

Transylvania County Schools
Mid-Point School Improvement Plan Review
Fall 2015

School Name

Donna Wilde, Principal & SIP Chair

Executive Summary

Description of the School

Located in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Western North Carolina, Transylvania County is referred to as the "Land of the Waterfalls". This rural school district serves approximately 3,525 students K-12 at nine schools including Davidson River School (DRS), the "School for Alternatives" for Transylvania County. DRS averages 125-150 of the approximately 1,100 high school students in the county annually for the past 6 years.

Approximately 90% of the district's students are white, while approximately 10% of the district's students represent ethnic minorities. African-American students represent the greatest percentage of students in the ethnic minority. While students of Hispanic descent represent a small portion of the total student population, they represent the fastest-growing ethnic minority population in the school system. Davidson River School's student base is primarily Caucasian, with a significant increase in the last five years of multi-racial students.

Transylvania County's community has suffered economically in recent years as a result of its loss of multiple manufacturing plants that were the largest employment sector within the local economy. The recent, prolonged economic recession affecting the state and nation has further magnified the impact of local economic changes including an increase in unemployment and decrease in age appropriate mental health services for students. Transylvania County Schools has observed an unprecedented increase in the number of students participating in the National School Lunch Program in recent years. Currently, approximately 60% of the district's students receive free or reduced priced meals in school cafeterias, with DRS having over 90% annually. Adding to the demographics for Davidson River School, the rate of homeless students has increased as has the percentage of transient students (56% of students in 2014-15).

At the same time, the school is fortunate to enjoy many strengths and assets in its ongoing pursuit of continuous improvement and quality results for all students. Among them are a highly qualified, dedicated corps of educators (0% teacher turnover rate for 6+ years) and a support system of caring and devoted community members and partner organizations that help to ensure the success of our students.

DRS offers programs for students in a variety of ways:

- Full day (4 blocks) of instruction in an academic setting of 15 or less per class, offering full course credit, credit recovery and credit acceleration options,
- Part time placement (2 blocks per day) where students also take courses at Brevard High School or Blue Ridge Community College,
- Various diploma options including supporting the local high schools with academic assistance for the full 28-32 credit traditional diploma and the 22+ minimum credit diploma allowed in the state.
- Other program opportunities include: Flexible scheduling, increased home school communications, active learning strategies, lunch time tutoring, and summer and afterschool programs.

Mission, Vision, and Purpose

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Vision - The vision for Davidson River School is to offer a creative learning environment where students take pride in their school and in their personal achievement. Collaboration by staff, families, and the community demonstrate to the students we are invested in their success through building strong and sustainable relationships focused on student achievement. We hold that all students will feel valued, safe, respected and that this learning environment will promote academic and personal success.

Mission - The MISSION of DAVIDSON RIVER SCHOOL: To provide our community with responsible, productive citizens through academic and career-technical education provided in a safe, caring environment.

Notable Achievements and Areas for Improvement

Achievements:

- Low teacher turnover with strong relationships built with at-risk learners and their families - 0% teacher turnover rate for over 6 consecutive years, lower than state and local average
- Student attendance rate (89% 2014-15) that is higher than 5 comparable alternative schools in WNC
- High staff attendance rate (97% 2014-15)
- Increased number of parent contacts in traditional (i.e. conferences) and non-traditional ways (i.e. text messages, parking lot meetings during work breaks for parents)
- Positive stakeholder perception survey results from parents and staff for years on both the district Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey and DRS surveys
- Increased partnerships with community agencies and individual community members increasing positive perceptions of DRS in the community
- High percentage of highly qualified teachers (100% for 6+ years)
- Personal Education Plans in place for 100% of the student body
- School-based professional development for 100% of teachers focused on 'Best Practices' with at-risk populations annually

Areas for Improvement:

- Continue to increase interventions that increase the graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate for TC S
- Expand partnerships with Blue Ridge Community College and other agencies that offer career-vocational training for at risk students
- Identify and implement interventions that increase school attendance for at risk students

Additional Information:

In 2012, DRS received grant funds to increase the graduation rate that totaled over \$350,000. These funds were used for extended day and summer programs as well as 3.5 staff positions. We entered the 2015-16 school year with reduced funding and significant reductions in support and instructional staff and resources. With the inclusion of automotive course offerings, complications grew in our schedule that resulted in fewer courses appropriate for 9th graders, thus changing the school composition compared to past years. Goals of the original School Improvement Plan are still appropriate but must be viewed through a different lens in the upcoming improvement cycle as resources and man-power to support our students have been significantly reduced.

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Goal Performance and Data Analysis

District Strategic Plan Goal: Supports Goal 1 & 3.	School Goal 1: Increase Student Attendance by 5%.
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Several trends and variables have impacted our ability to clearly assess attendance patterns at DRS. First, since 1995 when the NC General Assembly required school districts to provide programs for at-risk youth, state attendance regulations included a clause that allowed substitution of flexible scheduling and after school programs for traditional class period attendance. This makes sense, since several alternative schools statewide do not have bus transportation to their facilities and a student's school day begins when the student arrives. In 2014-15, the adoption of state-required Powerschool software eliminated this provision and state attendance regulations changed, adversely affecting alternative schools. Our initial goal "to increase attendance rates by 5%" began in 2014 with data for previous years inclusive of the original attendance provision, therefore rendering a true comparison of year to year trends impossible. Despite this obstacle, we moved forth with the goal.

Staff and School Improvement Team examined several pieces of data to track, compare and review attendance patterns for DRS. Daily attendance tracking and review of the old and new data management system was coupled with an internally created attendance tracking form. The latter form was used to track trends in attendance patterns with the intention of targeting low attendance days or periods. By tracking these periods, we could focus more attention on problem times or days.

What we have learned through our internal tracking model is three pronged: (A) There is no significant pattern indicative of specific high/low attendance periods or days, (B) Because our population is most likely to have poor attendance, efforts to increase attendance would be better served by researching subgroups of the student base to determine how we influence individual student attendance patterns. (i.e. pregnant or young mothers, homeless, juvenile justice referred), (C) The creation of an incentive system to increase attendance was largely ineffective (students rewarded by the incentives were most specifically the base that already had quality attendance records. Also, 2015-16 marked a significant reduction in ninth grade students and rendered one of our target subgroups no longer a part of the student base.

Current data, again skewed by software changes, show a decline from 89% attendance rate to an 82% attendance rate, with the school district hovering at 95%. Additionally, DRS lost support staff that was integral in boosting student attendance, either by counseling or emotional support as well as the ability to pick up students who habitually forego standard methods of school transportation.

Based on our findings, we reworked our internal tracking methods, identified tier groups and targeted the middle sector so as to be more effective in increasing attendance. With the addition of a partnership with Blue Ridge Community College automotive program, we have taken the first steps at working with a specific subgroup of students to increase attendance, many of whom had attendance issues. This dual enrollment program provides work study classes that are included in high school graduation requirements. For several students, poor attendance was greatly improved with this intervention. Taiko Japanese drumming has also been effective in improving attendance as has 1:1 community tutors for several students.

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Another revelation in our review is that low teacher turnover rate buoys student/teacher relationships and benefits the ability to identify subgroups of students 'most' at risk of having problems. This promotes regular consultation and revision of student's' Personal Education Plan (PEP). Periodic review of PEPs coupled with bi-monthly Option Team to generate potential interventions has also been effective to improve attendance.

The team will continue to make changes to our tracking methods, work to increase relationships with outside organizations such as Blue Ridge Community College and tutors, and implement additional tiers of interventions for focus group of students.

The Davidson River School Improvement Team and staff meet frequently to discuss school goals, identify options and opportunities for students as well as ways to engage families in their child's education. Weekly staff meetings identify students who are in need of interventions and organize parent conferences as needed. This includes traditional meetings at the school and non-traditional contacts (texting, home visits, conferences in parking lots or at parents' work place). Bi-monthly Option Team meetings, often inclusive of the school social worker as well as staff, target needy students and develop options for those specific needs (attendance, academic, social-emotional). School Improvement Team, comprised of staff, students, community agencies and family members reviews the work of the staff and offers additional suggestions. For 2015-16, the Team includes school administration, school counselor, student advocate, 2 students, 3 parents, 2 teachers and representatives from WCU, DSS, and the Mediation Center. The roster, SIT meeting agenda and meeting minutes are posted on the DRS school website. Data that was used to determine attendance patterns included the School Report Cards, monthly attendance reports for several years and chart of daily attendance rates since 2013-14.

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Goal Performance and Data Analysis

District Strategic Plan Goal: Supports Goal 2 – Every TCS student, every day has excellent educators.	School Goal 2: Professional Development for Staff
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Professional development for staff is an integral goal for the success of our students. The data needed to assess progress for this goal include records of Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits earned by staff, staff meeting agendas to document weekly professional development topics, teacher growth and performance data, and record of technology instruction credits offered by an Instructional Technology Facilitator. For the past 3 years, 100% of teachers have completed onsite professional development CEUs based on the needs of at-risk learners, as outlined in our original School Improvement Plan.

Completing professional development by its very nature should never be a finalized goal, as it is truly a never ending cycle at DRS as the nature and needs of our at-risk population change. We have the lowest teacher turnover rate in the county and a dramatically lower turnover rate in comparison to other alternative education facilities. Offering on-site professional development in a variety of formats to prepare teachers greatly contributes to this fact. Annually, DRS offers opportunities to earn 1-3 CEUs and delivers them through different venues to meet the needs of individual teachers. Staff development of this nature weaves the fabric by which we deliver instruction successfully to our challenging population. The aforementioned weekly opportunities for professional development are evaluated periodically throughout the year during observations and when individual staff members meet with the principal to discuss implementation of new techniques.

We currently have benchmark techniques in place in English and CTE courses, with other subject specific assessments in varying stages of development. Focused on increasing the literacy rate among our population, staff participated in workshops with a literacy consultant for the past 2 years. Unfortunately, we have lost funding for this position and have had to become increasingly creative as a staff to hone our practices.

With these efforts, we have 100% of our staff on board with continuous professional development. As previously stated, it is essential for our development to be fluid. As staff identifies unique or new needs, professional development opportunities will be implemented accordingly to meet these needs. As new staff members join the staff, plans are underway to review previous workshops based on understanding poverty, social skills training and active learning strategies. This has also provided an excellent refresher for our long term teachers and staff. Maintaining this high standard will continue to be tracked with CEU software and through weekly staff meetings.

School Improvement Team meetings review progress on this and other goals. In addition, we surveyed the staff for subject-specific, nature of the learner and technology interests in order to target needs and will provide workshops accordingly throughout the year. This spring, staff will participate in Professional Learning Communities based on either Star Teachers of Children in Poverty by Martin Haberman or The Cleopatra Teacher Rules: Effective Strategies for Engaging Students and Increasing Achievement by Sean Yisrael. The will work collaboratively to teach one another the content so that all gain the knowledge of both books.

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Goal Performance and Data Analysis

District Strategic Plan Goal: Supports District Goal 1: Every TC School student has a personalized education graduating from high school prepared for work, higher education and citizenship.	School Goal 3: Every student will have a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) that is shared with parents annually.
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Two key documents were created to track our success in reaching 100% of our students. The broad spectrum checklist that is found on the Parent Meeting Log paired with the PEP specific checklist has provided an excellent checks and balance system. At mid-point according to data, PEPs are complete for 98% of our students. Of the few students without documented PEPs, one is a drop out and the other lives independent parents. We believe we are ahead of the District Goal 1 as we develop a PEP for each student enrolled at DRS and review them periodically. We do not, however, have the statistical data specific to other schools that would be necessary for true comparison.

Each student and his/her parent participates in a comprehensive orientation meeting to develop goals and strategies for the student, review graduation plans and identify strengths and needs. The development of a PEP is one of the intrinsic pieces of the initial parent meeting. This results in all students at Davidson River School starting their first day with a plan in place for success. In the rare case of some transient or homeless students, a less than traditional meeting may be required which may result in a PEP not being established immediately upon enrollment. When critiquing our methods in developing PEPs for DRS students, several proposals arose for improving the information we can share with stakeholders. By increasing student/parent awareness of graduation requirements, a central portion of a PEP, the likelihood of meeting these goals will improve. One action step was to create a flow chart. This chart serves as a visual representation of graduation requirements over a four year period. A simple form was created but we later opted to revise it to better translate to our stakeholders. Second, we will increase the types of information being observed on our PEP checklist in order to ensure not only that we are doing initial PEP meetings, but follow up sessions with students in order to progressively plot individual course credit. Staff continues to utilize traditional (regular progress reports, phone calls, emails) as well as non-traditional home or work visits and online surveys to keep consistent communication with parents.

In the fall of 2014, DRS administered several surveys to students and parents with questions that indicate stakeholders understand graduation requirements. Results were discussed at School Improvement Team and staff meetings and action steps were developed accordingly. We developed and shared several infocharts with parents and will continue to revise for greater understanding. Based on suggestions from SIT, we included written comments on progress reports throughout the year (minimum of 6) giving updates on students meeting goals towards graduation.

While survey participation was low (33%) compared to other years, parents responded that they understand what students need to do to be promoted (92% positive response). Perceptions about the quality of instruction, adequacy of building facility and technology, and communication with school staff were also positive (92-100% positive responses) school safety. This year's survey will more clearly focus the question specifically to graduation requirements and parental knowledge of their child's progress.

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Again, staff reductions and new part time programs rendered enrolling fewer freshmen for 2015-16. We continue to be in general discussion with our stakeholders from the local high schools regarding their needs that DRS programs will address. Therefore, we abandoned the strategy of sponsoring a DRS Freshmen Retreat as this population is not currently in general enrollment at DRS.