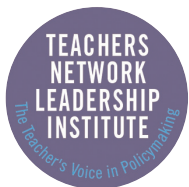# Teachers Network Leadership Institute–Delaware

TNLI

Teacher Research:
Results and Recommendations
for Reshaping Education

TEACHERS
NETWORK
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE
The Teacher's Voice in Policymaking

RODEL
FOUNDATION
OF DELAWARE

This booklet represents thousands of hours of action research undertaken by some of the state's most talented and motivated educators. When we began the Teachers Network Leadership Institute–Delaware, I knew we had gifted teachers who were willing to invest their time and energy to bring about change in our schools. But I didn't anticipate how passionate and committed they would become throughout their discovery process.

Their action research has helped to identify solutions to some serious problems in our schools: the gritty realities of teacher burnout, student apathy and negative school cultures; language and socioeconomic barriers; and the distinct challenges of special education in the context of mainstream learning.

Our Teacher Leaders have examined these and many other issues affecting the quality of education in our schools, and for this they deserve a voice in shaping education reform policy, both statewide and nationally.

On behalf of the Rodel Foundation, I would like to thank these outstanding educators for their fervent commitment to their research and for their desire to generate change in our schools. It is my genuine hope that the research and recommendations within these pages will be considered seriously and further studied by policy makers, in order to help create one of the finest education systems in the nation.

In concluding, let me thank Dr. Christopher M. Clark, Director of the School of Education at the University of Delaware, for providing guidance to these Teacher Leaders on their research and for assisting the Rodel Foundation in bringing the Teachers Network Leadership Institute to Delaware.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Herdman, Ed.D.
President and CEO
Rodel Foundation of Delaware

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About the Rodel Foundation of Delaware

The Rodel Foundation of Delaware is dedicated to the improvement of public education. We are committed to initiating and supporting programs that will create long-term, systemic change. We serve as an implementer of change and a broker of national practices. We are both an investor and a partner, working to leverage the resources needed to promote positive change in Delaware's schools.

The Creation of the Teachers Network Leadership Institute–Delaware

As part of our ongoing strategic mission, we created the Teachers Network Leadership Institute–Delaware (TNLI–DE) in 2004. It is designed to give talented educators throughout the state a forum for developing and implementing action research and a voice in Delaware policy, allowing them to effect change in the educational landscape of the state's public schools. TNLI–DE is one of thirteen national affiliates of the Teachers Network.

Teacher Selection Process

Teacher Leaders are chosen through an application process and must demonstrate a commitment to student achievement and a willingness to reach beyond the classroom to help improve education. Once chosen, each teacher identifies an educational premise upon which to base his or her action research. Relying on the support of other teachers and the encouragement and training from TNLI–DE, teachers gather research and results, helping to promote innovation within the education system.

Research has demonstrated that good teaching is the most important school factor in fostering student success. That is why the Rodel Foundation of Delaware is committed both to helping teachers gather knowledge and use their voice in the formation of policy and to encouraging access to the best practices in their fields.

All in the Family?

A Look at New Teachers, Veteran Teachers, and the Environment at Howard High School of Technology:

Does the state-mandated mentoring program help to retain new teachers?

Cary Brandenberger
9th and 10th Grade English,
Howard High School of
Technology, Wilmington

"As strong as the state mentoring program is, we need to change the climate and culture of our schools before we can expect to keep good teachers."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a statewide initiative to analyze the culture of apathy and disrespect prevalent in some schools.
- Implement strategies to reward students on meaningful levels for improved behavior.
- Offer incentives to new teachers who reach even minor milestones in their classrooms.
- Research how students can effectively be reached in the schools, regardless of their home environment.
- Work with school leaders in creating realistic plans for bringing about change in the culture of classrooms and schools.

Summary

At Howard, most of the faculty and the administration like to brag about the fact that we are a family: the faculty supports each other; we rally together, to help when a student or teacher is in crisis. We attend social events together, and most of us really "know" each other. Yet, it's funny how we say we are all family, but so many of the new teachers are quick to break free when they finish their first year. As the English Department chair, I was concerned that, excluding the Math Department, we had the highest turnover rate of new teachers.

I was mentoring a new teacher in the English Department who had come from another Delaware high school. She was enthusiastic, knew her material, and was an excellent addition to our department. She brought with her a passion for teaching, which resonated with the other members of the department who may have seen their excitement lessen after many years of teaching high school students.

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the new-teacher mentoring program. I received responses like "This school provides me with everything I need to be successful" and "I have every resource I need, including more than enough people to help me." When I reviewed my notes, I, too, had written things like "The whole staff is so supportive of the new teachers."

Despite the positive responses about the staff and resources, one recurring theme that quickly caught my attention continued to pop up on the new teachers' comment sheets: the students' behavior. So I decided that the focus of our new-teacher meetings should be classroom management. I quickly realized that what they were calling student behavior didn't have anything to do with classroom management.

As it turned out, the real issue was student apathy. The really hard truth came when the "good" new teacher left on April 1. She couldn't even make it to the end of the year. We lost a really good teacher because of the culture that had been established among the students at our school—a culture of apathy, disrespect, and manipulation.

With the support of our new principal, I surveyed almost the entire faculty and staff and discovered that they overwhelmingly felt that they worked harder than the students to increase student achievement and that the students continually circumvented the rules.

We used our last professional development day to explore the topic "How Can We Change the Climate and the Culture at Howard High School of Technology?"

With a focus on and a commitment to change and through teacher-led workshops, the faculty and staff created a protocol for dealing with student behavior and a thematic plan for the upcoming year. My research will continue next year to see if our plan makes a difference.

The Peaks and Valleys of Teacher Retention:

Are there times in which teachers are more susceptible to leaving their profession?

Jean Miclette

5th Grade
Allen Frear Elementary,
Camden

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further explore the reasons why teachers leave their profession.
- Provide workshops to help new teachers work with students and parents effectively.
- Implement properly run mentoring programs to benefit new teachers.
- Create support groups within school buildings for both new and experienced teachers to share ideas and gain strength to meet everyday challenges.

Summary

This study utilized data collected from a sample survey distributed across three counties in Delaware, determining if there were particular time frames when teachers were most likely to consider leaving the educational profession.

It also attempted to determine patterns of teacher reasoning and behaviors that may contribute to retention problems. Eighty-four teachers with one to fifteen years of classroom experience were asked various questions concerning experiences in the "trenches" of their own classrooms.
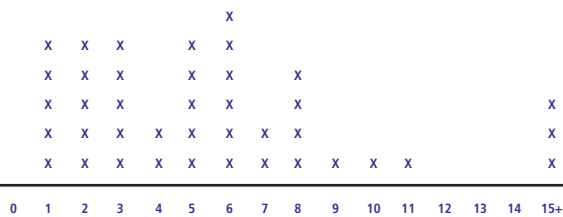
While 55% of teachers were found to be content with their teaching experience, as many as 45% of the eighty-four teachers surveyed admitted to a period of time when they contemplated leaving their profession.

It was discovered that the majority of the teachers who contemplated movement had been in their careers from three to five years. With the national teacher retention rate only as high as 50% within the first five years, this was no surprise. Interestingly enough, however, the pattern continued and spiked at six years, with a gradual decline at eight years. Another spike repeated at fifteen years.

What are the reasons behind these teachers' departures? Before distributing the survey, I surmised that pay would be one of the most important reasons for leaving. However, this was not the case. When individual teachers were asked the reasons why they were experiencing job dissatisfaction, there were surprising similarities in answers.

First was lack of parental interaction, interest, and support, with student behavior problems following in second place. With a clearer definition of the trend of teacher departures, it would be beneficial for state educational agencies and districts across Delaware to find a way to support this vulnerable group and to keep highly qualified teachers where they belong: in the classroom.

Years When Teachers Were Most Susceptible
to Leaving Teaching Profession (2005 Data)

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                        x
    x   x   x       x   x
    x   x   x       x   x       x
    x   x   x       x   x       x               x
    x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x               x
    x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10  11  12  13  14  15+
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Esther Roberts
8th Grade U.S. History, Phyllis Wheatley Elementary, Bridgeville

Mentoring to Save a Teacher:
How does the Pathwise Induction Program lower the turnover rate among new teachers?

"The most powerful form of learning, the sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good works of others but from sharing what we know with others…. By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge, we make meaning, we learn!"

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Beginning teachers can and will succeed if they use proven research-based practices.
- We as educators must offer help during the new teachers' crucial beginning year.
- Through the induction program, instructional practices can achieve desired results within the classroom.

Summary

In order to be successful, teachers must have support throughout their beginning years of teaching. Some beginning teachers believe that once they receive a teaching degree, they automatically know how to enter into a classroom and deal with the daily problems that occur. Many beginning teachers enter into the classroom and encounter stress and problems ranging from classroom management to dealing with students with diverse socioeconomic and intellectual backgrounds. They begin the day with a well-planned lesson, super creative projects, and positive thoughts; however, they still encounter critical times in the classroom. What can educators do to save the beginning teacher?

In my research, mentors observed a group of new teachers from the beginning of the school year until the end. This study examines ways and means for beginning teachers to gain a more collaborative relationship with a mentor throughout their first year of teaching. These teachers reflect on their success and the instructional experiences used for students on a daily basis.

The Pathwise Induction Program was designed to meet the needs of a beginning teacher in the areas of instruction and student learning. It is an evolving program in which mentors give input, reflect, and give immediate feedback to beginning teachers in an encouraging and nurturing way, a service that plays a key role throughout the first year of teaching.

In the induction program I examined three domains that became vital components of the professional practice: Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, and Instruction. The induction process is based on a cycle of Plan, Teach, Reflect, and Apply. In this program, I made an informal observation of the beginning teacher's classroom, followed by reflective conversations to discuss problems observed in the classroom. Next, I gathered information from readings and colleagues. Finally, mentors developed a plan of focus for the beginning teacher. Together they identified resources that helped develop skills to improve teaching. Both the mentor and the beginning teacher discussed teaching activities over a period of four to six weeks.

I have discovered that the most effective beginning teacher will need daily support from the faculty. I believe mentors' ultimate goal is to improve their effectiveness and help beginning teachers accomplish their goals, move toward excellence in teaching, and continue to become an accomplished professional in the future.

Taking the Responsibility of Discipline off the Teacher and Placing it on the Student:

How will implementing the Love and Logic® approach ultimately affect student discipline?

Abby Sipress

3rd Grade, Castle Hills Elementary, New Castle

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Districts should continue to offer the "9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom" course to any interested teacher.
- Districts should continue to sponsor the Love and Logic Club, which will allow teachers already using Love and Logic to learn new skills and discuss successes and failures with other teachers.
- Districts should require all new staff to take the "9 Essential Skills" course.
- Schools should continue to include Love and Logic as part of their achievement plans.
- State education leaders should promote Love and Logic training to schools and individual teachers as part of professional development.
- Include Love and Logic training and support as part of the New Teacher Mentor Program.
- Policy makers should either replace "I Can Do It" (DSEA's classroom management class) with Love and Logic or offer it as an alternative.
- State leaders should create an online community for teachers so they can share their successes and failures with others across the state.
- Education leaders should include Love and Logic in preservice training.
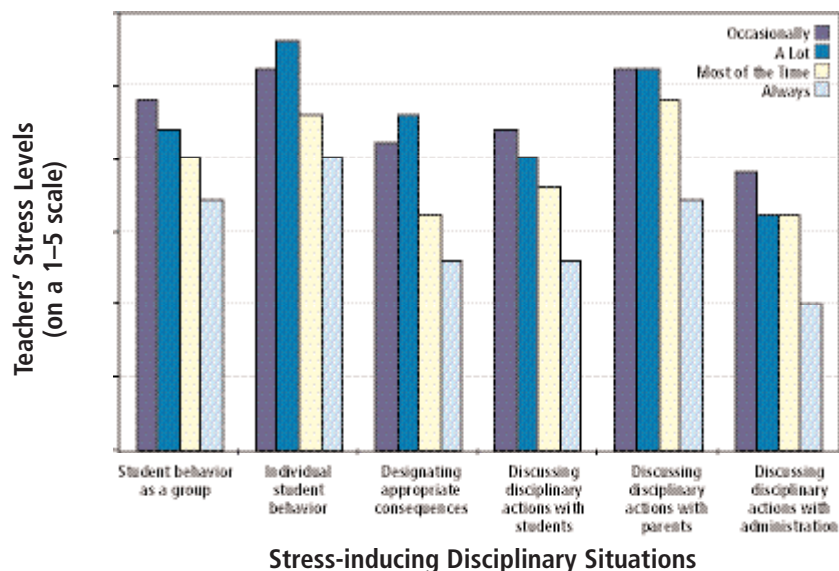
Summary

After spending my first two years of teaching in a constant state of stress, I chose to find a better way to deal with student discipline. I transferred to a new school in my district, not even a mile from my old school, and immediately noticed the more relaxed atmosphere. I also immediately noticed that the students were more disciplined and the teachers didn't seem to be stressed about the occasional inappropriate behavior. I discovered that most of the teachers in the school were using a program called Love and Logic. I anticipated that by implementing Love and Logic in my classroom, I would reduce my own stress and develop a class full of students who were responsible for their own behavior.

By using Love and Logic training materials, along with surveys and interviews conducted with teachers at my school, and finally my own personal journal, I discovered some preliminary findings: Teachers who implemented Love and Logic regularly spent less time dealing with discipline than those who used it less frequently. Additionally, teachers who implemented Love and Logic regularly felt less discipline-related stress (in relation to dealing with student behavior as a group or as individuals; designating appropriate consequences; and discussing disciplinary action with students, parents, and administrators) than those who used it less frequently.

With increased knowledge of Love and Logic skills and practices, my own stress level decreased in relation to discipline. As I increased my implementation of Love and Logic in the classroom, my students began to take on more responsibility for their behavior and any resulting consequences. Students also began attempting to work together to solve issues before they became problems.

How Frequency of Love and Logic Implementation Relates to Teacher Stress

Bar chart legend: Occasionally, A Lot, Most of the Time, Always

Y-axis: Teachers' Stress Levels (on a 1–5 scale)

X-axis categories: Student behavior as a group; Individual student behavior; Designating appropriate consequences; Discussing disciplinary actions with students; Discussing disciplinary actions with parents; Discussing disciplinary actions with administration

X-axis label: Stress-inducing Disciplinary Situations

Pullout or Structured Immersion:
What instructional setting can provide the most integrated learning experience for English Language Learner students?

Gemma Cabrera
1st Grade ELL, Georgetown Elementary, Georgetown

"When English Language Learners feel acclimated in a setting that encompasses both their academic and social needs, they are more likely to achieve success in school."

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Policy makers should study the results of immersion programs locally and nationally.
• Immersion programs should be implemented and supported in districts that have a large population of non-English-speaking constituents.
• The results regarding academic performance and social comfort levels among students in immersion programs should be used to generate policy and educational reform.

Summary

Nationwide, great demands and challenges are being placed on schools with large minority populations. The same challenges occur in schools like Georgetown Elementary, where I am a first-grade English Language Learner (ELL) teacher. One of the greatest challenges that I face is to serve the instructional needs of the ELL students. Instruction to first- and second-grade ELL students at Georgetown Elementary has been primarily provided through a pullout program. In this program, students are pulled out of their mainstream classes for a period of 45 minutes a day for special instruction in the English language. While aimed at meeting the academic and social needs of second-language learners, this program is problematic because the number of students has increased and instructional time has decreased.

Consequently, a new instructional program was implemented, namely, a structured immersion program. In this program, students are taught by an ELL-certified teacher who in most cases is bilingual in self-contained classes. The ELL teacher uses the same curriculum as the other first-grade mainstream teachers, yet adapts it to the students' needs and sets the pace according to their academic levels.

The research on both of these programs clearly distinguishes the effectiveness that each program has in meeting the needs of ELL students. In the academic arena, students show greater gains by being in the immersion program. Not only academically, but also socially, students demonstrate greater ownership and are less xenophobic about language learning, when they are in an immersion program. English Language Learners feel more empowered when they are in a classroom with students who have their same needs, study the same units, and go to special events at the same time.

In conclusion, for first- and second-grade ELL students at Georgetown Elementary, the immersion program provides a more effective way to become proficient in the English language. Consequently, ELL students show greater ownership when they stay in one classroom, get to know their peers and teacher, and are willing to take chances. ELL students become empowered by this sense of belonging, and this in turn provides them with the ability to be more successful academically and socially.

Keeping Them:
What can be done or needs to be done to improve special education teacher retention?

9

Stephanie DeWitt

Special Education, Shields Elementary School, Lewes

"Forty-eight percent of the teachers listed as special educators had returned to traditional education. That was a sign that the attrition rate needed to be addressed."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following may reduce stress and burnout that lead to high attrition rates among special educators:

- School administrators should reduce teachers' role overload, restructuring their jobs and the expectations placed on them.
- Policy makers should think "outside the box" when mandating programs to be implemented by special educators.

Summary

Every year, 12% of the teachers in the field of special education transfer by choice to regular education teaching positions. This is a costly problem. The expense of recruiting replacements is one cost, but the cost to the students also needs to be considered. With high teacher turnover in special education, there is a loss in efficiency because teacher turnover affects student performance.

There is a need for an in-depth look at why veteran special education teachers have been able to remain involved and committed to working with students with disabilities for many years. The benefits of this investigation far outweigh the costs.

Many research studies have been conducted on teacher attrition and retention. Bonnie Billingsley has conducted the most comprehensive review of the factors that contribute to special education teacher attrition and retention. Her research points to the challenge of developing a qualified workforce and creating school/work environments that maintain special educators' commitment and involvement.

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs publishes online SPeNSE Fact Sheets. (SPeNSE is an acronym for the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education.) Two important SPeNSE Fact Sheets reviewed for this action research focus on the need for high-quality teachers in every special education classroom and the amount of paperwork associated with special education.

Teacher questionnaires and personal interviews were used to conduct this action research. The minimum criterion for participants in this action research was fifteen years of continuous teaching in the field of special education. After the teacher questionnaire was completed, a personal interview was conducted. Attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about school climate were the main topics of discussion during the personal interviews.

The Cape Henlopen (DE) School District Reduction in Force (RIF) list was used to determine eligible research study participants. Forty-eight teachers were listed on the RIF list as special education teachers with fifteen or more years of experience. After further investigation, it was found that only twenty-five of those forty-eight teachers were currently teaching special education students. That meant that 48% of the teachers listed under special education had transferred to teaching in the regular education population. When almost half of the teachers in a certified area leave that certification area for another field, there is a problem. A return rate of 60% was achieved for the completed questionnaire. Personal interviews were conducted with 100% of the participants who completed the questionnaire.

Questionnaire and interview participants listed these "C.O.R.E.S." as the keys to a collaborative school climate that increases special education teacher retention: Connectedness, Optimism, Respect, Empowerment, and Support.

Implications of No Child Left Behind:
Does inclusion include students with disabilities and teachers?

Tamara Grimes-Stewart

7th and 8th Grade LRE
English/LA, Gauger-Cobbs
Middle School, Newark

RECOMMENDATIONS

- States and school districts must replace proficiency targets based on actual school achievement.
- We must measure students' academic growth in relation to their previous academic progress.
- We must use multiple indicators to assess student scores.
- Assessments should reflect the curriculum being taught in the school.
- Policy makers must ensure that assessments are aligned to state standards, are valid and reliable, and assess higher-order thinking.
- We should decrease the amount of assessment given to students.[1]

1. National Education Association. *Delaware Secondary Education Act.* Nov./Dec. 2004, p. 15.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to research and observe the implications of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its effect on middle school students. The question "Does inclusion include students with disabilities and teachers?" is very important because as we attempt to implement the mandates of NCLB we are faced with many challenges. These challenges affect the instruction of our students and the teacher's ability to help these students meet success in the inclusive setting.

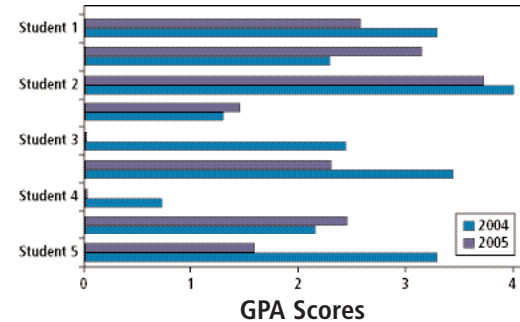**Grade Point Averages**

GPA Scores

This study came about after my school district decided to integrate resource students into an inclusive setting. This reorganized our special education department, our school, and the instructional strategies used in the classroom. I focused my study on students who were once a part of the resource team but are now in the inclusive setting. I interviewed these students, talked to their current teachers, and researched current and past grades in the core subjects. I also took a look at the teachers and their reaction to this change. Through interviews and observations, I learned of their years of experience and different methods of instruction used in the classroom.

As I began to collect data and researched the information, I found that students' motivation and the teacher's ability to keep students actively engaged was the key. Students who had succeeded in the resource setting had also succeeded in the inclusion setting. Their success was internal, and the teacher's ability to keep the students engaged throughout the lesson kept the students motivated. Teachers, on the other hand, were not really afraid to teach students with disabilities but were concerned that they were not adequately trained to handle the specialized needs of special education students.

Through the interviews with the students, I was able to learn more about their feelings about inclusion and special education in general. Some students were elated to be off the resource team because of the stigma that was attached to special education. Some of the students not succeeding were motivated but had home issues that inhibited their ability to meet success in the classroom.

No Child Left Behind has mandated that school districts and states that receive federal funds implement changes in order to increase the academic achievement of all students but especially minorities and students with disabilities. In light of that mandate, I have recommended some steps that I believe need to be implemented in the schools.

Plummet or Summit:
In what ways other than DSTP scores can special education students show growth in reading?

Christina James

5th Grade and Special Education, Bayard Elementary, Wilmington

RECOMMENDATIONS

- On a federal level, the No Child Left Behind mandate should be modified to allow for statewide measuring methods for learning among special education students.
- On a state level, policy makers should create and adopt alternate forms of measuring growth within a diverse range of ability levels among special needs students.
- Special education teachers should be given the latitude to use specific measures to determine growth among their students.
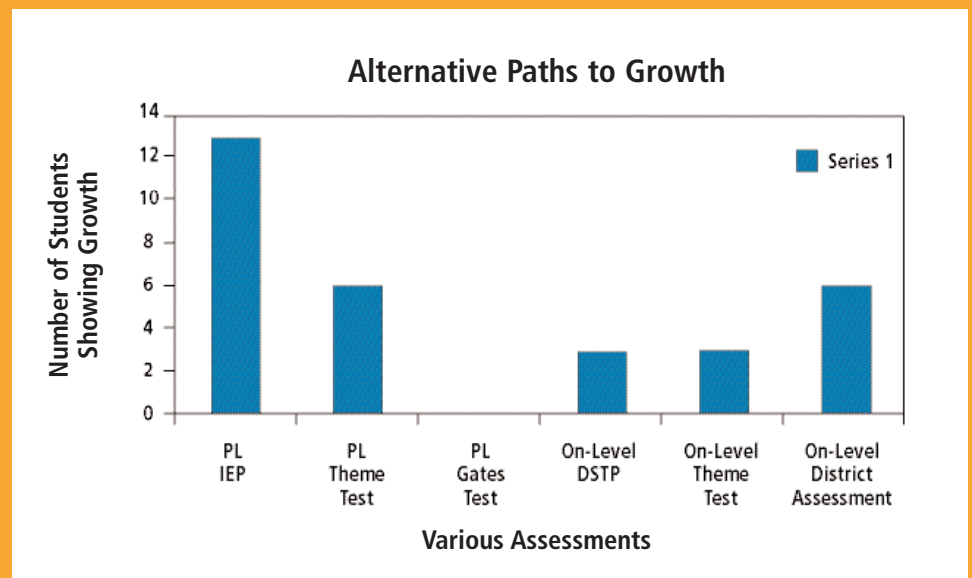
Summary

As an advocate for special education students, I am often frustrated that the progress of these students in the classroom is being negated by their poor Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) scores. In this time of high-stakes testing, special education students often fall through the cracks. Some districts in other states are looking into a value-added measure that allows districts to examine the growth of students over time through a statistical approach. Granted, the mathematical analysis may vary a little from state to state, but this is a way to corroborate data including, but not exclusive to, the high-stakes state test.

Through this research, I simply wanted to explore alternate routes to show growth in special education students. As a result, I found district and classroom assessments that display performance-level and on-level growth. I also examined IEP objectives in reading to determine growth of these students. In addition, two students put together portfolios to showcase their progress in reading.

What I found was that many of these students do not show growth on the DSTP yet show growth on the district and classroom assessments. Since many of these tests are required throughout the district, isn't it then feasible to document growth over time and develop some statistical measure to use as a value-added approach? Any growth should be celebrated, not undermined by the performance on one high-stakes test.

Although there was not as much growth as I would have liked to see, I am able to determine strengths and weaknesses with my teaching and the curriculum. Through this study, I was able to examine the real effectiveness of what takes place in the classroom.

Alternative Paths to Growth

What Factors Impact the Success of Special Education Students in the Inclusive Secondary English Classroom?

Juanita Pritchett

Special Ed., 11th and 12th Grade English, Glasgow High, Newark

"When given the opportunity to feel connected to their environment and learn without boundaries, disabled students often perform as well as—or better than— their regular education counterparts."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should study the results of inclusion classrooms, considering both the academic performance and the social well-being of the disabled students.
- Inclusion should be part of all districts that have students with disabilities, and the proper training should be provided to the teachers involved.

Summary

Inclusion—the process of moving children with disabilities into regular education settings so that they are able to get the same instruction as their fellow regular education students— has been discussed greatly by legislators, educators, and parents of disabled children. Keeping disabled students in isolated settings in schools has been a practice that has taken place for many years in education. Today, one can walk the halls of schools and still find classrooms where disabled youngsters do not have an opportunity to come in contact with students in the mainstream. Many disabled children are kept in "remediation" classes. These classes are supposedly designed to improve the skills of disabled youngsters so that they will be able to perform well academically. Unfortunately, teachers in these remediation programs spend much time working on improving students' performance on basic skills. Thus the assignments they complete are repetitive and mundane, and disabled students very often do not have an opportunity to do assignments that challenge their critical and creative thinking.

Efforts at school reform place disabled children with regular education students in the same classrooms to receive the same instruction and the same directions, regardless of their weaknesses. These reform efforts utilize varied instructional strategies that help to jump-start the skills of disabled students. While varying the process to achieve identified goals, special education students are no longer tracked and locked into groupings that are based solely on their academic capabilities but have an opportunity to get into groups that challenge their thinking, because they are based upon their interest and learning profiles.

In this action research study, I looked at one reform effort—inclusion—and studied groups of disabled students who for the first time had been placed in a full inclusion setting. I studied the progress they made in their eleventh- and twelfth-grade English classrooms and further examined how these students fared in their new setting. I also looked at the factors that support and/or hinder their academic progress.

As states push to get students to pass high-stakes tests, a large amount of money is being expended to improve the performance of students so that they can reach the school district's Average Yearly Progress (AYP) targets that are established by state department of education personnel. Placing students with disabilities into these settings places additional burdens on these expenditures while also placing districts at risk of being labeled substandard when large percentages of their students are not meeting AYP targets.

My findings demonstrate that disabled students can perform just as well as—and in some cases better than—their regular education counterparts when schools take the initiative to implement school reform efforts that are designed to help improve the academic performance of students, provide a school atmosphere where students feel connected to their environment and school personnel, and provide much needed resources to help address the health and social problems students encounter. The participants in this study were asked to complete a student survey. The results indicate that all but one of the forty-four participants enjoyed being in the inclusion setting.

Finding the Right Fit:

How will immerged special education students being tested in their actual grade level perform in high-stakes reading and writing tests?

Jill Rumley

9th Grade English, W.T. Chipman Middle School, Harrington

"If middle school teachers learn to expect more from their inclusion students, the majority of these students will surprise and delight educators and parents as well."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arrive at a combination of functional-level and grade-level material for special education students.
- Policy makers should become aware of the statistics regarding inclusion.
- Teachers and staff should be trained to work with inclusion students, and existing biases should be redirected for higher expectations from special education students.

Summary

Would a first grader take a test written for a third grader? Would a seventh grader take the SAT? The preceding questions are reflective of many parents and professionals whose special education students are being asked to take high-stakes tests that are at times three full grade levels above a child's functioning level. Can immerging these special education students in their actual grade level curriculum for reading/writing affect testing achievement?

Believe it or not, the answer is a resounding yes! I will be the first to admit that I fully intended to fight to have functional level tests given. Prior to doing this project, I believed that it was very unfair to these students. However, I wonder if I was more concerned about the rating they were causing my school to have or worried about the actual curriculum that was being taught.

W.T. Chipman is a typical middle school in rural Delaware. We have both a large number of special education students and a 41% poverty rate. We are a school that definitely has enough students to fill the special education cell. There are, however, schools within our state that have so few special education students that they do not have to count their scores. Due to this large number of special education students, our school is currently "under review." We have met every target except for the one dealing with special education. This has many teachers in the building distraught because we could be seen as a model school in so many other areas.

The data suggest that in our building special education teachers when compared to regular education teachers seem to have lower expectations for their students. Furthermore, this belief affects instruction and the learning process of both special education and regular education students. By looking at GATES testing, the DSTP, student surveys, teacher surveys, and attendance/referral records, one will see that immerging students in grade-level materials will positively affect achievement.

The GATES testing showed improvement in both "pullout" and "inclusion" special education students. However, the inclusion students did much better on the DSTP. Some may argue that this is because inclusion students have higher reading levels. This is not the case with these students. Their testing scores on the GATES were very similar. In fact, you would not be able to tell the two groups apart based on GATES testing scores. The major differences occur when looking at the DSTP scores.

Teaching styles also came into play. If "pullout" teachers followed the eighth-grade curriculum being taught in class, their students did better on the test. The inclusion students, who were fully immersed in the curriculum, did the best. Again, the results of this study were surprising. I certainly expected to go to battle for these special education students. The bottom line is that if high expectations are set from the beginning, students will reach their goals or at least come close to meeting them. This is obvious when test scores are reviewed.

Why Can't Johnny Read?
Could Preschool Really Be a Solution?
Are high-quality preschools addressing this problem and with what impact on future success?

Sherlynn Aurelio

Reading Specialist, Testing Coordinator, Thurgood Marshall Elementary, Newark

"Giving children entering kindergarten a more level playing field in terms of reading ability will give them a greater chance of future academic success."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since research shows that high-quality preschool benefits all children, we should take the following actions:

- Lobby for policy and legislation that supports high-quality pre-school programs.
- Lobby for policy and legislation that supports universal preschool.
- Encourage communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators.
- Provide full-day kindergarten for the children who score low in literacy benchmark skills.
- Support intervention programs.
- Encourage partnerships between teachers and parents, e.g., informational workshops.
- Provide outreach to private preschools.
- Develop a consistent curriculum for preschools to follow.

Summary

"Why can't Johnny read?" is a question that has echoed for years down every school corridor, down every legislative hall, and in every courtroom. Fingers have been pointed in all directions, and everything from remediation to desegregation has been tried to teach Johnny to read, but the question remains unanswered.

As a reading specialist working with struggling readers at the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade levels, I find myself in more of a reactionary position, addressing not only educational weaknesses but also the students' frail socioemotional states. Over the years, I've noticed that a kindergartner's literacy ability closely correlated to how successfully he or she performed later in the upper grades. This correlation ignited my interest in addressing this problem initially with questions such as Why weren't these children successful in kindergarten? and Why weren't they prepared for kindergarten?

Dawn Martinez, a kindergarten teacher and TNLI DE fellow, and I collaborated in gathering data and resource materials. We created a kindergarten teacher survey; studied her class assessment; joined our district's new Christina Early Childhood Committee; and attended a presentation, "Building Bridges—Zero to Six." I also interviewed a variety of people throughout Delaware concerning preschool policy and programs, such as those involved with Delaware's Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP). "The Delaware Early Childhood Longitudinal Study" (2002) reported interesting results using Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) scores for the same children taking the reading test in third grade and later in fifth grade. The at-risk children who earlier attended ECAP or Head Start outscored at-risk children who did not attend those programs by 20% in third grade and 39% by fifth grade. By fifth grade, the ECAP/Head Start students had nearly caught up to the total population taking the DSTP, and this trend tends to continue. At the same time, the at-risk students who did not attend ECAP/Head Start programs continued to fall further behind, leading to increased retention and dropout. From all that I have read, heard, and learned, a high-quality preschool could better prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten and, consequently, help them be successful in the future.

Investigation into the Effectiveness of a Mentoring Program:
Does mentoring borderline sophomore students make a difference in their academic outcomes?

Christine Bowe
High School English,
William Penn High School,
New Castle

Marsha Evans
High School Math,
William Penn High School,
New Castle

"With a positive mentoring experience, borderline students can rise to the challenge of meeting state and national standards."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The district should structure the Mentoring Program so that it

- clarifies teacher and student expectations,
- improves parent contact and involvement,
- connects with incoming administrators,
- identifies ninth graders who need to be matched with mentors for the following school year.

Summary

The goal of our action research project was to determine the effectiveness of mentoring tenth-grade students and to monitor their progress on the Delaware State Testing Program. We were looking to see if a link could be established between mentoring and getting students who are considered "borderline" to meet the standards.

Most research shows a positive correlation between student achievement in school and participation in an effective mentoring program. During the 2004–2005 school year, William Penn initiated a staff-to-student mentoring program, focusing on borderline students. Over the year, we examined this program to see if it was effective and what changes could be implemented to make it more so. Our research concluded that there were communication issues between the program's goals and the people involved. We plan to implement more of a structured mentoring program for the staff, modeled on various programs already successfully implemented across the country. We also plan to identify the students earlier and develop more activities for the staff mentor and student.

Future implications of this program would include extending the mentoring program to include students in the middle schools and continuing the connection beyond the school day to include mentoring for extracurricular activities.

The success of this program will be determined at the end of the 2006 school year with the release of the DSTP scores. We will also determine success based on the overall performance of those students in school. Finally, we look to continue the program well beyond the 2005–2006 school year.

Working Collaboratively to Build a Learning Community:
How effective are collaborative teaching models for student success?

Lorraine Caputo
Physical Science and Special Ed.,
Sussex Central High,
Georgetown

"Collaborative teaching provides the benefit of two educated minds bringing different angles of learning to students at the classroom level."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institute in all classrooms collaborative teaching of children with learning needs.
- Study the interviews, failure analysis reports, meeting analyses, and video recordings of faculty presentations to gain insight into the importance of collaborative teaching methods.
- Review the analysis of data identifying the correlation between the amount of time spent in a coteaching classroom and the success rate of special education students.
- Consider other collaborative models, including Richard DuFour's work on professional learning communities.
- Provide the least restrictive environment in which students can learn at an achievable level, instituting coteaching as a means of addressing diverse needs.
- Create professional learning communities throughout all public schools.
- Restructure secondary schools to meet time factors so school professionals can collaborate.

Summary

Teacher action research has proven to assist legislatures in developing policy that can shape the culture of a school. Currently, we are in the age of restructuring to improve secondary education, and teachers' voices can impact the decisions made. The changes need to be sustainable. By developing the process of collaboration in the school community, we can renew our most important resource in education—learning—and become an enduring professional learning community.

My research has shown a positive relationship between co-teaching and the success of special education students in that setting. It also qualitatively demonstrates the efforts of a team of educators and administrators to incorporate collaborative teaching models into a school community. The vision of improving student achievement and having all students succeed is based on this collaboration to build a professional learning community.

There is a legal precedent for providing students with special needs with the least restrictive environment (LRE) in which to learn. One LRE approach is co-teaching. This gives an opportunity for all students to benefit from the collaboration of two teachers. It becomes important to clarify how to collaborate for the best interests of the students. By establishing strong relationships as partners, teachers can begin to change the perception of students: that two teachers in a classroom are a positive thing rather than indicative that the students are placed in the slow class. With the reauthorized IDEA that took effect on July 1, 2005, districts and schools must provide intensive professional development to all school staff to improve academic achievement of children with learning needs.

Reflection is another important process for learning. Since this action research is more qualitative, it reveals the need to record quantitative data in all core cotaught courses, looking at the most successful models and working toward analyzing and sharing that information. It also discloses the desire of staff to collaborate as a school community to organize consistent, researched, and exemplary teaching models.

Reducing "Alliteracy" in High School Students:
How can teachers and librarians reduce alliteracy in high schools?

Joanne Collison

Secondary English,
Woodbridge High School,
Bridgeville

"By connecting with high school students on a level of personal interest, teachers and librarians can help them become engaged readers who will develop an appreciation for lifelong reading."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers need to identify students who can read but don't, through tools such as the Gates-MacGinitie assessment.
- Once those students are identified, someone needs to work one-on-one with them to connect them to a book…any book.
- Teachers need to become more familiar with young adult literature and accept that adults and teenagers have different likes and values.
- Teachers and librarians need to talk often about what is happening in the classroom and what is available in the library that would add to the curriculum.
- Students need to spend time talking about books, using guided activities such as Book Pass and book clubs.

Summary

This action research project looks at the growing problem of "alliteracy" (the state of being able to read but being uninterested in doing so) in teenagers and what teachers and school librarians can do to fight the problem. This research establishes a clear connection between teacher expectations and recommendations and student independent reading performance. Using a combination of Gates-MacGinitie defined reading levels, Accelerated Reader diagnostic reports, and library circulation statistics, I am able to show that students can become literate adults.

I began teaching senior English in 2001. I quickly realized the school culture did not include an interest in reading. While the principal mandated sustained silent reading each day and students were required to read ten books outside of their classroom work over the course of the year, students were not successful with their efforts. If my students were to be adequately prepared for college, I needed to turn them into readers. Because the Woodbridge School District administers the Gates-MacGinitie test each spring, I was able to analyze the reading levels of my students. What I found was shocking. It wasn't that my students couldn't read; instead, it appeared that they chose not to. Most of the students who did not complete their annual summer reading assignments tested at a post–high school reading level. If they could read, why were they not reading?

Literature reviewed for the project illuminated three main ideas. First, libraries can be intimidating to young readers because of the seemingly unlimited number of books on the shelves. In other words, students don't know how to get started when selecting a book, so they often just give up. No book, no reading. Next, the publication explosion in young adult literature compounds the large numbers of books in libraries. Additionally, most high school English teachers do not particularly like young adult literature, so they don't read it. Students look to their teachers for recommendations. If teachers are unfamiliar with new books, these recommendations are lacking. Finally, an important revelation from the literature is that "alliterate" readers don't necessarily hate reading or those students who love to read. Kylene Beers identifies three types of "alliterate" readers: dormant, uncommitted, and unmotivated. All English instructors must read Beers.

During the 2004–2005 school year, changes were made in the Woodbridge library to accommodate student needs. I added regular book discussions to planned lessons and started an after-school book club. Both the school librarian and I worked individually with identified students to match books and student interests. By the end of the year, instead of showing a 50% reading failure rate, 57% of students in my classes exceeded their reading expectations.

Consider Advanced Placement for Career Technical Students:

How does offering advanced placement classes in a before-school setting affect a diverse population of students in a vocational school?

Sharon Crossen

Drama and English, Polytech
High School, Woodside

"Students improve their literacy skills best when they have the opportunity to read challenging material in a social environment that enables them to construct their own meaning of the text."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schools should offer challenging coursework specifically designed to meet the scheduling needs of career vocational students.
- Policy makers should publicize the findings of this example to implement a broad-based AP opportunity program to vocational students throughout the state and the nation.

Summary

While fellow students linger in the halls and lobbies socializing, AP English students begin to enter the classroom, some carrying breakfast trays from the school cafeteria. In spite of the early hour, the attendance rate is greater than 90%. The students are highly motivated lovers of literature whose achievement scores may range but whose interest in literature does not flag.

The instructors' goals are to help these students move from an immediate emotional response to literature to a more analytical and critical approach and to get them to use the language of literary analysis. As a literary term is introduced, it is added to a word wall and is available for reference by the teachers or students. Juxtaposition, lyric, metaphor, formal-ism, diction, allegory, verisimilitude, and other terms like them are a part of a word garden that grows through the year.

At one time, Delaware's vocational schools provided AP coursework to interested students. However, when the scores were printed in the local newspaper and used as a basis for com-paring high schools, the vocational schools withdrew from AP offerings.

As instructors, we believed that these students would be successful with challenging course-work if they were given the opportunity to learn it and that their achievement, as recorded by state assessments, would have been higher had they had proper academic opportunities.

The class is composed of twenty-two students, ranging from freshmen to seniors. Initially there were only juniors and seniors in the class. Then, one day early in the initial year of the program, 2003–2004, a freshman timidly walked into the room and asked if she could join, and in the 2004–2005 school year, all four grade levels were represented. This gives the instructors a built-in looping structure that will give us the freshmen for four years.

While the scores for this year's seniors on the AP exam are not available at this writing, there is other evidence. DSTP scores show promising gains for most students for whom pre- and post-AP course data are available, while those who do not demonstrate gains remain close to their pre-test scores.

Most students want to see the class expanded to add more mornings of instruction. The instructors see this class as an affirmation of their belief in the ability of all students to learn at high standards and to benefit from close reading and analysis of high-quality literature.

Walkthrough Supervision:
How does a policy of short, frequent visits by administrators affect student achievement?

Helen E. Gieske

Physics and Chemistry,
Woodbridge High School,
Bridgeville

"Teachers and supervisors need to arrive at a mutually agreeable method of class-room visitation that causes the smallest amount of disruption and offers the greatest amount of help."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schools should modify current practices to establish better communication between super-visor and teachers.
- Schools should develop a more effective dialogue in a nonthreatening manner between supervisor and teachers to enhance profes-sional development.
- Supervisors should give equal attention to teachers in all subject areas so that teachers in noncore subjects feel as if they are a valuable members of the school.

Summary

A new method of teacher supervision has been showing up recently in public school systems. It is not supplanting the traditional method required by state policy but supplementing it. The new method involves frequent short visits to classrooms by a supervisor who looks for patterns in the teaching methods being applied.

Based on the work of W. Edward Deming in the 1950s, one of the objectives of this method of supervision is to reduce the apprehension occurring during regularly scheduled observa-tions for evaluative purposes. As in Deming's industrial model, improved "production" is the main goal of supervision. In the case of education, student progress is the "product" and the goal of the supervision is to improve instruction. With that improvement will come improve-ment in student learning.

Carolyn J. Downey has developed the Three-Minute Walkthrough method of supervision. It is designed to give a clearer picture of what is going on in school classrooms than is attainable through isolated observations. Supervisors make frequent short visits to identify patterns in the management or instruction in each classroom. After several visits, the supervisor opens a dialogue with the teacher to discuss the methods used. The discussions are to be nonthreat-ening and to assist the teacher in professional development.

The purpose of my research was to find out how the application of these methods actually affects the teachers and students in the high school where I teach. I surveyed staff members and students to learn their reactions to the first year of short visits by the curriculum supervisor.

Survey results indicated that neither teachers nor students found the visits to be particularly helpful. The visits without feedback left teachers waiting for some response to what they were doing in their classrooms. The presence of a supervisor was sometimes disruptive to the classes, with special education students most affected. Teachers of math, English, social studies, and science received more visits. Arts, health, and physical education teachers did not receive any visits at all.

Looping…a Loopy Idea?
Does looping increase student achievement?

Candice Hopkins
1st and 2nd Grade, Pleasantville Elementary, New Castle

"Giving students and teachers the advantage of spending two years together in a mutually beneficial educational environment creates extraordinary learning efficiencies and emotional benefits for all involved."

Summary

Looping is a classroom setting in which a teacher moves with his or her students to the next grade level rather than sending them to another teacher at the end of the school year. I learned about the concept of looping and believed that the long-term relationships provided by looping—not only with my students, but also with their families—might lead to increased parental involvement and improved student achievement.

My study examines the last two of my four years of looping classes. My data, drawn from surveying and interviewing parents and students, and the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) tests in reading, writing, and math, demonstrate how looping positively affects a student's social, emotional, and academic development. I also discovered that looping did indeed lead to increased family involvement, which therefore led to students who performed better on state tests than their counterparts at the local, district, and state levels.

It has taken several years to fine-tune the way that I loop with my students and their families. I have successfully engaged the families of my students. To illustrate, at the end of my last loop of 2002 through 2004, I had 100% participation at spring conferences.

For students, looping provides long-term relationships with their teachers, a stable environment, increased confidence, and improved student behavior. There is a smooth transition from one year to another, with no fright factor in year two. Looping allows more time for special needs students to learn skills and for all students to develop the confidence to become independent thinkers and problem solvers.

Teachers benefit from looping. It improves job satisfaction and provides extra teaching time (learning can begin on day one of the second year), and its continuity allows for a more coherent instructional plan appropriate to a child's development. In a two-year period, a teacher is able to know the strengths and weaknesses of her students.

Looping benefits families by providing a sustained joint commitment between teacher, student, and family, creating a familiarity that comes from working together for an extended period of time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Transition to looping because it is easy to implement and does not cost extra.
- Looping teachers' success stories like mine need to be shared with others.
- Looping should move into the mainstream of American educational practice.
- Studies showing the benefits of looping need to be shared with key policy makers at all levels.
- Professional development opportunities should be created for teachers at the local and the district levels to explore looping benefits.
- A pilot looping program should be implemented so that looping classrooms can serve as laboratories for teachers, parents, and policy makers.

Planting the Seeds for Success: Preschool to Kindergarten and Beyond

How can we reach disadvantaged families and preschoolers with information concerning kindergarten preparedness?

Dawn Martinez

Kindergarten and Special Education, Keene Elementary, Newark

"If policy makers were aware of how much impact a positive preschool experience could have on a student's eventual success, all children would be required to attend preschool before entering kindergarten."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should become familiar with studies that cite the impact of quality preschool on academic success in later years.
- Local officials should communicate with their constituents about the availability of preschools in their areas.
- Funding should be made available for low-income families so they can send their children to at least one year of preschool before entering kindergarten.
- Ideally, universal preschool should be instituted at the state or the national level to ensure an equal opportunity for all incoming kindergartners, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Summary

Many children entering kindergarten, especially those from low socioeconomic and/or minority households, come to school with limited or no preschool experience. A 2000 survey completed by kindergarten teachers has reported that, in general, each year a quarter of the incoming kindergarten students lack basic skills in social, emotional, motor, and academic areas (Rim-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox). Kindergarten programs are increasingly placing more academic demands on students as evidenced by state and district standards and benchmarks. In fact, kindergarten programs look more like pre-first- or first-grade classrooms with a strong emphasis on reading and literacy skills. There are learning and skill acquisition gaps between preschool and kindergarten, and these gaps often continue to impact student achievement in upper grades. How can the gaps between preschool and kindergarten be bridged in order to build a strong foundation for future learning success?

Affordable quality preschool is in high demand. Those families at the upper income levels frequently take advantage of quality preschool opportunities. However, for many families in lower income brackets or those families with minority classifications, quality preschool is a missed opportunity. It also proves difficult for middle-income families to take full advantage of quality preschool opportunities. One possible solution is universal preschool. Although the price tag for this proposal is costly, it has a reported seven-to-one return on investment in broad public benefits. Studies have shown some of the following results: better academic achievement in school and on achievement tests, and the narrowing of the achievement gap between poor and/or minority students and more advantaged students.

My action research project looks at bridging early childhood education from preschool to kindergarten and future grades. It explores the prerequisite skills kindergarten teachers identify as important for entering kindergarten students to possess, the skill deficits that kindergarten teachers see in the students entering kindergarten, and the ways in which teachers can reach disadvantaged preschoolers and their families with materials and information to better prepare the children for kindergarten.

Closing the Achievement Gap:
Would an ethnocentric curriculum raise the achievement levels of my struggling minority students?

Chris McLean

8th Grade Social Studies, Conrad Middle School, Wilmington

"If students desire to learn more about their own culture, they should be encouraged to learn within that framework. If, on the other hand, the learning gap is simply a cultural bias against education itself, we have a different issue on our hands."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research should be done to see if the results of an ethnocentric curriculum differ by age.
- If student achievement is performance-based versus learning-based, determine why many Asian students can still achieve without an ethnocentric curriculum.
- Determine whether the gap is due to cultural issues and if more time should be spent on changing cultural perceptions of education rather than the material itself.
- Teachers need to acknowledge other ethnic groups and allow for choices in their classrooms where students can learn more about their own ethnic group if they choose to.

Summary

Minority students around the United States are scoring lower on standardized tests and graduating at a lower percentage than Caucasians. In Delaware, students graduate with a basic, standard, or distinguished diploma. In 2004, 76% of African Americans graduating in Delaware received the lowest form of diploma, a basic diploma, compared to 71% of Hispanics and 41% of Caucasians. Twenty-two percent of the African American graduates received the standard diploma, compared to 28% of the Hispanics and 48% of the Caucasians. Only 2% of the graduating African Americans achieved the distinguished diploma, compared to 1% of the Hispanic graduates and 11% of the Caucasian graduates. Overall, Asian students fared the best, having the lowest percentage receiving basic diplomas (30%) and the highest percentage achieving distinguished diplomas (24%).

These figures show that across the state, Hispanics and African Americans are well behind their peers when it comes to academic achievement. These figures are similar to figures across the United States. This research report focuses on trying to narrow this gap by infusing an ethnocentric curriculum into classrooms to attempt to boost interest and achievement for these struggling minority learners.

After analyzing the data from the surveys, I learned that more than half of the African American and Hispanic students feel their education has not provided them with knowledge of their own ethnic group. The Hispanics had a greater number who expressed this sentiment, followed by the African American students. Both groups overwhelmingly claim to have more interest in what they are doing when their learning pertains to their own ethnic group. Both groups of students expressed the desire for and interest in this type of education; however, the data from work done in the classroom seem to contradict this interest. It appears that at the eighth-grade level, the majority of the students are more concerned about which project is the easiest rather than what the topic is about. The cause of that may be that the students are performance driven instead of learning driven. What that means is that the majority of the students may be more concerned about just getting a passing grade instead of learning the material. In the case of the students who did choose the option related to minorities, there wasn't an overwhelming increase in the student achievement. The majority of the students stayed consistent with how they usually perform. One interesting note when analyzing the students who stayed the same is that the majority of these students were already high achievers and their achievement stayed high.

"What's Going On in There?"
How does structured teacher collaboration influence student achievement?

Denise Snyder

Special Education, East Millsboro Elementary, Millsboro

"As lifelong learners, teachers are always looking for ways in which to grow and develop their already finely tuned skills. Collaboration provides a forum for them to do just that."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should study the results of the benefits of teacher collaboration as it affects test scores and teacher morale.
- Schools should build time into the school day/year for teacher collaboration, in order to allow for better problem-solving skills and enhanced teacher effectiveness.
- School administrators should foster an attitude of mutual benefit among teachers, eliminating isolation and creating a positive atmosphere in which to educate students.

Summary

Collaboration is the topic for this research project: structured time within the school day for teachers to meet with their peers and discuss the achievement of their students in terms of common assessments that are given within the instructional groups at a particular grade level. The primary focus group of this study was a kindergarten group of at-risk students who received instruction from both a regular and a resource teacher in an all-day setting. The teachers of these students as well as the other kindergarten teachers in the school were part of a collaborative group that met during the school day for ninety minutes each week to discuss their students' academic progress. During these meetings, planning for academics was not discussed; rather, the time was used to focus on specific learning strengths and weaknesses of individual students.

Teachers also assessed their own learning strengths and weaknesses and applied that assessment to their teaching methods. Particular teachers instructed specific groups of students so that the task matched the teacher. This proved to be beneficial to the students as their test scores increased significantly throughout the year.

Teachers found the collaboration to be effective for student achievement, but they also noticed a bond that formed between the participants. A camaraderie was established, and teachers felt free to openly discuss the strengths of particular lessons as well as share any obstacles they faced during their instructional day. This willingness to share is contrary to the way most teachers operate in American schools. According to research, most teachers are content to close their doors and simply teach. By taking part in a collaborative group, teachers are flinging open their doors and inviting everyone inside not only to watch them teach, but also to help them learn. Collaborative teachers are lifelong learners who believe that when you are teaching, you, too, are learning.

The data presented in this study support the idea of teachers working together to further the achievement of all students, not just those in the "golden classes." All students can learn, and all teachers can learn to teach those students in such a way that they are able to continue to learn for the rest of their lives.

It's More than Throwing Out the Ball:
Do children who are physically active during the school day perform better in school than those who are not?

Carolann Space
Health and Phys. Ed., Charter School of Wilmington, Wilmington

"It's easy to identify the benefits of a positive mind/body relationship, and it seems undeniable that physical exertion helps students think more clearly. So we would better serve our students if we mandated physical fitness classes during every semester of the school career."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Delaware policy makers should consider requiring all students to take physical education class during every semester of the high school career.
- Delaware should consider adopting new state physical education standards that increase student fitness levels and teach students how to sustain a healthful lifestyle through a variety of activities.

Summary

Today's students face greater pressures to perform at a higher level and are expected to take higher-level classes. With all these added pressures and demands, students are experiencing higher levels of stress and an increase of health problems such as obesity. Because schools are placing more emphasis on learning, many of the "extra" programs, such as physical education, are being reduced. As a result of the reduction in physical education classes, the number of overweight children has been increasing. In the state of Delaware alone, about 25% of the students are considered to be overweight. For this reason, schools should be placing more emphasis on increasing physical education instead of decreasing it. If the ultimate goal is to increase academic performance, then physical education should be included as a critical part of a curriculum.

Throughout history, physical education has played an important role in both education and society. The data state that students who are physically fit perform better academically. Those who are physically active have a greater potential to learn. Research has shown that cognitive performance is improved by aerobic activity. There is strong evidence that students will perform better in school if they are physically active.

Student surveys were given to 171 students who were enrolled in physical education class during their sophomore or junior year. A two-week teacher observation was performed on twenty randomly selected students. A GPA (grade point average) analysis was performed to see if students who were enrolled in physical education during a given semester had a higher GPA compared to the semester when they were not enrolled in physical education class.

Preliminary findings showed that of the 171 students surveyed, ninety-two stated a positive response toward physical fitness. Many students noted that after physical education class, they were more alert and were able to concentrate more in their other classes. The teachers had favorable responses about their students' behavior and actions after they had participated in physical education class. The GPA analysis showed a positive relationship between physical activity and academic achievement. Of the 171 students whose GPAs were analyzed, eighty-eight had higher GPAs during the semester in which they were enrolled in physical education class than during the semester they were not.

Leaving No Child Behind:
Can you motivate an underachieving regular education student to graduate?

Greer Stangl

7th Grade Social Studies,
Milford Middle School,
Milford

"If underachievers can be reached in the middle schools, with personal instruction and appropriate incentives for advancement, these students can succeed in high school and ultimately graduate."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Instead of expecting high schools to make up for lost time, schools need to establish initiatives that support under-achievers in middle schools.
- Policy makers should look at individual growth on a variety of measures as the best indicator of how well we are serving children, instead of grouping them in a "cell" that has to meet a goal.
- Policy makers should study the effects of mobility; more needs to be learned about the transient nature of our under-achieving population in the context of assessment scores for accountability and instruction.
- Middle schools need to do more to prepare students for the academic, social, and emotional demands of high school.

Summary

Something new was taking place at the largest middle school in Delaware for the 1999–2000 school year, and none of us knew quite what to think about it, much less how it would turn out.

My teaching assignment was to pilot a program for twenty seventh graders who had been retained at least two times; none had documented learning disabilities. I was told that I would be the reading and language arts teacher (meaning they were with me two hours per day); I would have an extra planning period to use for tutoring the students as well as for arranging for intervention services needed outside the classroom setting. I was also told I would have the support of the at-risk coordinator and two school-based counselors. I was assigned to an interdisciplinary team that would provide the math, science, and social studies instruction.

The students were told that if they made the 3.25 honor roll for the first and second marking periods, they would be promoted to grade eight at midyear. They were also told that if they continued to meet the honor-roll criteria for the remaining marking periods and passed the state's assessment (DSTP) in math and reading (per new state law), they would be allowed to attend high school in the fall as freshmen.

My students were highly motivated by the opportunity to erase one year of failure and were also highly suspicious of the deal they were making with the school. At no time did any student indicate doubt that he or she could meet these goals for promotion. This last state-ment is worth repeating. Of the twenty students who began the program, seventeen remained as students in our school and sixteen advanced to high school in the fall of 2000. Only one failed to meet the promotion criteria.

The program suffered the effects of changing administrations and ceased to exist as it was piloted. A couple of years later, a student from the program came to see me. She asked, "Why aren't they doing it any more? What will happen to kids like me?" I knew from her concerned tone and thoughtful question that there was a population in our school, probably in most schools, that needed our attention. I also knew that unless I documented what happened that year, the benefit of our experience would be lost forever. Sixteen of seventeen students graduated to ninth grade by meeting the goals of the pilot program. And 85% of those students graduated from high school.

Though not quantifiable, I offer this advice to teachers of underachievers: Love them. Respect them. Set high standards and show them every minute that you believe they can meet those standards…and be prepared to go the extra mile to show you mean it. You won't be the only one giving a test.

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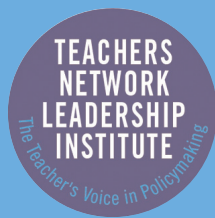the web at **www.rodelfoundationde.org**.

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