

**An Evaluation of the
High School Initiatives 2000+ of
Richland School District Two**

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Executive Summary

An evaluation team from the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) and the South Carolina Educational Policy Center (SCEPC) at the University of South Carolina (USC) at the University of South Carolina (USC) conducted an evaluation of the High School Initiatives 2000+ (HSI) Program of Richland School District Two (RCSD2) between March and December 2004. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the Initiatives program in the promotion of student success. The goal of the Initiatives is to provide a learning environment where students can be successful, both academically and socially, through a series of safety nets designed to assist students in making the transition from middle school through high school graduation.

The evaluation team administered questionnaires to 1,276 9th-grade students and 315 teachers from the district's three high schools. Focus groups were conducted with students in grades 10-12 and with parents at each school. An evaluation advisory committee consisting of district-level staff and teachers reviewed data collection instruments to assist the evaluation team in conducting an evaluation responsive to district concerns. In addition, members of the evaluation team met with the principals of each high school to determine evaluation issues relevant to their schools as related to the High School Initiatives 2000+.

Major Findings

The major findings from the teacher and student questionnaires are summarized below. Additional information from the focus groups is provided in the body of the report.

Academic Skills and Preparation

Students and teachers agree that Richland School District Two provides an academically demanding curriculum. Survey items receiving the highest percentage of agreement from teachers were *Overall, I feel that the school is preparing students well academically* (89%) and *At this school, students have to work hard to get good grades* (87%). For students, the items with the highest percentage of agreement were *At this school, I have to work hard to get good grades* (86%), *Overall, I feel that the school is preparing me well academically* (82%), and *I have improved my test-taking skills this year* (82%).

The items receiving the lowest levels of agreement from teachers were *Over the past three years, I have seen an improvement in my students' ability to manage their time* (46%) and *Over the past three years, students have improved their note-taking skills* (51%). The fewest students were in agreement with the items, *I have improved my study skills this year* (69%), *My English/language arts classes are interesting* (66%), and *My mathematics classes are interesting* (48%).

Comparison of responses of students with all passing grades and students with a failing grade provides insight into the needs of struggling students. Agreement levels were lower for failing students for items relating to improving study skills (11 point difference), receiving the help needed to improve academic skills (12 point difference), and feeling

that the school is preparing the student well academically (12 point difference). Also, students who previously earned an F less often indicated agreement with the statements that *I have improved my test-taking skills this year* (9 point difference) and *I have improved my ability to manage my time this year* (9 point difference)

School Climate

Overall, teachers perceived their school climate to be positive (64% - 99%); whereas student agreement with items was more far-ranging (43%-97%). Teachers' level of agreement for many of the school climate items was in the range of 87%- 99%. Items receiving the highest percentages of agreement from students were *I care if I finish high school* (97%); *At this school, there are many clubs, sport activities, and other organizations for students to join* (93%); and *I have many friends at this school* (87%).

The school climate items with the lowest levels of agreement by teachers were *At this school, there is a real school spirit* (64%) and *The guidance counselors provide students with useful advice* (68%). The items least endorsed by students were *I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems* (44%) and *I look forward to coming to school in the morning* (43%).

Items related to climate showed differences between students with failing grades and those with no failing grades. Differences occur for items that address students feeling like they belong (9% points difference), respect from teachers (9% points difference), students caring about what teachers think of them (12% points difference), and teachers and students getting along well with each other (10% points difference).

Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards

A majority of teachers agreed with most of the items about school rules (69%-98%). A majority of students agreed with the following items:

- *I would work harder in class to gain privileges* (85%).
- *At this school, you get into trouble if you do not follow the rules* (83%).
- *It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well* (83%).
- *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules* (73%).
- *It is fair to require tutoring if my grades are too low* (73%).

The lowest level of agreement for teachers was for the item, *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule* (45%). This item also had the lowest level of agreement for students (42%). In addition, students had a low level of agreement with the statements, *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school if my grades are too low* (60%) and *The rules about how students should behave in my school are fair* (59%).

Students with failing grades reported being sent to the administrator for misbehaving more often than did their peers with passing grades. They less often were inclined to agree with statements about fairness of awarding privileges to those with good grades and who behave well.

Reporting Student Progress

Students registered higher agreement levels (66% – 88%) on the reporting student progress items than teachers (61 – 69%). The item with the highest percentage of agreement by teachers was *Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped parents keep up with students' work* (69%). A majority of students (88%) agreed with the item, *My parent or guardian knows how well I am doing in school*.

For teachers, the item with the lowest percentage of agreement was *Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped students get the extra help they need to succeed* (61%). For students, the item with the lowest percentage of agreement (66%) was *I consistently give my three-week grade reports to my parents*.

The greatest difference between students who received passing grades and those who have received a failing grade was for the item, *I consistently give my three-week grade reports to my parents* (11% points difference). Students with failing grades generally reported lower level of agreements on the items related to reporting school progress.

Scheduling

Teachers registered higher agreement levels (43% – 93%) than students (47% – 67%) on the scheduling items. The scheduling item receiving the highest percentage of agreement (93%) from teachers was *The length of a class should be based on the nature of the course*. A slight majority of students agreed with the items, *Overall, I like my 45-minute classes better than my 90-minute classes* (69%) and *I spend more time doing homework during my 90-minute classes than during my 45-minute classes* (61%).

Teacher agreement was the lowest (43%) for the item, *Overall, students learn more in 90-minute semester classes than in the 45-minute year-long classes*. Student agreement was lowest (47%) for the items *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than in my 45-minute classes* and *Students are better behaved in my 45-minute classes than in my 90-minute classes*.

The agreement levels of the students with passing grades and those with failing grades were most different for the items related to spending more time with hands-on activities (6% points difference), and spending more time working in groups (7% points difference) in 90-minute classes than in 45-minute classes.

Grading

Overall, teachers responded positively to grading items (78% – 95%). A majority of teachers indicated that they always or often engaged in the following grading practices:

- *I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card* (95%).
- *I tell students what to study for a test* (92%).
- *I grade and return assigned work within a week* (86%).
- *I write comments on students' graded work to identify strengths and weaknesses* (78%).

A majority of students agreed with the grading items, *My English teacher tells us what to study for a test* (85%) and *My math teacher tells us what to study for a test* (78%).

For teachers, the item with the lowest level of agreement was *I write comments on students' graded work to identify strengths and weaknesses* (78%). The lowest level of agreement for students was for the following items:

- *My English teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card* (42%).
- *My math teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve* (43%).
- *My math teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card* (44%).

In the comparison of responses from students with passing grades with those students with a failing grade, the largest differences were for the items related to math teachers grading and returning class work within a week (9% points difference) and English teachers writing comments on graded work to let students know where they can improve (13 points difference). Overall, differences were small (1% to 4% points difference).

Professional Early Planning (PEP)

Teacher agreement levels were high on PEP items related to its use for curriculum alignment, the ability of PEP to foster a sense of collaboration with their colleagues, and its use to examine student assessment data to improve instruction. As expected, the items with the lowest percentage of agreement were *I mostly use my PEP time for routine classroom tasks like grading papers* (14%) and *The administration uses PEP time for faculty meetings or other non-PD activities* (27%).

HSI Outcomes

A majority of teachers (85%) indicated that the HSI program has gone smoothly the previous year and that it should continue to operate. Approximately three-fourths of the teachers agreed that the HSI had favorably affected the school's learning environment and student learning.

Feeling Part of the School, Knowledge of the School, and Academic Success

Approximately half of students (55%) assigned their school an A or B for helping them feel part of the school. In their responses to an open-ended question about the various programs or activities that were helpful in feeling part of their high school, activities often listed by students included pep rallies (8%) and football (7%). Fifty-five percent of students also assigned their high school an A or B for helping them gain knowledge of the school. When asked to list the program or activity that helped them in getting to know their high school, students most frequently wrote football (8%), marching band (6%), pep rallies (5%), and the Freshmen Mentoring Program (5%).

Eighty-two percent of teachers compared to 61% of students assigned their high school an A or B for helping students succeed academically. Seventy-three percent of

teachers assigned their school an A or B for helping students in their transition from middle to high school.

Grades and Behavior

One goal of the Initiative was to decrease the number of failing grades. In English, 9.0% of students received a failing grade in 2000-2001. The percentage of failing grades in English increased to 16.3% in 2001-2002, decreased to 13.6% the following year, and increased again to 14.1% in 2003-2004. In mathematics, the percentage of students earning an F increased slightly from 22.1% in 2000-2001 to 22.8% in 2001-2002, declined to 17.9 in 2003-2003, and increased again in 2003-2004 to 22.5%. Thus, no trend in the reduction of F's is evident.

It does not appear that the percentage of 9th-grade students receiving a failing grade is related to strict grading practices in high school. The percentage of 9th-grade students who received a failing grade is lower than the percentage of students in the cohort who earned a *Below Basic* classification on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test as 8th-grade students. According to the State Department of Education, PACT scores may be considered an indicator of a student's likelihood of success in the next grade level. Thus, the percentage of 9th-grade students who experience failure in a subject area is lower than might be expected according to PACT scores.

Another key goal of the Initiative was to assist students to be successful socially. To examine the effect of HSI on behavioral success, the percentage of in-school and out-of-school suspensions from the period of 2000-2004 were compiled. Out-of-school suspensions increased from 34% in 2000-2001 to 39% in 2002-2002 and remained at 38% for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. In-school suspensions showed an initial drop from 22% in 2000-2001 to 21% in 2001-2002 and increased slightly in the two subsequent years (23% in 2002-2003 and 27% in 2003-2004). Thus, a decline in suspensions does not appear to be associated with the Initiative.

The trends for grades and suspensions should be interpreted with caution. It is unknown whether the failure rates or suspension rates would have been higher if the High School Initiative were not in place.

Commendations and Recommendations

Academic Skills and Preparation

Richland School District Two is commended for its initiative to provide a learning environment where students can be successful, both academically and socially. Overall, students (82%) and teachers (89%) agreed that their school prepared students well academically. Students (86%) and teachers (87%) also agreed that students have to work hard to make good grades. In addition, over 90% of teachers and 9th grade students agreed with a statement that students seemed to care if they finished high school.

A need for continued improvement of strategies to improve student academics is reflected in the continued high failure rate of 9th grade students. The percentage of 9th-grade students who failed either English or mathematics did not decrease during the time period from 2001-2004. Also, only 61% of students and 82% of teachers assigned their school an A or B for helping students succeed academically. The development of strategies should consider the role of the middle schools in preparing students for high school. The *Below Basic* scores on 8th-grade PACT ranged between 21%-26% in English language arts and 24%-30% in mathematics, indicating that approximately 25% of students were likely to encounter academic challenges in the 9th grade.

The district is to be commended for its tutorial programs. When students were asked what activity or program helped them to be academically successful, tutoring sessions and the Tutoring and Testing Centers were listed by slightly more than 11% of the students. Similar responses were given by students in the focus groups, teachers in their survey, and parents in their focus groups. However, some students, parents, and teachers mentioned that tutoring opportunities needed to be expanded and coordinated with classroom teacher expectations.

The evaluation team recommends that the district examine the provision of study skill instruction to 9th-grade students. Study skills appear to contribute to student academic success. For example, as compared with students with all passing grades, students who received failing grades less often indicated they had improved their study skills (e.g., note-taking, test-taking, time management). However, only about half of teachers indicated that over the prior three years that students had improved their note-taking skills (51%), their ability to manage their time (46%), or their study skills (57%).

School Climate

Another commendation is for the commitment of high schools in their offering of programs and activities that promote student engagement in the school environment. A majority of students and teachers endorsed a survey item about the availability of clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students to join. Survey results also revealed that freshmen orientation and social activities, such as football, pep rallies, and lunch, helped students to feel part of their school. These results are consistent with research findings suggesting that participation in extracurricular activities connects students to school, helps build student-adult relationships, and motivates students to stay in school (Holloway, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Davalos, et. al., 1999).

In terms of programs and activities, the evaluation team suggests that all high schools provide a structured orientation for freshmen where they have the opportunity to learn their class schedules and become knowledgeable about the organizations and activities available at the school. The district may also want to consider making changes to the school schedule so that clubs and organizations have the opportunity to meet at a time when all students are available to participate.

School climate presents some challenges. The evaluation team recommends that the high schools invite input from students about activities or programs that would help them feel connected to their school. In their responses to an item on school spirit, students' and teachers' almost identical agreement levels (66% and 64%, respectively) indicated a need to review school climate issues. Students registered some of the lowest agreement levels on *school climate* items. When comparing the agreement levels of teachers and students, differences in agreement level exist on items such as *I look forward to coming to school in the morning* (46% points difference), *I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems/Students come to me when they have problems* (44% points difference), and *Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school* (34% points difference). Also, the percentage of suspensions did not decrease during this period.

The evaluation team also recommends that high schools solicit feedback about existing programs from students, parents, and teachers on an on-going basis. Input should also be elicited during the development and implementation of new strategies and programs.

Another focus should be developing strategies for engaging students with failing grades. Students who have earned a failing grade appeared less engaged in the schools. As compared to their peers with passing grades, they less often indicated they felt as if they belonged (9% points difference), they received respect from teachers (9% points difference), they cared about what teachers thought of them (12% points difference), and teachers and students got along well with each other (10% points difference).

Counseling

Feedback from students, parents, and teachers about counseling indicates the need for review of these services. The Initiative is meant to promote student success academically and socially. With evident disengagement of students being associated with problems, the district should consider ways to expand the services that counseling provides, especially for at-risk students.

Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards

Items in the *Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards* section of the student and teacher surveys addressed components of REP. The overall REP strategy receives strong support by the teachers and mixed support of students. A majority of students (85%) and teachers (86%) indicated that students are willing to work harder to earn privileges. Also, a majority of students (83%) and teachers (98%) indicated it is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well.

Based on student feedback about the role of school activities in their getting to know the school and feel a part of their high school, the practice of reducing the lunch period or elimination of involvement in school activities should be examined to determine if these actions should be used for inappropriate behavior and low grades.

The evaluation team recommends a review of the administrative practices for disciplinary actions. Students and teachers registered close agreement levels (42% of

students; 45% of teachers) on the item, *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule*. These agreement levels on this last item suggest that schools could benefit from a closer examination of the issue of fairness. In addition, this was an area of concern raised by some teachers in their responses to an open-ended item about needed changes in HSI. Consideration should be given to whether disciplinary actions should be on a case by case decision or whether disciplinary actions should be equally implemented across cases. The decision should be clearly communicated to teachers and students.

The district should examine whether the use of a REP period for students who earn a low grade is preferable to the use of tutoring. Students' responses to the issue of privileges appear to vary according to the situation. While 60% agree with the practice of limiting privileges when grades are low, agreement with the limitation of privileges increases to 73% when linked to behavior. Also, 73% of students agreed with the statement that it is fair to require *tutoring* when grades are too low. As one student remarked: "Can't learn it on our own [in REP]. Wouldn't be in REP if we could." For the item on tutoring, students with an F on their 9-week report card basically agreed with their peers who had not earned an F (2% point difference). Thus, to some degree, students appear to be separating the issue of behavior and grades and the district should consider low grades as a need for tutoring, not REP. In addition, although some teachers supported the REP period, others noted that it was basically a detention period that required teacher time and did not improve student learning.

The use of REP alone may not help students who have earned a failing grade. As compared to their peers with passing grades, students who have earned a failing grade less often agreed with the statements *It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well* (13% point difference), *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules* (10% point difference), and *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when my grades are too low* (16% point difference). If students who have earned an F do not accept the premise that responsibility earns privileges, then the ability of the REP component of the Initiative to help them improve academically should be examined by the schools.

Reporting Student Progress

The district should be commended for its implementation of the three-week grade report. The only area where students indicated higher agreement levels than teachers was for items related to reporting student progress. Generally, student-teacher differences in agreement level were 10 or more percentage points. A majority of students indicated that the three-week grade report has helped them to keep up with their work (78%) and helped them to get the extra assistance they need to succeed (72%).

Two recommendations are offered to improve the three-week grade report. The district should explore ways to make them more available to parents. Only 66% of students indicated they consistently gave the three-week reports to their parents. Students who had received one or more F's also less often indicated that they consistently give their

three-week grade to their parents. In addition, the schools should eliminate the use of three-week reports to make decisions about REP in the first 3 weeks of a course. Students in the focus groups indicated that 3-week reports at the beginning of the year on occasion are based on as few as two or three grades. They questioned the accuracy of these grades and indicated that the first three-week report should not be used for making decisions about REP.

Grading

A recommendation for grading practices is to encourage teachers to communicate to students the method for calculation of their report card grades. In terms of grading practices, students differed from teachers by as much as 50% points on the items *I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card* and *My English/math teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card*. If students are to monitor their academic progress, then they should be clear on how grades are calculated.

Scheduling

The district is to be commended on its focus on the appropriate use of scheduling to meet the varying instructional needs of academic courses. In the responses to items on scheduling, a majority (93%) of teachers agreed with the statement that the length of the class should be based on the nature of the course. Teachers' focus on the nature of the course appears appropriately placed.

A recommendation is for teachers to use PEP sessions to consider the use of time in the 90-minute classes. The largest difference in student-teacher agreement level appeared on the item *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than my 45-minute classes/ Students in 90-minute classes spend more time teaming with other students in learning* (25% points difference). A similar difference (24% points difference) occurred for an item that asked whether 90-minute classes spend more time with hands-on activities than in 45-minute classes. Consideration should be given to whether more active modes of learning, such as hands-on activities and group work, will improve student academic progress and engagement

Professional Early Planning (PEP)

PEP appears to be a positive professional development experience for teachers. Overall, teachers responded positively to the PEP items. A recommendation for PEP is to reinforce the appropriate use of PEP time and clearly communicate this policy to faculty and administration. Although the endorsement levels were low for items about the use of PEP time for routine classroom tasks like grading papers (14%) and for faculty meetings or other non-PD activities (27%), the focus of the time should be to improve the social and academic success of high school students.

Background

Between March and December 2004, an evaluation team from the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) and the South Carolina Educational Policy Center (SCEPC) at the University of South Carolina (USC) conducted an evaluation of the High School Initiatives 2000+ (HSI) Program of Richland School District Two (RCSD II). The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the Initiatives program in the promotion of student success.

Overview of the High School Initiatives 2000+

The High School Initiatives 2000+ (HSI 2000+) program was designed to address the needs of high school freshmen who had difficulty in making the transition from middle school to high school. Analyses of district data found that unacceptable numbers of freshmen were failing courses and not being promoted to sophomore status at the end of the freshmen year. The HSI 2000+ included strategies focused on supporting the academic and social development of students transitioning from middle school to high school.

Interviews with the three high school principals who participated in HSI 2000+ revealed that the original strategies for implementation were modified over time to address the needs of each school. The following sections provide a brief description of the purpose of the individual strategies and how they were implemented in the district's high schools during 2003-2004.

Academic Skills and Preparation (ASAP)

The goal of the ASAP strategy was to reduce the retention rate for first-time freshmen by providing additional academic support for at-risk students. Students were selected for the program based on MAP scores or scores from the eighth grade PACT. ASAP services focused on English I in two schools, while the third school focused on Algebra I and Math for the Technologies. Students receiving ASAP services attended an additional class of either English or math in the class period that followed their regular English or math course. In the ASAP courses, students received additional help to reinforce skills taught in the regular classes and also worked on test-taking skills, study skills, and other skills that were needed to help them become academically successful.

Clear and Consistent Communication – Grading

A second goal of the initiatives program was to provide effective feedback to the parent or guardian and student about the student's academic progress and information about the availability of remedial assistance if appropriate. In all three high schools, students' course grades were given to the students to take home every three weeks. In one school, some teachers sent home weekly reports and routinely e-mailed parents. At a second school, lead teachers for the three freshmen academies monitored student grades and arranged tutoring where necessary. Lead teachers also served as a single

point of contact for parents at one of the high schools and contacted parents if students' grades dropped.

Counselor Watch

The Counselor Watch strategy was designed to track rising ninth-grade students who have been identified by their middle school guidance counselors as at-risk. These students participated in a summer survival course held at each high school. In addition, these students were to be monitored regularly by their high school guidance counselors and mentor teachers. Approximately 20-25 students participated in summer survival at each of the high schools. Programs at two of the high schools lasted for two weeks and one program for one week. During the summer survival program, students learned about the school and what to expect in high school. They also worked on topics such as time management, study skills, and team building. In addition, individual schools helped students to master assigned summer reading, worked on social skills, or taught students about group work. During the year, teacher mentors monitored these students at one high school. The students were not monitored in any systematic way by guidance counselors at the three high schools following the students' participation in the summer survival program.

Freshman Mentoring program (FMP)

The purpose of the freshmen mentoring strategy was to provide support to students to facilitate their transition from middle school to high school. Each high school implemented this strategy in a different way. One high school conducted six assemblies for freshmen focused on topics selected by upper-class students (for example, the dangers of drinking). Upper-class students mentored freshmen students during a portion of the lunch period (two days per week) at another high school. Students learned about the school traditions, traits of effective people, planning for the future and other related topics. Students with acceptable grades at the end of the first semester no longer participated in FMP, while those with low grades received tutoring from teachers in math and English in a "freshmen REP" program. The second semester seminars were considered part of ASAP by the principal in this school. In a third school, upper-class students served as mentors to freshmen students who participated in seminars. The seminars incorporated orientation to the high school, study skills, group dynamics, and time management. Student mentors were trained on specific activities, such as an activity in group dynamics, and then went into the seminar class to conduct the activity.

Tutoring and Testing Center

Testing and tutoring centers were established in all of the high schools to provide a range of services to students. Management configurations of the tutoring and testing centers consisted of:

- a teacher (alone for one period per day) assisted by teachers with "holes" in their schedules, two aides with no teacher certification, and trained student tutors;

- a former dental hygienist assisted by teachers with “holes” in their schedules and tutors from a variety of backgrounds; and
- two administrative monitors with no teacher certification.

In all three schools, students completed make-up tests in these centers. In two schools, transition students who lost class time during a move received assistance. Students received a variety of services, such as tutoring, access to web-based instruction for a class that the student failed, career counseling, and the opportunity to make up excessive absences or missed work.

Responsibility Earns Privileges (REP)

REP is a layered system of privileges that increase as students progress through high school. Students with specified academic grades and no discipline referrals are rewarded with privileges such as parking on campus or going off campus for lunch in all three high schools. REP also provides disincentives for students who receive one or more grades of “F” during a grading period. Students at two schools were required to give up their first 15 or 20 minutes of lunch for REP. The expectation was that students bring homework or work to the sessions. Students were not allowed to talk during the REP period. In these two schools, students with one “F” after each grading period were expected to have six hours of tutoring. Multiple F’s required attendance of lunchtime REP and additional tutoring. In the third school, there was no time for the REP period because the lunch period was not long enough to accommodate it. In all three schools, privileges mainly included parking and the ability to leave campus for lunch.

Professional Early Planning (PEP)

PEP was designed to provide a scheduled time each week for teachers to participate in collaborative planning or professional development activities. The high schools had “late start” one day each week, with the students reporting to school approximately one hour later on Wednesdays. PEP time was not intended to be used for regular teacher meetings, individual teacher planning time, meetings with administrators, or other similar activities. According to district staff, each of the four monthly Wednesday sessions was typically scheduled to address the total department, specified grade levels, professional development, or other identified topics. At the departmental level, issues or information shared were those relevant to all members of the department. Grade level teachers met to address issues specific to their particular grade such as curriculum, grading, or other concerns. Professional development sessions included topics such as test score interpretation, use of writing rubrics, sharing of new curriculum or assessments, etc.

Modified Block Scheduling

Modified block scheduling is a combination of 45-minute classes with 90 to 97-minute classes depending on the type of class and requirements for effective student learning. For example, science classes were typically 90 to 97 minutes for one semester block in all high schools to allow for hands-on activities and laboratory exercises. Other classes

such as foreign language tended to be scheduled for shorter periods all year long to support the students' learning and practices of skills.

Methodology

To gauge the effectiveness of the High School Initiative in the promotion of student success, the evaluation team surveyed teachers and 9th-grade students. The team also conducted focus groups with students in grades 10-12 and with parents. Data collection tools included questionnaires for teachers (see Appendix A) and students (see Appendix B) and focus groups for parents (see Appendix C) and students (see Appendix D). An evaluation advisory committee consisting of district-level staff and teachers reviewed these data collection tools to assist the evaluation team in conducting an evaluation responsive to district concerns. In addition, members of the evaluation team met with the principals at each high school to determine evaluation issues relevant to their schools as related to the High School Initiatives 2000+. The evaluation team also obtained data about student behavior and grades from Dr. Jennifer Gouvin, director of the Quality Assessment office.

The teacher questionnaire asked teachers to indicate agreement or disagreement with items related to ASAP; school climate; rules, behaviors, and rewards; reporting student progress; scheduling; Professional Early Planning (PEP), and outcomes of the HSI program. Items used a 4-point scale with descriptors from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. For analysis, responses of *agree* or *strongly agree* were collapsed into an *agree* category. Combination of the two levels of agreement allows us to see the percentage of students and teachers who are in general agreement with a statement. The questionnaire also included a section on the frequency of activities associated with grading. The scale descriptors ranged from *never* to *all the time*. The highest two categories, *often* and *all the time*, were collapsed in order to report the percentage of teachers indicating they used a grading practice often or all the time. A section with open-ended items solicited teachers' opinion on the program that most helped students to transition into high school and succeed academically. Teachers were also asked to grade their school on the assistance they provided students to succeed academically and to suggest changes to the HSI program that, in their opinion, were most needed. The last section on the teacher questionnaire dealt with respondent information, e.g. level of education, type of teaching certificate, number of years taught, and subject area.

The student questionnaire paralleled the teacher questionnaire in soliciting students' opinion about ASAP; school climate; rules, behaviors, and rewards; reporting student progress; and scheduling. Items in these sections of the student survey used a 4-point scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). Students were also asked to indicate the frequency (*never* to *all the time*) with which teachers performed tasks associated with grading. The same form of analysis was used with students' responses as with teachers' responses. In the open-ended section, students were asked to indicate the program or activity that helped them the most in getting to know the people, places, and

traditions at their school; being academically successful; and helping them feel a part of the school. In addition, students were asked to grade their school in each of these three areas. In the final section, students were asked to indicate the amount of time they spend on homework, the initiatives in which they have participated, whether they had a tutor or mentor for the school year, and whether they have received one or more F-grades for the academic year. Students also were asked to indicate their gender.

In the student focus groups, students were asked about rewards used at their school, the pros and cons of the REP program, positive and negative changes noted in the academic learning environment, the school program or activity that most helped them to feel part of their school, what their high school could have done to make the transition from 8th to 9th grade easier, and what their middle school could have done to make the transition into 9th grade easier.

In the parent focus groups, parents were asked which program helped their child the most in feeling part of the school and to state their reason(s) for naming a particular program. Parents were also asked which aspect was least helpful in making their child feel part of the school, any positive changes they may have noticed in the learning environment, any negative changes they may have noticed in the learning environment, things the high school could have done to make the move from eighth to ninth grade easier, and the things the middle school could have done to make the move into ninth grade easier.

Questionnaire data were processed using MS Excel and SAS to generate descriptive statistics and charts. Responses to open-ended items and focus group data were transcribed into Microsoft Word files and were coded for analysis.

Results

In this section, we report the results by survey sections: ASAP; school climate; rules, behaviors, and rewards; reporting student progress; scheduling; grading; Professional Early Planning (PEP); and HSI program outcomes. We then report student and teacher responses for items about program and activities that helped students feel a part of their school, gain knowledge about their school, and succeed academically. This section also examines teacher responses to an item about the programs and activities which most facilitated students' transition to high school and the changes that are needed in HSI. In the subsequent section, we compare survey results for students who report earning passing grades to those reporting earning at least one failing grade. Finally, we examine the effect of the Initiatives on English and mathematics grades and on in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Respondents

A total of 1,276 9th grade students and 315 teachers from all three of the district's high schools responded to the questionnaires. In addition, 25 students and 15 parents participated in the focus groups.

Of the 9th grade student respondents,

- 51% were male and 49% female,
- 40% indicated that they earned one or more grades of F on their nine-week report card,
- 76% participated in Freshman Seminars or Freshman Mentoring,
- 29% had a tutor for the past academic year,
- 41% had a mentor for the past academic year,
- 33% had an upperclassman as a mentor,
- 78% spent less than one hour or no time on English homework, and
- 71% spent less than one hour or no time on math homework.

Only 15% of the teacher respondents indicated that between 80 and 100% of their students were ninth graders. Sixty-seven percent indicated that they were moderately or very familiar with the HSI project.

Results by Component

Academic Skills and Preparation (ASAP)

Student and teacher responses were As shown in Table 1a, the ASAP items receiving the highest percentage of agreement from teachers were *Overall, I feel that the school is preparing students well academically* (89%) and *At this school, students have to work hard to get good grades* (87%). The items receiving the lowest levels of agreement were *Over the past three years, I have seen an improvement in my students' ability to manage their time* (46%) and *Over the past three years, students have improved their note-taking skills* (51%).

Results for students are shown in Table 1a and Table 1b. Items common to the student and teacher surveys are shown in Table 1a, whereas, Table 1b summarizes responses for the items unique to the student survey. For students, the ASAP items receiving the highest levels of agreement were:

At this school, I have to work hard to get good grades (86%).

Overall, I feel that the school is preparing me well academically (82%).

I have improved my test-taking skills this year (82%).

The items that the fewest number of students agreed with were *I have improved my study skills this year* (69%), *My English/language arts classes are interesting* (66%), and *My mathematics classes are interesting* (48%).

Data from the student focus groups revealed that students considered improvement in technology or teachers' use of technology as a positive change in their learning environment. Other students said that they liked having certain classes every day or having some classes with longer periods. Students also noted that the interim reports helped them to know how they were doing in their classes. When asked about negative changes in the academic learning environment, students from two schools stated that the freshmen mentoring program was not helpful. One student did say that "It (FMP) actually boosted your grade a little bit because we would get a 100 for sitting there." Other students said that although the interim reports helped you know where you were, there was no follow through in terms of helping students to get help if needed. Students also mentioned some difficulties in getting all the courses they wanted because of conflicts in scheduling between blocks and skinnies.

Data from the parent focus groups indicated the offering of additional classes as a positive change in the academic learning environment. One parent noted:

I think the science and technology courses have certainly increased over the years. Each year I think they add something else.

Another parent said:

The other academic thing that came out of SIC [School Improvement Council], we added the honors area in some areas...helps kids and families place themselves in the right classes for both the honors and AP track.

Parents also mentioned services in career and college planning and services provided by the testing and tutoring centers as positive changes. Parent nights and additional parental involvement with guidance and course scheduling were also cited as positive changes. In terms of any negative changes in the academic learning environment, some parents were not supportive of the freshmen mentoring program and were concerned that the students' lunch periods were decreased in length. Other parents were concerned about what they perceived as excessive homework requirements for some of the high school programs. One parents stated that "I feel that they should feel some pleasure and joy out of this, not feel stressed out all the time." Parents also were concerned about student behavior at school and lack of supervision for students during the late start days.

Table 1a.
Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on Academic Skills and Preparation Survey Items

Type	Item #	Item	% Agree
S	1	I have improved my test-taking skills this year.	81.5
T	1	Over the past three years, students have improved their test-taking skills.	71.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	10.3
S	2	I have improved my study skills this year.	68.5
T	2	Over the past three years, students have improved their study skills.	57.0
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	11.5
S	3	I have improved my note-taking skills this year.	78.2
T	3	Over the past three years, students have improved their note-taking skills.	51.0
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	27.2
S	4	I have improved my ability to manage my time this year.	71.1
T	4	Over the past three years, I have seen an improvement in my students' ability to manage their time.	45.9
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	25.2
S	6	At this school, I have to work hard to get good grades.	85.6
T	5	At this school, students have to work hard to get good grades.	86.6
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-1.0
S	11	Overall, I feel that the school is preparing me well academically.	82.3
T	7	Overall, I feel that the school is preparing students well academically.	89.0
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-6.7

Table 1b
Agreement Levels for Students on Academic Skills and Preparation Survey Items

Item #	Item	% Agree
9	My English/language arts classes are interesting.	66
10	My mathematics classes are interesting.	48

School Climate

When asked about school climate, teachers' responses were generally positive. As shown in Table 2a, most teachers agreed with the following items:

- *At this school, teachers care about the students (99%).*
- *At this school, there are many clubs, sport activities, and other organizations for students to join (98%).*
- *Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school (96%).*
- *The school keeps parents informed about events and activities at school (94%).*
- *Students seem to care if they finish high school (92%).*
- *I look forward to coming to work in the morning (90%).*
- *Students from different backgrounds get along well together at this school (87%).*
- *Students come to me when they have problems (87%).*

A few items were included on only the teacher survey. Of those items, a majority of teachers agreed with the following:

- *I have colleagues on whom I can count at this school (95%).*
- *The students respect me (92%).*
- *At this school, I really feel that I am a member of a team (81%).*

The school climate items with the lowest levels of agreement by teachers were *At this school, there is a real school spirit (64%)* and *The guidance counselors provide students with useful advice (68%)*.

The results for the student survey are shown in Table 2a and Table 2b. Items common to the student and teacher surveys are shown in 2a, whereas, Table 2b summarizes responses for the items unique to the student survey. Items receiving the highest percentages of agreement from students were:

- *I care if I finish high school (97%).*
- *At this school, there are many clubs, sport activities, and other organizations for students to join (93%).*
- *I have many friends at this school (87%).*

The items least endorsed by students were:

- *I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems (44%).*
- *I look forward to coming to school in the morning (43%).*

As seen in Table 2a, teachers and students had similarly high response levels for the items *I care if I finish high school/Students seem to care if they finish high school* and *At this school there are many clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students to join*. They also had similarly low response levels to the items *At this school there is a real school spirit* and *My guidance counselor provides me with useful advice /The guidance counselor provides students with useful advice*.

Table 2a shows sizeable differences between teacher and student opinions on school climate items. The greatest differences were for the following items:

- *"I look forward to coming to school/work in the morning (student-teacher difference = -46.3%).*
- *I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems/ Students come to me when they have problems (student-teacher difference = -43.5).*
- *Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school (student-teacher difference = -34.3).*

Table 2a
 Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on School Climate (SC) Survey
 Items

Type	Item #	Item	% Agree
S	13	I care about what my teachers think about me.	61.6
T	11	Students care what staff members think of them.	72.9
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-11.3
S	14	At this school there is a real school spirit.	66.4
T	12	At this school there is a real school spirit.	64.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	2.2
S	16	At this school students from different backgrounds get along well together.	70.5
T	13	Students from different backgrounds get along well together at this school.	86.5
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-16.0
S	18	Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school.	61.8
T	15	Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school.	96.1
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-34.3
S	19	I feel my teachers care about me.	72.4
T	16	At this school, teachers care about the students.	98.7
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-26.3
S	17	I care if I finish high school.	96.7
T	14	Students seem to care if they finish high school.	91.9
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	4.8
S	20	I look forward to coming to school in the morning.	43.3
T	17	I look forward to coming to work in the morning.	89.6
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-46.3
S	21	The school keeps parents informed about events and activities at school.	69.0
T	18	The school keeps parents informed about events and activities at school.	94.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-25.2
S	22	I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems.	43.7
T	20	Students come to me when they have problems.	87.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-43.5
S	25	My guidance counselor provides me with useful advice.	63.2
T	21	The guidance counselors provide students with useful advice.	68.1
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-4.9
S	26	At this school there are many clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students to join.	93.3
T	22	At this school there are many clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students to join.	98.1
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	-4.8

Table 2b
Agreement Levels for Students on School Climate (SC) Survey Items

Item #	Item	% Agree
12	At this school, I feel like I belong.	76
15	I have many friends at this school.	87
23	At this school, the teachers respect me.	68
24	At this school I feel other students care about me.	67

Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards

The section of the survey on rules, behaviors and rewards contained items related to the Responsibility Earns Privilege strategy of the High Schools Initiative. As shown in Table 3, with one exception, a majority of teachers agreed with the items about school rules (69%-98%). The exception is the item receiving the least agreement, *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule* (45%).

The school rules items endorsed by the majority of students were:

- *I would work harder in class to gain privileges* (85%).
- *At this school, you get into trouble if you do not follow the rules* (83%).
- *It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well* (83%).
- *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules* (73%).
- *It is fair to require tutoring if my grades are too low* (73%).

As shown in Table 3, students had the least agreement with the following items:

- *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school if my grades are too low* (60%).
- *The rules about how students should behave in my school are fair* (59%).
- *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule* (42%).

Students were also asked to indicate their agreement with the statement “*I often get sent to an administrator for misbehaving.*” With only 22% of students agreeing with the statement, this item was the least endorsed in the *School Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards* section of the survey.

Students and teachers concurred in their high level of endorsement of the statements *It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well* (83% and 98%, respectively) and *I would work harder in class to gain privileges/ Students are willing to work harder in class to gain privileges (like parking)* (85% and 86%, respectively). Students and teachers also concurred in their low level of agreement with the statement that *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule* (42% and 45%, respectively).

Teacher and student agreement levels differed on some of the school rules items. The greatest disagreements were for the following items:

- *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school if my grades are too low* (student-teacher difference = 34.8%).
- *The rules about how students should behave in my school are fair* (student-teacher difference = -30.9%)

During the focus groups, when asked about positive and negative features of the Responsibilities Earn Privileges (REP) program, students noted that their peers are motivated by privileges. They offered as negatives the use of a shorter lunch period for REP students and the fact that some students have to attend REP because of a limited number of grades on the interim report. One student expressed the concern that at the beginning of the school year "a lot of students get put in the program when we only have two grades and it makes it look like you have a bad grade when you don't."

Table 3

Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on School Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards (RB) Survey Items

Type	Item #	Item	% Agree
S	28	The rules about how students should behave in my school are fair.	58.6
T	24	The rules about how students should behave in this school are fair.	89.5
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-30.9</i>
S	29	At this school you get into trouble if you do not follow the rules.	83.1
T	25	At this school students get into trouble if they do not follow the rules.	68.8
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>14.3</i>
S	30	It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules.	72.5
T	26	It is fair to limit students' privileges when they do not follow the rules.	97.5
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-25.0</i>
S	27	All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule.	42.3
T	23	All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule.	45.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-2.9</i>
S	31	It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when my grades are too low.	60.4
T	27	It is fair to limit students' privileges here at school when their grades are too low.	95.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-34.8</i>
S	32	It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well.	83.2
T	28	It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well.	98.1
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-14.9</i>
S	33	It is fair to require tutoring if my grades are too low.	73.2
T	29	It is fair for the school to require tutoring if a student's grades are too low.	93.9
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-20.7</i>
S	34	I would work harder in class to gain privileges.	84.5
T	30	Students are willing to work harder in class to gain privileges (like parking).	85.8
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-1.3</i>

Reporting Student Progress

Approximately two-thirds of teachers agreed with the items related to reporting school progress (see Table 4). The progress report item agreed to by the highest percentage of teachers was *Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped parents keep up with students' work* (69%). The item with the lowest percentage of agreement was *Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped students get the extra help they need to succeed* (61%).

A majority of students (88%) agreed with the item, *My parent or guardian knows how well I am doing in school*. The item with the lowest percentage of agreement (66%) was *I consistently give my three-week grade reports to my parents*. As shown in Table 4, students endorsed *reporting student progress* items at a slightly higher rate than teachers. In addition, as discussed later, parents who participated in the focus groups indicated that the high school should continue to use interim reports to monitor student progress.

Table 4
Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on Reporting Student Progress Survey Items

Type	Item #	Item	% Agree
S	36	Getting a grade report every three weeks has helped me keep up with my work.	78.4
T	32	Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped students keep up with their work.	62.2
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	16.2
S	37	Getting a grade report every three weeks has helped me get the extra help I need to succeed.	71.5
T	33	Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped students get the extra help they need to succeed.	60.7
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	10.8
S	39	My parent or guardian knows how well I am doing in school.	87.6
T	34	Giving a grade report every three weeks has helped parents keep up with students work.	68.7
		<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	18.9

Scheduling

The scheduling item receiving the highest percentage of agreement (93%) from teachers was *The length of a class should be based on the nature of the course*, and the item receiving the lowest percentage of agreement (43%) was *Overall, students learn more in 90-minute semester classes than in the 45-minute year-long classes*.

A slight majority of students agreed with the items, *Overall, I like my 45-minute classes better than my 90-minute classes* (69%) and *I spend more time doing homework during my 90-minute classes than during my 45-minute classes* (61%). With only 47% of students agreeing with the statements, the items with the lowest percentages of agreement were *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than in*

my 45-minute classes and Students are better behaved in my 45-minute classes than in my 90-minute classes.

In Table 5, when student and teacher responses are compared, the two items with the greatest differences were *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time with hands-on activities than my 45-minute classes* (student-teacher difference =-23.9%) and *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than my 45-minute classes* (student-teacher difference =-24.5%).

Table 5
Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on Scheduling Survey Items

Type	Item #	Item	% Agree
S	40	In my 90-minute classes I spend more time with hands-on activities than my 45-minute classes.	49.5
T	36	Students in 90-minute classes spend more time with hands-on activities than in 45-minute classes.	73.4
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-23.9</i>
S	41	In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than my 45-minute classes.	47.4
T	37	Students in 90-minute classes spend more time teaming with other students in learning.	71.9
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-24.5</i>
S	42	The teachers in my 90-minute classes provide more individual help than in my 45-minute classes.	50.7
T	38	Students in 90-minute classes get more individual help than students in 45-minute classes.	65.2
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-14.5</i>
S	43	Students are better behaved in my 45-minute classes than in my 90-minute classes.	47.0
T	39	Students are better behaved in 45-minute classes than in 90-minute classes.	56.6
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-9.6</i>
S	45	Overall, I learn more in my 90-minute classes than in my 45-minute classes.	53.1
T	40	Overall, students learn more in 90-minute semester classes than in the 45-minute year-long classes.	43.1
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>10.0</i>
S	46	Overall, I like my 45-minute classes better than my 90-minute classes.	68.6
T	41	Overall, I prefer 45-minute classes to 90-minute classes.	50.3
		<i>Student – Teacher Difference</i>	<i>18.3</i>

Grading

A majority of teachers indicated that they always or often engaged in the following grading practices:

- *I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card (95%).*
- *I tell students what to study for a test (92%).*
- *I grade and return assigned work within a week (86%).*

Table 6

Agreement Levels for Students (S) and Teachers (T) on Grading Survey Items

Group	ITEM	% All the time or Often
S	My math teacher tells us what to study for a test.	78
T	I tell students what they need to study for a test.	92
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-14</i>
S	My English teacher tells us what to study for a test.	85
T	I tell students what they need to study for a test.	92
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-7</i>
S	My math teacher grades and returns class work within a week.	68
T	I grade and return assigned work within a week.	86
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-18</i>
S	My English teacher grades and returns class work within a week.	54
T	I grade and return assigned work within a week.	86
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-31</i>
S	My math teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve.	43
T	I write comments on students graded work to identify strengths and weaknesses.	78
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-35</i>
S	My English teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve.	63
T	I write comments on students graded work to identify strengths and weaknesses.	78
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-15</i>
S	My math teacher shows me how to calculate my math grade on the report card.	44
T	I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card.	95
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-50</i>
S	My English teacher shows me how to calculate my English grade on the report card.	42
T	I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card.	95
	<i>Student - Teacher Difference</i>	<i>-53</i>

*Percentages are based upon the responses of all subject area teachers

The item with the lowest level of agreement was *I write comments on students' graded work to identify strengths and weaknesses* (78%).

A majority of students agreed with the grading items, *My English teacher tells us what to study for a test* (85%) and *My math teacher tells us what to study for a test* (78%). The items with the lowest agreement levels were:

- *My English teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card* (42%).
- *My math teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve* (43%).
- *My math teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card* (44%).

Professional Early Planning (PEP)

As shown in Table 7, when asked about PEP, teachers had high levels of agreement with the following items:

- *I have spent time on curriculum alignment in PEP to improve my classroom instruction* (88%).
- *My participation in PEP has fostered a stronger sense of collaboration with my colleagues* (80%).
- *I have spent time examining student assessment data in PEP to improve my classroom instruction* (79%).
- *I recommend that we continue to have PEP* (79%).
- *PEP time has helped me be a more effective teacher* (68%).

Table 7
Agreement Levels of Teachers on Survey Items about Professional Early Planning (PEP)

Item #	Item	% Agree
43	I have spent time on curriculum alignment in PEP to improve my classroom instruction.	88
44	I have spent time examining student assessment data in PEP to improve my classroom instruction.	79
45	My participation in PEP has fostered a stronger sense of collaboration with my colleagues.	80
46	I mostly use my PEP time for routine classroom tasks like grading papers.	14
47	I recommend that we continue to have PEP.	79
48	PEP time has helped me be a more effective teacher.	68
49	The administration uses PEP time for faculty meetings or other non-PD activities.	27

The items with the lowest percentage of agreement were *I mostly use my PEP time for routine classroom tasks like grading papers* (14%) and *The administration uses PEP time for faculty meetings or other non-PD activities* (27%).

HSI Outcomes

Table 8 shows the percentage of agreement for each of the questionnaire items related to HIS outcomes. The items receiving the highest percentage of agreement (85%) from the teachers were *The High School Initiatives program has gone smoothly this year* and *The High School Initiatives program should continue to operate next year*.

Approximately three-fourths of the teachers agreed that the HSI had favorably affected the school's learning environment and student learning.

Table 8

Agreement Levels of Teachers on Survey Items about HSI Outcomes

Item #	Item	% Agree
50	The High School Initiatives program has gone smoothly this year.	85
51	The High School Initiatives program should continue to operate next year.	85
52	The High School Initiatives program has favorably affected the learning environment at this school.	79
53	The High School Initiatives program has favorably affected student learning at this school.	77
	N =	315

Open-ended Responses

Feeling Part of the School

As seen in Figure 1, 55% of students assigned their school an A or B for helping them feel part of the school. As shown in Table 9, of the various programs or activities indicated by students as helpful in feeling part of their high school, pep rallies (8%) and football (7%) ranked the highest.

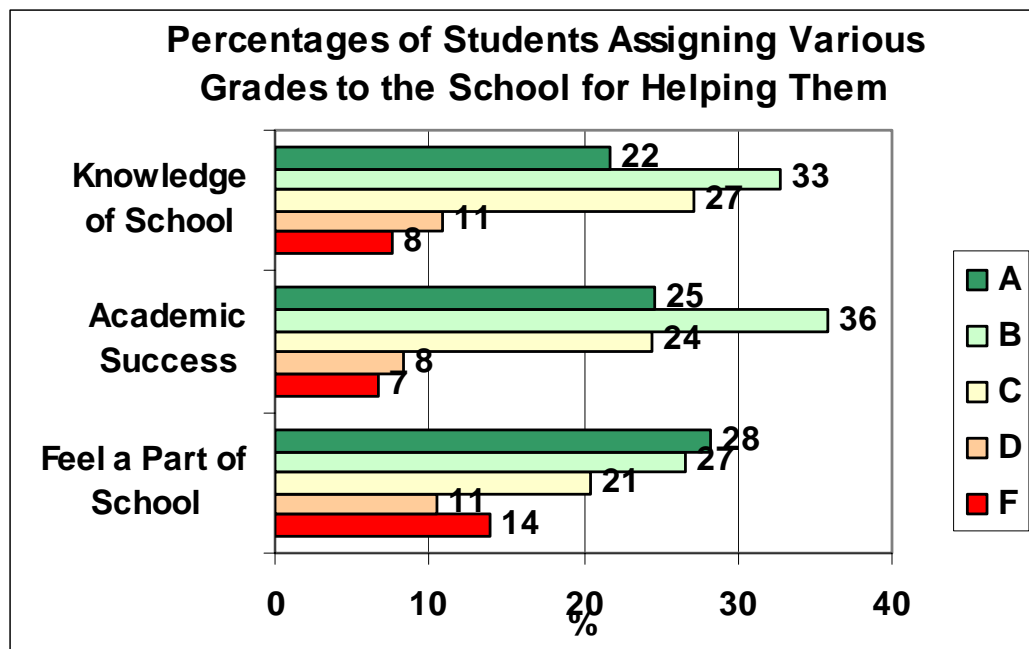


Figure 1. The percentage of students who assigned various grades to their schools in terms of their gaining knowledge of the school, being academically successful, and feeling a part of the school

Students who participated in the focus groups indicated that ROTC, student government, marching band, sports, drama club, freshmen orientation, special schools, and other school activities most helped them feel a part of their high school. Students stated the following:

... it [band] was fun. It made me feel part of the school and I got into football games free.

Have few friends when school starts, learn the fight song and alma mater, and meet new people [in marching band].

Each of the schools within the school, they all end up with their own sense of camaraderie.

Parents who participated in the focus groups said that programs related to academic structures, such as magnet programs, academies, and schools-within-a-school, as well as school clubs, activities, and freshmen orientation, helped their child most feel part of the school. In addition, student government was mentioned in two schools. When asked about the least helpful aspect for their child, parents' responses included having different guidance counselors each year, freshmen mentoring, and school schedules going back and forth between block and skinny scheduling. In discussing freshmen mentoring, one parent said that it "just took their time that they had to be with their friends, and they are not given that much..."

Table 9

School Programs and Activities that Students (S) Indicated Contributed to their Feeling a Part of the School, Knowledge of the School, and their Academic Success¹

Activity	Feel a Part		Knowledge		Academic Success	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Band/marching band	56	5.5	65	5.8	20	2.0
Chorus (Cavalier Chorale, Gospel and Praise Choir, Viking Singers, Gospel Chorus)	29	2.8	39	3.5	8	0.8
Step Team	9	0.9	13	1.2	2	0.2
Sports or sports training (not specified)	24	2.4	20	1.8	9	0.9
Academic Clubs (Spanish Honor Society/French International Club/Spanish International Club/ESOL/SAT Team/Mock Trial/Model United Nations)	23	2.3	35	3.1	15	1.5
Basketball	22	2.2	26	2.3	14	1.4
Football	73	7.2	86	7.7	29	2.9
Cheerleading	23	2.3	23	2.1	7	0.7
Cross-country/track	24	2.4	21	1.9	7	0.7
Soccer	17	1.7	18	1.6	6	0.6
Other sports (golf, lacrosse, swimming, tennis, volleyball, wrestling, skate boarding)	26	2.6	25	2.2	11	1.1
Other Clubs (chess, photo, student-to-student, drama, prom committee, Latin Dance Club, FCA, FBLA)	12	1.2	15	1.3	2	0.2
ROTC	16	1.6	19	1.7	16	1.6
NJROTC	7	0.7	11	1.0	8	0.8
JROTC	12	1.2	14	1.3	11	1.1
Freshmen Orientation (Freshmen day, Fresh start, Jumpstart, Freshman Fun day)	3	0.3	16	1.4	2	0.2
Pep rallies	77	7.6	55	4.9	0	0.0
Student government (Student Council, Senate)	14	1.4	19	1.7	2	0.2
Assemblies	4	0.4	11	1.0	1	0.1
Sports events (football/soccer games)	16	1.6	8	0.7	0	0.0
Winter Days	20	2.0	6	0.5	1	0.1
Other (such as morning news, dances, field trips, spirit week, Battle of the Bands, etc.)	14	1.4	18	1.6	4	0.4

¹ Only those activities that received at least 1% of the responses are reported in the table. A complete version of the table can be found in the Appendix.

Table 9 (continued)
School Programs and Activities that Students Indicated Contributed to their Feeling a Part of the School, Knowledge of the School, and their Academic Success

Activity	Feel a Part		Knowledge		Academic Success	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Horizon	6	0.6	8	0.7	19	1.9
Infolink	7	0.7	15	1.3	26	2.6
AVID	6	0.6	11	1.0	14	1.4
E-School	4	0.4	6	0.5	14	1.4
Honors School	3	0.3	8	0.7	12	1.2
Discovery	4	0.4	10	0.9	18	1.8
Lunch	16	1.6	32	2.9	4	0.4
Classes (not specified)	7	0.7	15	1.3	15	1.5
Seminars (not specified)	4	0.4	15	1.3	19	1.9
Gym/Physical Education	12	1.2	15	1.3	5	0.5
English/English I/English CP (not Honors)	2	0.2	9	0.8	33	3.2
Math (Algebra I, Math for Technologies, etc.)	5	0.5	4	0.4	42	4.1
Honors (or specific class such as Honors English)	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	1.1
Other specified classes (such as art, creative writing, leadership, dance, etc.)	13	1.3	18	1.6	20	2.0
Freshmen Mentoring Program	16	1.6	60	5.4	14	1.4
ASAP	2	0.2	7	0.6	11	1.1
REP	1	0.1	1	0.1	20	2.0
Tutoring and Testing Center/Lab	1	0.1	4	0.4	41	4.0
Tutoring (After-school help, etc.)	3	0.3	0	0.0	74	7.3
Nothing/None	256	25.1	195	17.4	291	28.6
I don't know	34	3.3	32	2.9	48	4.7
Non-responsive answer	11	1.1	10	0.9	12	1.2
Other	26	2.6	24	2.1	29	2.9

Knowledge of the School

Figure 1 shows that 55% of students also assigned their high school an A or B for helping them gain knowledge of the school. Seventy-three percent of teachers assigned their school an A or B for helping students in their transition from middle to high school. As shown in Table 9, the program or activity that students indicated helped them the most in getting to know the people, places, and traditions at their high school was football (8%). Other activities with higher ratings included marching band (6%), pep rallies (5%), and the FMP (5%). Seventeen percent of the students responded that nothing or no activity helped them feel a part of the school.

When asked what the high school could have done to make the move into 9th grade easier, students participating in the focus groups suggested that they get the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their new environment and schedule on a day before the start of the school year. One said:

We need to do it like RNE where they get their personal schedule and go through it, walk to each class, and find the fastest way to get there.

Students also suggested that more tutoring opportunities would be helpful. One student stated that the school “needs a small program that is free to help with math skills...right now it’s expensive...” Students also mentioned difficulties in getting help from teachers when many classes seemed overcrowded. They suggested that assistant teachers be used in large classes to free the teacher to provide extra assistance. There were also some students who thought that the high school teachers should meet with the 8th grade teachers to go over the curriculum so that the 8th grade teachers know what will be required in 9th grade.

When parents were asked how the high school could make the transition easier, they indicated that the high school should continue to use interim reports to monitor student progress. One parent indicated that it would be helpful if there were more information on the interim to show why the student received a particular grade. Some parents thought that parent conferences should be mandated if your student was having academic difficulty. Other parents mentioned the need for the students to be part of smaller groups at the school that could be mentored and monitored more closely by teachers.

When asked what the middle school could have done to make the move into 9th grade easier, student participants in the focus groups indicated that they should have had a tougher 8th grade year in order to be prepared for the challenges or rigor of high school. Below are examples of students’ responses:

... they [teachers] should push you that last year so that you can be ready for whatever might come your way.
 Stop babying us [in middle school].
 My 8th grade teacher taught like a 9th grade teacher so it helped with the transition.

Students also mentioned that it would be helpful to have high school students come in and talk with them at middle school to tell them what high school was like.

Parents who participated in the focus groups indicated that middle schools or guidance counselors should provide students with more information about the district’s high schools and what programs they offer. One parent mentioned that field trips to the high schools would be very useful to the students. Another group of parents agreed with the students that more rigor was needed in middle school courses. One parent was concerned about the middle school practice of giving extra credit and its effect on the student’s judgment of their academic skills. Other parents thought that students needed to spend more time writing in middle school as well as in learning how to use the library for research.

Academic Success

As seen in Figure 1, 61% of students assigned their school an A or B for helping them to be academically successful. In contrast, 82% of teachers assigned their school an A or B for helping students succeed academically (see Figure 2). As seen in Table 9, 7% of students indicated that tutoring helped them to be academically successful.

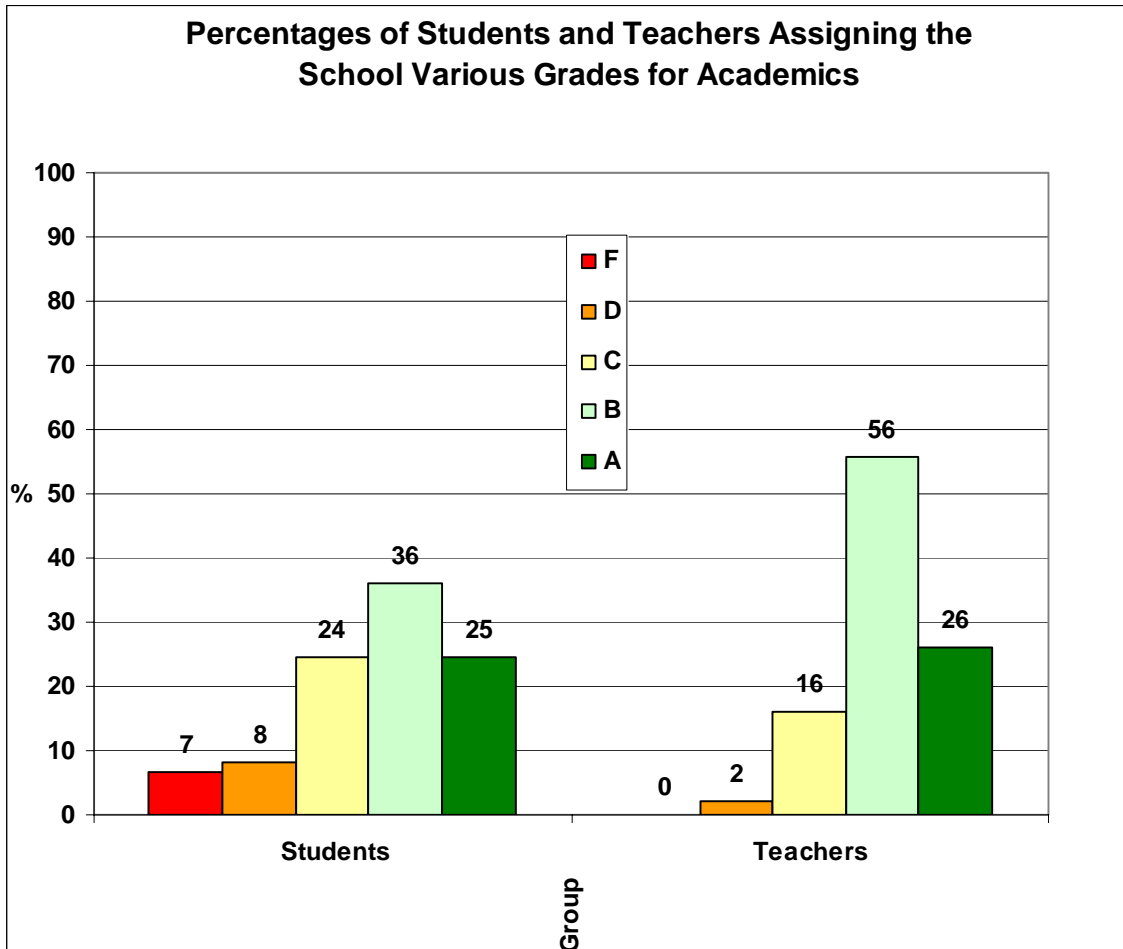


Figure 2. The percentage of students and teachers who assigned various grades to their schools in terms of being academically successful.

Approximately a fourth of students wrote *nothing/none* in response to the questions about the programs or activities offered by their high schools that was helpful in making them feel part of the school, gain knowledge of the school, or succeeding academically (see Table 9).

Teachers also responded to a question about what school program or activity most helped students to be academically successful. As shown in Table 10, tutoring was the most frequent response of the teachers. A large percentage of teachers also indicated that REP contributed to student academic success.

Table 10
High School Initiatives 2000+ Teacher Questionnaire Responses

Activity	Academic Success		Transition	
	N	%	N	%
Tutoring	64	35.0	4	2.0
REP	34	18.6	6	3.1
Magnet Schools/Schools within a School	17	9.3	12	6.2
Curriculum/Instruction	15	8.2	0	0.0
Freshman Academy	8	4.4	38	19.7
ASAP	7	3.8	14	7.3
Extracurricular Activities	5	2.7	10	5.2
Freshman Focus/Seminars	5	2.7	12	6.2
Freshman Mentoring	4	2.2	23	11.9
Freshman Orientation	0	0.0	30	15.5
Transition Activities	0	0.0	7	3.6
Other	8	4.4	13	6.7
None	2	1.0	9	4.7
Don't Know/Not sure/No comment	14	7.7	15	7.8
Total	183	100.0	193	99.9

When asked to assign a grade for their high school helping students make the transition into high school, 63% of the teachers assigned an A or B (see Figure 3). As shown in Table 10, according to teachers, programs contributing to students' transition included Freshman Academy, Freshman Orientation, and Freshman Mentoring.

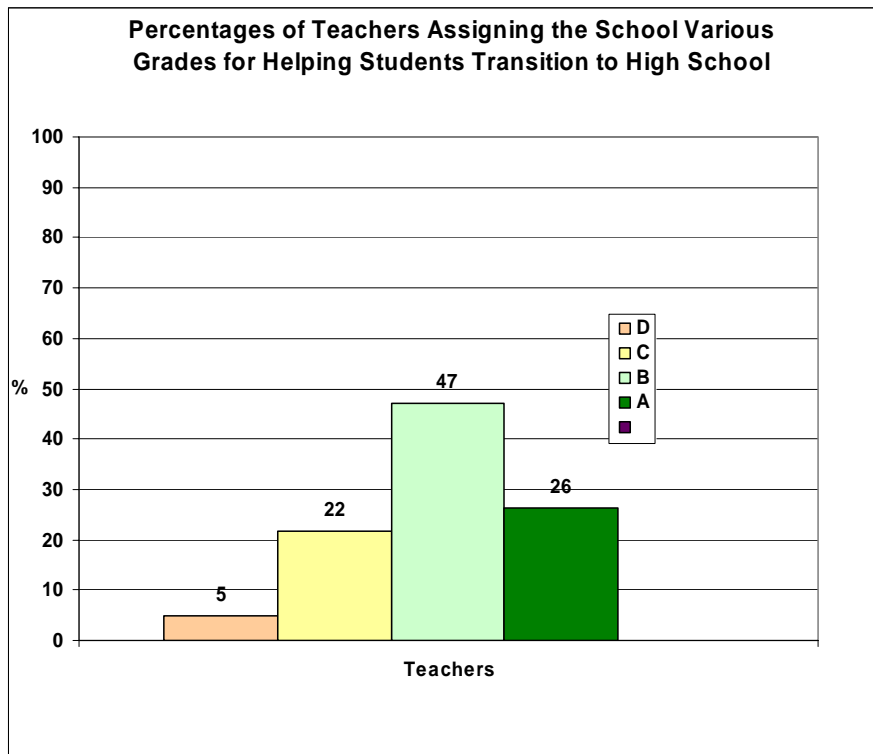


Figure 3. The percentage of teachers who assigned various grades to their schools in terms of helping students in their transition from middle to high school.

Changes

Teachers were asked to suggest needed changes to the High School Initiatives in a final open-ended question. Approximately one third of the teachers made suggestions, but no consensus on the specific types of changes was evident. Teachers most frequently mentioned that changes needed to be made in REP, specifically the REP period where students gave up part of their lunch period to do homework or sit quietly in designated locations. One third of the teachers who mentioned REP wanted it to be enforced more or strengthened. The other two thirds of the teachers thought that the REP period should be eliminated because it did not help the students learn academic material and took teacher time for supervision. One teacher noted that the REP period was “counterproductive (and) achieves no positive results...tutoring is the answer to academic success...”

Other suggestions for changes were less frequent. The teachers who commented on freshmen mentoring and PEP were divided between those who thought that these programs should be changed or eliminated. Comments on block scheduling also were split between teachers who supported the combination of 90 and 45 minute periods and those who wished to return either to all 90 minute blocks or all 45 minute periods. Teachers who commented on discipline issues, student and parent responsibility, and the need for more support for teachers and administrators all conveyed the same point of view. Teachers stated that school rules needed to be enforced consistently and fairly for all students. They also felt that parents and students should take more responsibility

for the students' behavior and academic performance. As one teacher remarked, "Not all accountability lies with the educational system." Support for teachers and administrators were discussed in relation to issues with excessive paperwork and other demands on their time that distracts attention from instruction. One teacher suggested hiring additional clerical workers to provide time for school administrators, counselors, and teachers to work more directly with students. Teachers also mentioned that additional assistance was needed by students such as more tutoring services, smaller classes, additional teachers, and additional student monitoring.

Results by Student Pass/Fail Status

An emphasis of the Initiative was to assist students in being academically successful. To examine the issues facing 9th grade students who are experiencing difficulty in the transition, this section of the report contrasts the responses of students who have passing grades with those who report that they have received one or more failing grades.

Academic Skills and Preparation (ASAP)

As shown in Table 11, the differences in the responses for the two groups of students are the greatest for items relating to improving study skills (11 point difference), receiving the help needed to improve academic skills (12 point difference), and feeling that the school is preparing the student well academically (12 point difference). Also, students who previously earned an F less often indicated agreement with the statements that *I have improved my test-taking skills this year* (9 point difference) and *I have improved my ability to manage my time this year* (9 point difference).

Table 11

Agreement Levels in Academic Skills and Preparation for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

	% Agree F=Yes	% Agree F=No	Diff. % Yes – No
Academic Skills and Preparation			
At this school, I have to work hard to get good grades.	86	86	0
My mathematics classes are challenging.	78	75	3
I have improved my note-taking skills this year.	74	81	-7
Overall, I feel that the school is preparing me well academically.	77	88	-12
My English/language arts classes are challenging.	69	74	-5
I have improved my test-taking skills this year.	76	86	-9
I have received the help I need to improve my academic skills this year.	71	83	-12
I have improved my ability to manage my time this year.	66	75	-9
My English/language arts classes are interesting.	64	68	-5
I have improved my study skills this year.	62	73	-11
My mathematics classes are interesting.	48	48	-1

School Climate

Items related to climate also showed differences between students with failing grades and those with no failing grades. Table 12 illustrates the largest differences in responses between students with failing grades and those with passing grades on the items related to feeling like they belong (9% points difference), respect from teachers (9% points difference), students caring about what teachers think of them (12% points difference), and teachers and students getting along well with each other (10% points difference). Student agreement levels were the same or close on items related to them having many friends at school (no difference), the presence of a real school spirit at their school (no difference), the school keeping parents informed about events and activities (1% point difference), talking with adults when they have problems (2% point difference), getting along with students from different backgrounds (2% point difference), and looking forward to coming to school in the morning (2% point difference).

Table 12

Agreement Levels in School Climate and Affiliation for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

School Climate/Affiliation	% Agree F=Yes	% Agree F=No	Diff. % Yes - No
I care if I finish high school.	95	99	-4
At this school there are many clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students.	92	95	-3
I have many friends at this school.	88	88	0
At this school, I feel like I belong.	71	80	-9
The school keeps parents informed about events and activities at school.	69	69	1
At this school students from different backgrounds get along well together.	69	71	-2
At this school there is a real school spirit.	67	67	0
My guidance counselor provides me with useful advice.	67	62	5
I feel my teachers care about me.	71	76	-5
At this school I feel other students care about me.	65	68	-3
At this school, the teachers respect me.	63	72	-9
I care about what my teachers think about me.	55	67	-12
Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school.	56	66	-10
I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems.	42	44	-2
I look forward to coming to school in the morning.	42	44	-2

Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards

Students with failing grades reported being sent to the administrator for misbehaving more often than did their peers with passing grades (see Table 13). They less often

were inclined to agree with statements about fairness of awarding privileges to those with good grades and who behave well.

Table 13

Agreement Levels in School Rules, Behavior, and Rewards for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

	% Agree F=Yes	% Agree F=No	Diff. % Yes - No
School Rules, Behavior, and Rewards			
I would work harder in class to gain privileges (like parking and going off-campus for lunch).	81	89	-8
It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well.	77	90	-13
At this school you get into trouble if you do not follow the rules.	83	85	-2
It is fair to require tutoring if my grades are too low.	73	75	-2
It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules.	67	77	-10
The rules about how students should behave in my school are fair.	57	61	-4
It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when my grades are too low.	52	67	-16
All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule.	41	45	-4
I often get sent to an administrator for misbehaving.	30	14	16

Reporting Student Progress

In Table 14, the greatest difference (11 points) between students who received passing grades and those who have received a failing grade was for the item, *I consistently give my three-week grade reports to my parents*. Students with failing grades generally reported lower level of agreements on the items related to reporting school progress.

Table 14

Agreement Levels in Reporting Student Progress for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

	% Agree F=Yes	% Agree F=No	Diff. % Yes - No
Reporting Student Progress			
My parent or guardian knows how well I am doing in school.	84	91	-7
Getting a grade report every three weeks has helped me keep up with my work.	75	82	-8
Getting a grade report every three weeks has helped me get the extra help I need to succeed.	68	74	-6
I consistently give my three-week grade reports to my parents.	60	71	-11

Scheduling

In Table 15, the agreement levels of the two groups of students for most items are fairly close (1% point and 3% points). The largest differences (6% and 7% points) are reported for the items related to spending more time with hands-on activities, and spending more time working in groups in 90-minute classes than in 45-minute classes.

Table 15

Agreement Levels in Scheduling for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

Scheduling	% Agree F=Yes	% Agree F=No	Diff. % Yes - No
Overall, I like my 45-minute classes better than my 90-minute classes.	70	68	1
I spend more time doing homework during my 90-minute classes than during my 45-minute classes.	60	63	-3
Overall, I learn more in my 90-minute classes than in my 45-minute classes.	52	53	-1
Students are better behaved in my 45-minute classes than in my 90-minute classes.	49	46	3
The teachers in my 90-minute classes provide more individual help in my 45-minute classes.	51	50	1
In my 90-minute classes I spend more time with hands-on activities than my 45-minute classes.	46	51	-6
In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than my 45-minute classes.	44	50	-7

Grading

As shown in Table 16, the largest differences in responses between the two student groups were reported on the items related to math teachers grading and returning class work within a week (9% points) and English teachers writing comments on graded work to let students know where they can improve (13% points). Overall, differences were small (1% to 4 % points).

Table 16

Agreement Levels on Grading Practices for Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

Grading Item	% Often or All the time F=Yes	% Often or All the time F=No	Diff. % Yes - No
My math teacher tells us what to study for a test.	76	79	-2
My English teacher tells us what to study for a test.	87	85	2
My math teacher grades and returns class work within a week.	63	71	-9
My English teacher grades and returns class work within a week.	55	53	2
My math teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve.	43	42	1
My English teacher writes comments on graded work to let me know where I can improve.	56	69	-13
My math teacher shows me how to calculate my math grade on the report card.	43	45	-2
My English teacher shows me how to calculate my English grade on the report card.	38	42	-4

Participation in HSI Strategies

Table 17 shows higher participation rates by students with failing grades in all HSI activities except participation in the freshmen seminar. The largest difference (36 points) is reported on the item related to participation in REP.

Table 17

Participation Levels in HSI Activities of Students Who Reported Receiving at Least One Report Grade of F (F=Yes) Versus Students Who Reported Not Receiving any Fs (F=No)

Item	% Yes	% Yes	Diff. %
	F=Yes	F=No	Yes - No
Participated in the tutoring and testing center?	41	26	15
Participated in the freshmen seminar?	47	49	-1
Participated in freshmen mentoring program?	32	29	3
Participated in the summer survival program between grades 8 and 9?	5	4	1
Participated in REP?	41	4	36
Participated in Academic Skills and Preparation?	36	21	14
Did you have a tutor this year?	38	22	15
Did you have an upperclassmen as a tutor this year?	14	7	7
Did you have an adult tutor this year?	21	12	9
Did you have some other tutor this year?	11	8	3
Did you have a mentor this year?	43	38	5
Did you have an upperclassmen as a mentor this year?	36	33	3
Did you have an adult mentor this year?	7	5	1
Did you have some other mentor this year?	4	4	0

Results for Grades and Behavior

One goal of the Initiative was to decrease the number of failing grades. English grades for the previous four academic years are depicted in Figure 4. In 2000-2001, 9.0% of students received a failing grade in English. The percentage of failing grades increased to 16.3% in 2001-2002, decreased to 13.6% the following year, and increased again to 14.1% in 2003-2004.

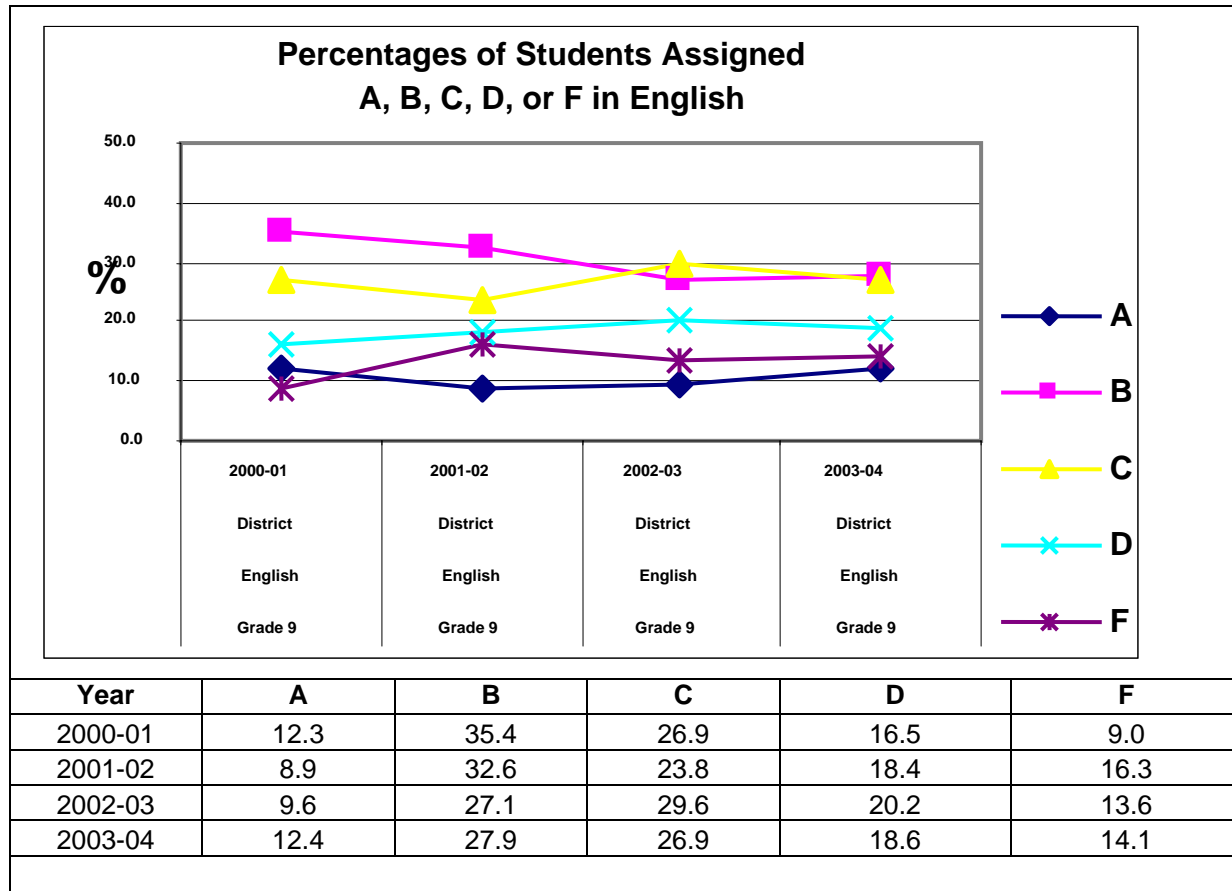


Figure 4. The percentage of English grades by school year during the High School Initiative.

The trends for mathematics grades are shown in Figure 5. In mathematics, the percentage of students earning an F increased slightly from 22.1% in 2000-2001 to 22.8% in 2001-2002, declined to 17.9 in 2003-2003, and increased again in 2003-2004 to 22.5%.

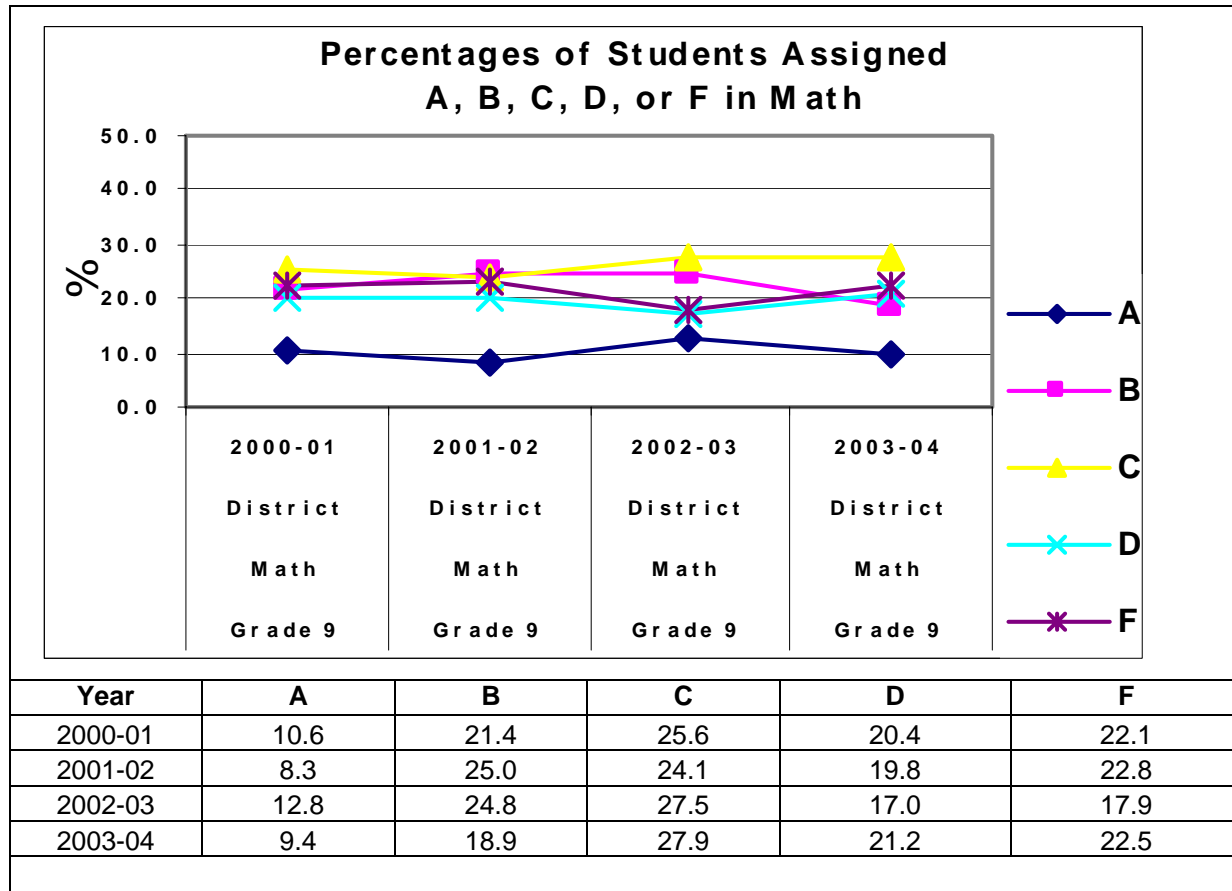


Figure 5. The percentage of mathematics grades by school year during the High School Initiative.

A question may arise about whether the percentage of F's awarded by high school teachers is reasonable or whether strict grading practices inappropriately contributed to a large percentage of F's. Interpretation of the percentage of 9th grade students who received an F can be informed by comparison with the percentage of students in the cohort who scored *Below Basic* on the PACT at the end of 8th grade. The *PACT Score Report User's Guide* defines *Below Basic* as follows:

Below Basic: The student has not met minimum expectations for student performance based on the curriculum standards approved by the State Board of Education. *The student is not prepared for work at the next grade.* (p. 2)

Thus, the percentage of students with a *Below Basic* classification at the end of 8th grade may serve as a rough indicator of the percentage of 9th-grade students who might experience difficulty (i.e., receive an F). As shown in Table 18, the percentage of 8th grade students whose performance level was *Below Basic* in English language arts has ranged from 21.0% to 26.0% during the 2001-2004 period. For this cohort of students, the percentage of 9th grade students who received an F in English ranged from 9.0% to 16.3%.

Table 18.

The Percentage of Ninth-Grade Students in a Cohort who Earned an F in English and Earned Below Basic at the End of Eighth Grade

Year	Percentage of 9 th Grade Cohort with Fs in English	Percentage of Cohort Earning Below Basic in 8 th Grade
2000-01	9.0	23.0
2001-02	16.3	22.0
2002-03	13.6	26.0
2003-04	14.1	21.0

In mathematics, the percentage of 8th grade students whose performance level was Below Basic ranged from 24.0% to 30.0% (see Table 19). For this cohort of students, the percentage of 9th grade students who received an F in mathematics ranged from 17.9% to 22.8%.

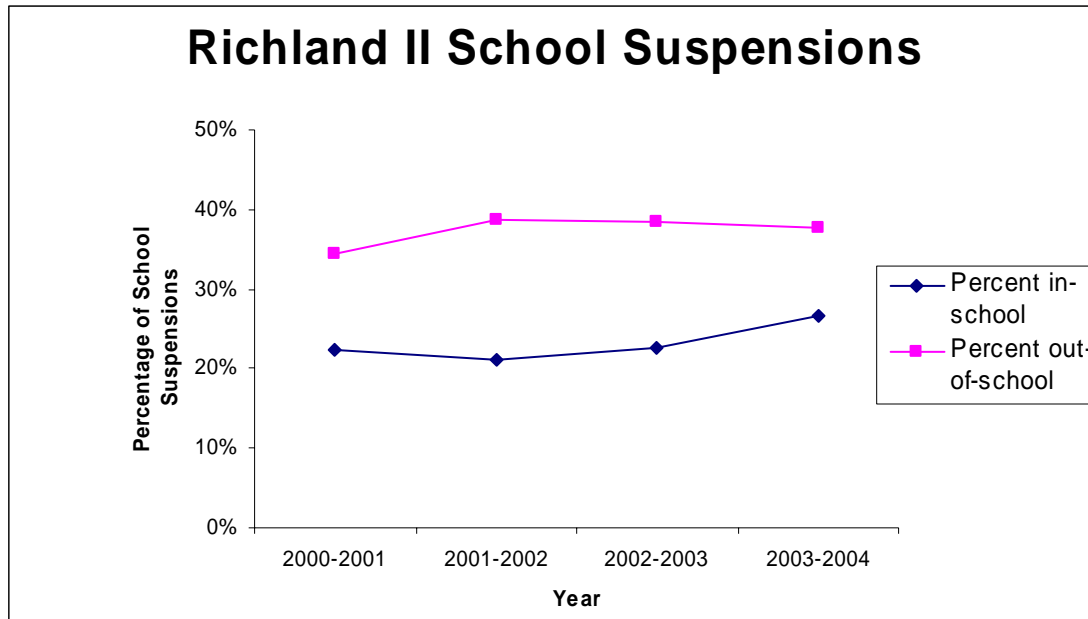
Table 19.

The Percentage of Ninth-Grade Students in a Cohort who Earned an F in Mathematics and Earned Below Basic at the End of Eighth Grade

Year	Percentage of 9 th Grade Cohort with Fs in Math	Percentage of Cohort Earning Below Basic in 8 th Grade
2000-01	22.1	30.0
2001-02	22.8	26.0
2002-03	17.9	24.0
2003-04	22.5	24.0

In both English and mathematics, the percentage of F's for a cohort was lower than the percentage of students earning Below Basic. Thus, the grades assigned by high school teachers do not appear to be incongruent with the percentage of students scoring at the Below Basic level of PACT.

Another key goal of the Initiative was to assist students to be successful socially. For example, the REP component offers a system of privileges for students who maintain academic and behavioral success. To examine the effect of HSI on behavioral success, the percent of in-school and out-of-school suspensions from the period of 2000-2004 were compiled. In order to ascertain the percentage of suspensions, the total number of suspensions in a given year was divided by the total enrollment reported in the SC school report cards. Figure 6 shows that out-of-school suspensions leveled off after an initial increase in 2002-2002. In-school suspensions showed an initial drop in 2001-2002 and increased slightly in the two subsequent years. Thus, a decline in suspensions is not associated with the Initiative.



Year	Percent in-school	Percent out-of-school
2000-2001	22%	34%
2001-2002	21%	39%
2002-2003	23%	38%
2003-2004	27%	38%

Figure 6. The percentage of mathematics grades by school year during the High School Initiative.

The trends for grades and suspensions should be interpreted with caution. It is unknown whether the failure rates or suspension rates would have been higher if the High School Initiative were not in place.

Evaluation Commendations and Recommendations

In this section, the views expressed by teachers, students, and parents are used to make commendations about and recommendations for the High School Initiative of Richland School District Two. The commendations and recommendations are organized by the following categories: Academic Skills and Preparation; School Climate; Counseling; Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards; Reporting Student Progress, Grading, Scheduling, and Professional Early Planning (PEP).

Academic Skills and Preparation

Richland School District Two is commended for its initiative to provide a learning environment where students can be successful, both academically and socially. Overall, students (82%) and teachers (89%) agreed that their school prepared students well academically. Students (86%) and teachers (87%) also agreed that students have to work hard to make good grades. In addition, over 90% of teachers and 9th grade students agreed with a statement that students seemed to care if they finished high school.

A need for continued improvement of strategies to improve student academics is reflected in the continued high failure rate of 9th grade students. The percentage of 9th-grade students who failed either English or mathematics did not decrease during the time period from 2001-2004. Also, only 61% of students and 82% of teachers assigned their school an A or B for helping students succeed academically. The development of strategies should consider the role of the middle schools in preparing students for high school. The *Below Basic* scores on 8th-grade PACT ranged between 21%-26% in English language arts and 24%-30% in mathematics, indicating that approximately 25% of students were likely to encounter academic challenges in the 9th grade.

The district is to be commended for its tutorial programs. When students were asked what activity or program helped them to be academically successful, tutoring sessions and the Tutoring and Testing Centers were listed by slightly more than 11% of the students. Similar responses were given by students in the focus groups, teachers in their survey, and parents in their focus groups. However, some students, parents, and teachers mentioned that tutoring opportunities needed to be expanded and coordinated with classroom teacher expectations.

The evaluation team recommends that the district examine the provision of study skill instruction to 9th-grade students. Study skills appear to contribute to student academic success. For example, as compared with students with all passing grades, students who received failing grades less often indicated they had improved their study skills (e.g., note-taking, test-taking, time management). However, only about half of teachers indicated that over the prior three years that students had improved their note-taking skills (51%), their ability to manage their time (46%), or their study skills (57%).

School Climate

Another commendation is for the commitment of high schools in their offering of programs and activities that promote student engagement in the school environment. A majority of students and teachers endorsed a survey item about the availability of clubs, sports activities, and other organizations for students to join. Survey results also revealed that freshmen orientation and social activities, such as football, pep rallies, and lunch, helped students to feel part of their school. These results are consistent with research findings suggesting that participation in extracurricular activities connects students to school, helps build student-adult relationships, and motivates students to stay in school (Holloway, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1999; Davalos, et. al., 1999).

In terms of programs and activities, the evaluation team suggests that all high schools provide a structured orientation for freshmen where they have the opportunity to learn their class schedules and become knowledgeable about the organizations and activities available at the school. The district may also want to consider making changes to the school schedule so that clubs and organizations have the opportunity to meet at a time when all students are available to participate.

School climate presents some challenges. The evaluation team recommends that the high schools invite input from students about activities or programs that would help them feel connected to their school. In their responses to an item on school spirit, students' and teachers' almost identical agreement levels (66% and 64%, respectively) indicated a need to review school climate issues. Students registered some of the lowest agreement levels on *school climate* items. When comparing the agreement levels of teachers and students, differences in agreement level exist on items such as *I look forward to coming to school in the morning* (46% points difference), *I talk with adults (such as teachers, counselors, coaches) at this school when I have problems/Students come to me when they have problems* (44% points difference), and *Teachers and students get along well with each other at this school* (34% points difference). Also, the percentage of suspensions did not decrease during this period.

The evaluation team also recommends that high schools solicit feedback about existing programs from students, parents, and teachers on an on-going basis. Input should also be elicited during the development and implementation of new strategies and programs.

Another focus should be developing strategies for engaging students with failing grades. Students who have earned a failing grade appeared less engaged in the schools. As compared to their peers with passing grades, they less often indicated they felt as if they belonged (9% points difference), they received respect from teachers (9% points difference), they cared about what teachers thought of them (12% points difference), and teachers and students got along well with each other (10% points difference).

Counseling

Feedback from students, parents, and teachers about counseling indicates the need for review of these services. The Initiative is meant to promote student success academically and socially. With evident disengagement of students being associated with problems, the district should consider ways to expand the services that counseling provides, especially for at-risk students.

Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards

Items in the *Rules, Behaviors, and Rewards* section of the student and teacher surveys addressed components of REP. The overall REP strategy receives strong support by the teachers and mixed support of students. A majority of students (85%) and teachers (86%) indicated that students are willing to work harder to earn privileges. Also, a majority of students (83%) and teachers (98%) indicated it is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well.

Based on student feedback about the role of school activities in their getting to know the school and feel a part of their high school, the practice of reducing the lunch period or elimination of involvement in school activities should be examined to determine if these actions should be used for inappropriate behavior and low grades.

The evaluation team recommends a review of the administrative practices for disciplinary actions. Students and teachers registered close agreement levels (42% of

students; 45% of teachers) on the item, *All students at this school get the same treatment for breaking the same rule*. These agreement levels on this last item suggest that schools could benefit from a closer examination of the issue of fairness. In addition, this was an area of concern raised by some teachers in their responses to an open-ended item about needed changes in HSI. Consideration should be given to whether disciplinary actions should be on a case by case decision or whether disciplinary actions should be equally implemented across cases. The decision should be clearly communicated to teachers and students.

The district should examine whether the use of a REP period for students who earn a low grade is preferable to the use of tutoring. Students' responses to the issue of privileges appear to vary according to the situation. While 60% agree with the practice of limiting privileges when grades are low, agreement with the limitation of privileges increases to 73% when linked to behavior. Also, 73% of students agreed with the statement that it is fair to require *tutoring* when grades are too low. As one student remarked: "Can't learn it on our own [in REP]. Wouldn't be in REP if we could." For the item on tutoring, students with an F on their 9-week report card basically agreed with their peers who had not earned an F (2% point difference). Thus, to some degree, students appear to be separating the issue of behavior and grades and the district should consider low grades as a need for tutoring, not REP. In addition, although some teachers supported the REP period, others noted that it was basically a detention period that required teacher time and did not improve student learning.

The use of REP alone may not help students who have earned a failing grade. As compared to their peers with passing grades, students who have earned a failing grade less often agreed with the statements *It is fair to award privileges to students who make good grades and behave well* (13% point difference), *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when I do not follow the rules* (10% point difference), and *It is fair to limit my privileges here at school when my grades are too low* (16% point difference). If students who have earned an F do not accept the premise that responsibility earns privileges, then the ability of the REP component of the Initiative to help them improve academically should be examined by the schools.

Reporting Student Progress

The district should be commended for its implementation of the three-week grade report. The only area where students indicated higher agreement levels than teachers was for items related to reporting student progress. Generally, student-teacher differences in agreement level were 10 or more percentage points. A majority of students indicated that the three-week grade report has helped them to keep up with their work (78%) and helped them to get the extra assistance they need to succeed (72%).

Two recommendations are offered to improve the three-week grade report. The district should explore ways to make them more available to parents. Only 66% of students indicated they consistently gave the three-week reports to their parents. Students who had received one or more F's also less often indicated that they consistently give their

three-week grade to their parents. In addition, the schools should eliminate the use of three-week reports to make decisions about REP in the first 3 weeks of a course. Students in the focus groups indicated that 3-week reports at the beginning of the year on occasion are based on as few as two or three grades. They questioned the accuracy of these grades and indicated that the first three-week report should not be used for making decisions about REP.

Grading

A recommendation for grading practices is to encourage teachers to communicate to students the method for calculation of their report card grades. In terms of grading practices, students differed from teachers by as much as 50% points on the items *I explain to students how their grades are calculated on the report card* and *My English/math teacher shows me how to calculate my grade on the report card*. If students are to monitor their academic progress, then they should be clear on how grades are calculated.

Scheduling

The district is to be commended on its focus on the appropriate use of scheduling to meet the varying instructional needs of academic courses. In the responses to items on scheduling, a majority (93%) of teachers agreed with the statement that the length of the class should be based on the nature of the course. Teachers' focus on the nature of the course appears appropriately placed.

A recommendation is for teachers to use PEP sessions to consider the use of time in the 90-minute classes. The largest difference in student-teacher agreement level appeared on the item *In my 90-minute classes I spend more time working in groups than my 45-minute classes/ Students in 90-minute classes spend more time teaming with other students in learning* (25% points difference). A similar difference (24% points difference) occurred for an item that asked whether 90-minute classes spend more time with hands-on activities than in 45-minute classes. Consideration should be given to whether more active modes of learning, such as hands-on activities and group work, will improve student academic progress and engagement

Professional Early Planning (PEP)

PEP appears to be a positive professional development experience for teachers. Overall, teachers responded positively to the PEP items. A recommendation for PEP is to reinforce the appropriate use of PEP time and clearly communicate this policy to faculty and administration. Although the endorsement levels were low for items about the use of PEP time for routine classroom tasks like grading papers (14%) and for faculty meetings or other non-PD activities (27%), the focus of the time should be to improve the social and academic success of high school students.

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Appendix

High School Initiative Focus Group Guide

Introduction:

Over the last few years, your high school has started some projects to help students be successful academically and socially. The school district has hired a group of professors from the University of South Carolina to evaluate these projects and to examine if the changes have helped students be successful and where additional changes are needed. Today we would like for you to reflect on your experiences at _____ High School. Your answers will be used to identify the strengths of the high schools and to identify where additional changes are needed.

Some information you will need: This focus group will be 45 minutes long. Two important ways that we make sure we get the ideas that you share is through taping and observing the focus group session. The tape-recording of the focus-group will be only for analysis; the names of participants will not be used in any reports. Also, _____ will act as an observer; she/he is working on the project. Her/His role will be to take notes in case the tape recorder fails; she/he will not be participating in the discussion. Your input to this process is very important; however, if you are uncomfortable with participation, you are free to return to your class. Do you have any questions about the study?

We want to hear from all of you; so a few rules will help.

Ground rules:

1. The ideas shared here are confidential. This simply means that after the session is over, no one repeats what another person said during the session. We need for everyone to speak freely; so people should not have to be concerned that what they say in here will be repeated to classmates, teachers, or administrators.
2. Comments should be focused on the school, not on individual teachers or staff members. The district wants us to find out where your school's strengths are and where changes may be needed.

They do not want, nor will they accept, comments about individual teachers, administrators, or other school staff.

3. As I mentioned, our discussion will be tape-recorded; so please speak loudly enough for the tape-recorder to pick up your voice.
4. One person should speak at a time. Please do not interrupt other students when they are speaking.
5. Address statements to the entire group even when you are responding to the comment of an individual; avoid conversations with your neighbors because this will limit the information that goes into our discussion and distract other group members.
6. Your comments do not have to be aimed at me; we hope to have an open discussion about the strengths of your school and areas for improvement. I am here to ask questions and keep us on target.
7. In our discussion, feel free to make comments that are negative as well as positive. All opinions, need to be shared. We are not trying to get everyone to agree on an issue; instead we want to hear all viewpoints.
8. You do not have to answer every question, but I hope you will share your thoughts at some point.
9. At times I may have to interrupt you. I am not trying to be rude; I'm instead trying to assure that everyone is heard and that in our limited time we cover a certain amount of material.
10. Feel free to refresh your drink or move about during the conversation.

Do you have any questions about the procedures?

Questions:

1. All high schools in Richland Two have a Responsibilities Earns Privileges program. For example, students need a certain grade point average to get a parking place or to go off campus for lunch.
 - a. What are other rewards or privileges used here at _____ High School?
 - b. How do you think the Responsibilities Earns Privileges program has been positive for students?

- c. What is the downside?
2. You have been at _____ High School for more than one year.
 - a. In terms of the academic learning environment here at _____ High School, what positive changes have you noticed?
 - b. Again, in terms of the academic learning environment, what negative changes have you noticed?
 3. Which school program or activity has most helped you to feel a part of this school? Why?
 4. One area of concern for the school district is the number of 9th grade students who fail one or more course.
 - a. Looking back, what things could the high school have done to make the move from 8th to 9th grade easier?
 - b. What could your middle school have done to make the move into 9th grade easier?

Close:

Again, thank you for your attention and participation. Your input will help in improving your school.

High School Initiative Focus Group Guide

Parents

Introduction:

Over the last few years, _____ High School has started some projects to help students be successful academically and socially. The school district has hired a group of professors from the University of South Carolina to evaluate these projects and to examine if the changes have helped students be successful and where additional changes are needed. Today we would like for you to reflect on your son or daughters' experiences at _____ High School. Your answers will be used to identify the strengths of the high schools and to identify where additional changes are needed.

Some information you will need: This focus group will be 30 minutes long. Two important ways that we make sure we get the ideas that you share is through taping and observing the focus group session. The tape-recording of the focus-group will be only for analysis; the names of participants will not be used in any reports. Also, _____ will act as an observer; she/he is working on the project. Her/His role will be to take notes in case the tape recorder fails; she/he will not be participating in the discussion. Your input to this process is very important; however, if you are uncomfortable with participation, you are free to leave. Do you have any questions about the study?

We want to hear from all of you; so a few rules will help.

Ground rules:

1. The ideas shared here are confidential. This simply means that after the session is over, no one repeats what another person said during the session. We need for everyone to speak freely; so people should not have to be concerned that what they say in here will be repeated to classmates, teachers, or administrators.
2. Comments should be focused on the school, not on individual teachers or staff members. The district wants us to find out where the school's strengths are and where changes may be needed. They

do not want, nor will they accept, comments about individual teachers, administrators, or other school staff.

3. As I mentioned, our discussion will be tape-recorded; so please speak loudly enough for the tape-recorder to pick up your voice.
4. One person should speak at a time. Please do not interrupt other parents when they are speaking.
5. Address statements to the entire group even when you are responding to the comment of an individual; avoid conversations with your neighbors because this will limit the information that goes into our discussion and distract other group members.
6. Your comments do not have to be aimed at me; we hope to have an open discussion about the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. I am here to ask questions and keep us on target.
7. In our discussion, feel free to make comments that are negative as well as positive. All opinions, need to be shared. We are not trying to get everyone to agree on an issue; instead we want to hear all viewpoints.
8. You do not have to answer every question, but I hope you will share your thoughts at some point.
9. At times I may have to interrupt you. I am not trying to be rude; I am instead trying to assure that everyone is heard and that in our limited time we cover a certain amount of material.
10. Feel free to refresh your drink or move about during the conversation.

Do you have any questions about the procedures?

Questions:

1. Which school program or activity has most helped your son or daughter to feel a part of this school? Why?
What aspect, if any, of the school has been least helpful to your daughter or son?
2. Your daughter or son has been at _____ High School for more than one year.

- a. In terms of the academic learning environment here at _____ High School, what positive changes have you noticed?
 - b. Again, in terms of the academic learning environment, what negative changes have you noticed?
3. One area of concern for the school district is the number of 9th grade students who fail one or more courses.
- c. Looking back, what things could the high school have done to make the move from 8th to 9th grade easier for your child?
 - d. What could the middle school have done to make the move into 9th grade easier?

Close:

Again, thank you for your attention and participation. Your input will help in improving _____ school.

Appendix

School Programs and Activities that Students Indicated Contributed to their Feeling a Part of the School, Knowledge of the School, and their Academic Success

Code	Activity	Feel a Part		Knowledge		Academic Success	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
101	Band/marching band	56	5.5	65	5.8	20	2.0
102	Chorus (Cavalier Chorale, Gospel and Praise Choir, Viking Singers, Gospel Chorus)	29	2.8	39	3.5	8	0.8
103	Colorguard/Winterguard	4	0.4	7	0.6	2	0.2
104	Dance	2	0.2	2	0.2	0	0.0
105	Drama/plays	0	0.0	2	0.2	0	0.0
106	Step Team	9	0.9	13	1.2	2	0.2
107	Orchestra	3	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.2
110	Sports or sports training (not specified)	24	2.4	20	1.8	9	0.9
111	Academic Clubs (Spanish Honor Society/French International Club/Spanish International Club/ESOL/SAT Team/Mock Trial/Model United Nations)	23	2.3	35	3.1	15	1.5
112	Basketball	22	2.2	26	2.3	14	1.4
113	Football	73	7.2	86	7.7	29	2.9
114	Cheerleading	23	2.3	23	2.1	7	0.7
115	Cross-country/track	24	2.4	21	1.9	7	0.7
116	Soccer	17	1.7	18	1.6	6	0.6
117	Other sports (golf, lacrosse, swimming, tennis, volleyball, wrestling, skate boarding)	26	2.6	25	2.2	11	1.1
120	Clubs (not specified)	4	0.4	2	0.2	0	0.0
122	Service Clubs (Interact/Junior Civitan/Viking Volunteer/Recycling Club)	8	0.8	8	0.7	0	0.0
123	Other Clubs (chess, photo, student-to-student, drama, prom committee, Latin Dance Club, FCA, FBLA)	12	1.2	15	1.3	2	0.2
201	ROTC	16	1.6	19	1.7	16	1.6
202	AFJROTC	2	0.2	3	0.3	1	0.1
203	NJROTC	7	0.7	11	1.0	8	0.8
204	JROTC	12	1.2	14	1.3	11	1.1
205	Rifle Club	0	0.0	1	0.1	0	0.0
206	Drill team	6	0.6	4	0.4	2	0.2
301	Freshmen Orientation (Freshmen day, Fresh start, Jumpstart, Freshman Fun day)	3	0.3	16	1.4	2	0.2
302	Pep rallies	77	7.6	55	4.9	0	0.0
303	Student government (Student Council, Senate)	14	1.4	19	1.7	2	0.2
304	Assemblies	4	0.4	11	1.0	1	0.1
305	Sports events (football/soccer games)	16	1.6	8	0.7	0	0.0
306	Winter Days	20	2.0	6	0.5	1	0.1
307	Other (such as morning news, dances, field trips, spirit week, Battle of the Bands, etc.)	14	1.4	18	1.6	4	0.4

Code	Activity	Feel a Part		Knowledge		Academic Success	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
		401	Magnet or Schools-within-Schools (not specified)	0	0.0	4	0.4
402	Horizon	6	0.6	8	0.7	19	1.9
403	Infolink	7	0.7	15	1.3	26	2.6
404	Palmetto Center for the Arts (PCA)	8	0.8	1	0.1	2	0.2
405	AVID	6	0.6	11	1.0	14	1.4
406	E-School	4	0.4	6	0.5	14	1.4
407	Honors School	3	0.3	8	0.7	12	1.2
408	Discovery	4	0.4	10	0.9	18	1.8
409	Explorations	4	0.4	5	0.5	7	0.7
410	Freshman Academy	5	0.5	4	0.4	1	0.1
411	School for the Arts	2	0.2	4	0.4	1	0.1
500	Lunch	16	1.6	32	2.9	4	0.4
601	Classes (not specified)	7	0.7	15	1.3	15	1.5
602	Seminars (not specified)	4	0.4	15	1.3	19	1.9
603	Gym/Physical Education	12	1.2	15	1.3	5	0.5
604	English/English I/English CP (not Honors)	2	0.2	9	0.8	33	3.2
605	Math (Algebra I, Math for Technologies, etc.)	5	0.5	4	0.4	42	4.1
606	Foreign Language (French, Spanish, Latin, etc.)	0	0.0	2	0.2	5	0.5
607	ESOL	2	0.2	1	0.1	3	0.3
608	Social Studies	2	0.2	0	0.0	2	0.2
609	Science	1	0.1	4	0.4	4	0.4
610	Honors (or specific class such as Honors English)	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	1.1
611	Study Hall	1	0.1	2	0.2	6	0.6
612	Talented and Gifted	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	0.6
613	Business/Career classes	4	0.4	1	0.1	2	0.2
614	Other specified classes (such as art, creative writing, leadership, dance, etc.)	13	1.3	18	1.6	20	2.0
700	Initiatives (General)	1	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
701	Freshmen Mentoring Program	16	1.6	60	5.4	14	1.4
702	Summer Survival/summer preparation program	1	0.1	2	0.2	1	0.1
703	ASAP	2	0.2	7	0.6	11	1.1
704	REP	1	0.1	1	0.1	20	2.0
705	Tutoring and Testing Center/Lab	1	0.1	4	0.4	41	4.0
706	Tutoring (After-school help, etc.)	3	0.3	0	0.0	74	7.3
707	Unspecified	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.2
800	Nothing/None	256	25.1	195	17.4	291	28.6
900	I don't know	34	3.3	32	2.9	48	4.7
998	Non-responsive answer	11	1.1	10	0.9	12	1.2
999	Other	26	2.6	24	2.1	29	2.9