in learning content

Recommendations

• Compile and distribute list of online resources, tailored to individual subject areas.
• Provide more in-depth professional development opportunities, especially those which allow for open-ended exploration of programs and resources.
• Offer on-going technology training sessions for students in areas such as typing and email.
• Provide a comprehensive technological orientation to the 4th and 5th grade students, before the school year begins.
• Create school-wide policy addressing students being off-task.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Angie Veitch, Director of Technology and Media for the Orange County Schools, for her support of this project.
Standards-Based Grading: Reporting Meaningful Progress
Jacqueline Stedman

What do teachers say about the new grading system implemented by DPS?

DEFINITION
1. Define clear and specific standards.
2. Use these standards to evaluate student achievement levels.
3. Focus on communication between the student, the teacher, and the parents.
4. Non-academic factors, or behaviors that do not directly reflect students’ mastery of the material but do affect their academic success, should be represented separately.

DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS’ INTEREST
DPS Strategic Plan: Chapter 8, Goal 1.6: DPS will implement an assessment for learning model to improve student achievement outcomes as measured by school, district and state assessments.

Standards-based grading was implemented in DPS elementary schools for the 2012-2013 school year as part of this plan. DPS plans to move standards-based grading into middle and high schools as well.

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SURVEY AND INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

Factors to Consider
Changing the grading system involves the entire system of assessment and feedback, not just how grades are reported.

Standards-based grading suggests that:
- Students should be required to complete missing assignments rather than receiving a zero. Teachers can dock a responsibility-type score in the nonacademic factors.
- Homework completion and quality are nonacademic factors. Homework should be assigned to help students achieve their learning goals.
- After corrective instruction, students should be allowed to complete a re-do or retake to have another opportunity to demonstrate mastery.
- Summative assessments should be part of the learning process, not just an end measurement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Card
- The report card should be user-friendly for teachers, students, and parents.
- The report card should contain only the standards that are being taught in that quarter in order to simplify it.

Professional Development
- Teachers need ongoing training on how to implement a standards-based grading system based on the recommendations from the literature.
- Training should include how to use the report card, how to use assessment for learning, and how to use standards-based grading as a form of communication with students and parents.

Teacher Advisory Committee
- A committee of teachers could be established to consult with DPS throughout the process of implementing a new grading system.
Recommendations for Developing an Effective Summer Bridge Program

Matt Truwit

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The purpose of this study was to develop recommendations for a summer bridge program at NCSSM that would facilitate the success of the school’s more underprepared students.

The program was mandatory and four-week long. Students were selected based on GPA, race, and ACT scores. The program provided an opportunity to socially and emotionally adjust to a new environment.

Goals
- Increasing student graduation and retention rates
- Providing an opportunity to socially and emotionally adjust to a new environment

Case Studies
Six faculty and staff members determined the following areas to be of most concern to the students who would be targeted for the bridge program.

Most Deficient Study Skills
1. Time Management
2. Information Processing
3. Study Aids

Most Lacking Areas of Academic Content
- Writing
  - Pre-writing process
  - Outlining and organization
  - Thesis construction
  - Advanced essay structure
- Mathematics
  - Functions and notation
  - Graphing without a calculator
  - Factoring
  - Data analysis
  - Interpretation and application

Both the study skills and the content identified as areas of concern require metacognitive abilities; faculty and staff emphasized the importance of ensuring that students know how to think and how to think about their learning.

Policy Recommendations
- Four to five weeks long
- Mornings: standard class time
- Afternoons: real-world application
- Evenings: orientation and social activities
- 10-20% of the incoming class

Selection Criteria
- Low placement test scores
- Below-average standardized test scores
- Identified school districts
- Status as a first generation college student

Goals
- Primary
  - Refreshing old material rather than acquiring new or accelerating course trajectories
  - Enhancing metacognitive study skills
- Secondary
  - Providing an opportunity to socially and emotionally adjust to a new environment

Characteristics
- Willing and energetic NCSSM faculty members who teach the same subject during the year
- Peer mentoring with alumni of the program
- Ample structured study time
- Non-traditional elements of instruction and real-world relevant tasks to avoid student burnout
- An honest and candid explanation of the purpose for the program to prevent stigmatization

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