A Formative Evaluation of the Norfolk Public Schools’ Open Campus High School Program

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John Nunnery, Executive Director
Pamela Arnold, Associate Director
The Center for Educational Partnerships

[Old Dominion University logo]
Open Campus High School (OCHS) was piloted in 2014-2015 to assist two types of NPS students earn a *regular* high school diploma.

- **Students who have dropped out**
- **Overage for grade students**
OCHS, based on the Magic Johnson Bridgescape program, incorporates features intended to support graduation.

- Self-paced, computer-mediated instruction
- Individual learning and advisory support
- Flexible and focused scheduling
- Wrap-around services
This was a formative evaluation designed to inform efforts to maximize program effectiveness.

1. What were the student characteristics and risk factors?
2. What factors motivated students to re-engage in school?
3. How does the program influence continued engagement and success?
4. What were the key challenges?
5. To what extent do preliminary data suggest promise?
6. Can preliminary data be used to guide recruitment efforts?
We used a mixed-methods, holistic case study design with multiple points of triangulation.

Documents
- Lesson Plans
- All content areas

Archival Records
- "Leading indicator" data

Interviews
- Students (N=16)
- Educators (N=10)

Observations
- Lab and pull out
- 6 Phases
- 2 Observers

Questionnaire
- Students
  - (N=43)
“Leading indicator” data were collected from the school and analyzed to provide a preliminary picture of program effects.
Drop-out recovery and over-age for grade students were similar in some ways, quite different in others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFG Students</th>
<th>DOR Students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 credits at enrollment</td>
<td>58% had 6+ credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>2+ years behind peers</td>
<td>65% age 19 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean reading equivalency=2.8</td>
<td>Mean reading equivalency=5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low reading levels (1.2-4.3)</td>
<td>Very wide range of reading levels (1.1-post secondary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All lived with parent(s)</td>
<td>Significant number lived with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Significant number work</td>
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<tr>
<td>High rate of behavioral incidents</td>
<td>Many have children or other family responsibilities</td>
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</table>
Students and teachers perceived similar *risk factors* for dropping out or becoming over-age for grade.

| Social difficulties in previous school | Negative peer interactions, influences  
Behavioral difficulties  
Difficulty coping, anxiety |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Life circumstances impact on attendance, performance | Parenthood, family responsibilities  
Moving around, transitions  
Financial difficulty, homelessness  
Mental health issues, abuse  
Incarceration, legal issues |
| Academic difficulties in previous school | Not enough 1:1 support  
Inability to keep up |
Students responding to the questionnaire indicated a number of program characteristics motivated them to enroll in OCHS.
Interviewees discussed three additional “pull-in” factors.

- Regular high school diploma
- Community recruitment and publicity
- Family encouragement
Students' responses to questionnaire items indicated OCHS maintains a positive environment supportive of students' continued engagement.

- Respect teachers: 98%
- Like attending: 93%
- Teachers care how I am doing: 91%
- Like teachers: 91%
- Teachers care, achievement: 85%
- Can talk to teachers: 83%
- Feel good about progress: 83%
- More hopeful about future: 80%
- Like course presentation: 79%
Interviewees described three core aspects of OCHS that promoted their school engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive School Climate</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive peer interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in students’ lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement and expectations for success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive responsiveness to needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive environment for educators/staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualization of Learning</td>
<td>Self-pacing, self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensive teacher academic support, progress monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scaffolding in online curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selective curricular focus (2 courses at a time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive School Structure</td>
<td>Flexible scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smaller environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wrap-around services</td>
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</table>
A student on the OCHS learning environment:

“They tell us that they want to treat us like adults here. There is more freedom.”
A student on 1:1 support at OCHS:

“They take time out to sit down and help me. At most schools teachers are all over the place and cannot entirely focus on you. They have to concentrate on the whole class, but [these teachers] are right there when you need their help.”
Two different students on self-pacing:

“It’s just a lot easier, because you can move at your own pace. You don’t have the teacher stressing over your shoulder.”

“You get more done without waiting for other people.”
Observations by two independent observers over six phases captured strong evidence of six indicators of instructional effectiveness.

- Pacing for content mastery
- Differentiation
- Student engagement
- Checks for individual understanding
- Instructional technology
- Feedback
Observers captured some evidence of other indicators of effective instruction.

- Higher level thinking
- Linking present content with past and future learning, real world
- Peer to peer learning interactions
- Communication of learning objectives
Observers captured strong evidence of five of six indicators of a positive school climate.

- Trust
- Active Listening
- Flexible Grouping
- Clear expectations
- Safety
Questionnaire respondents identified financial challenges as most impactful on their ability to attend or complete schoolwork.
Interviews with students revealed two additional areas of challenge, also related to financial circumstances.

1. Need for more opportunities to complete work: other session times, resources for remote computing

2. Child care
Educators and staff echoed students’ perceptions of challenge, and identified additional challenges.

- School Environment
- Pedagogical
- Student Academic
- Community

- Behavior
  - Multiple Courses
  - Shared Expectations
  - Relevance

- Learning Difficulties
- Foundation Content

- Childcare Homeless
Outcomes were more promising for DOR students than OFG students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>DOR</th>
<th>OFG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N graduates</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of credits earned</td>
<td>.5-8.5</td>
<td>0-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean credits earned</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean reading grade-level change</td>
<td>+.2</td>
<td>+.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful SOL attempts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOL attempts: pass</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average n lessons completed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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*Note: There was a statistically significant positive correlation between average lessons completed per day and the number of credits earned (r = .48, n = 152, p < .001).*
Number of credits upon enrollment was a statistically significant predictor of graduation status.
The number of days attended on site was a statistically significant predictor of number of credits earned at OCHS.
The findings led us to suggest six recommendations for NPS to consider:

- Target recruitment and retention efforts on DOR students

- Provide services, scheduling options and resources to support attendance

- Explore additional supports for educators teaching multiple courses at a wide variety of levels.
➢ Strategize ways to systematically enhance peer-to-peer instruction and interactive learning opportunities

➢ Consider site-based study of collaborative teaching and foster additional opportunities for teachers to interact with content colleagues

➢ Explore development of a process for identifying and referring high school students who are likely to benefit from the program
Contact Information

John A. Nunnery
Associate Vice President
for Research
Executive Director

Pamela L. Arnold
Associate Director
Research Associate

The Center for Educational Partnerships
Old Dominion University

757-683-5449

jnunnery@odu.edu   parnold@odu.edu