

**Transylvania County Schools
2012-2014 School Improvement Plan
Section 6 Mid-Point Report**

School: Davidson River

Principal: Donna Wilde

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Current School Improvement Team Members:

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Mission and Vision

Mission Statement:

To provide our community with responsible, productive citizens through academic and career-technical education provided in a safe, caring environment.

Introduction: General Comments

During late spring 2012, the Davidson River School Improvement Team reviewed multiple data sources to determine progress towards meeting goals in the 2010-12 Improvement Plan and developing the new plan to guide improvement for 2012-14. During this planning phase, we identified *strategic goals* that would exceed the two-year required timeframe for a School Improvement Plan, rather than focusing improvement on short term “fixes” to school procedures more easily accomplished in a two year cycle. Our belief is that *true change*, strategic change, comes after extensive planning, implementing strategies, studying results and taking action in the direction of implementing effective evidence based changes, or modifying and repeating the cycle. The “Plan-Do-Study-Act” cycle for continuous improvement cannot be accomplished in many cases in 2 or less years.

During the same semester, DRS staff underwent substantial training on implementing a one-to-one computer initiative for students that would provide computers for every student for school and home use. In April 2012, teachers were simultaneously preparing for the end of year testing, last minute remediation and academic coaching for students, graduation activities AND receiving crash-course instruction on how to convert curriculum and daily lessons into online learning

units through “moodle” based instruction in preparation for opening a new school year with the One-to-One Computer Initiative.

In addition, significant changes occurred at the state level and with school demographics. First, the percentage of DRS students on free/reduced lunch (economically disadvantaged) increased from 72 % to over 85% that year, triggering a state review for Title One eligibility. Second, the state initiated a new accountability model which required all schools that issue diplomas to have a 60% graduation rate, including alternative schools. Based on these factors, DRS was identified as Priority School status, received Title 1 funds and was required to adopt another set of goals to be tracked through the lens of yet another set of guidelines called the Turnaround Principles.

Transylvania County Schools acknowledges that DRS offers services to support the *district graduation rate*, with most of our seniors attaining enough credits to earn a full 28 credit diploma, therefore, graduating from BHS or RHS while earning course credit at DRS. Yet, the new accountability model focuses on the individual *school's graduation rate*, despite classification as a traditional or alternative school. In addition, alternative schools are also held to the *old accountability model* for alternative schools, legislatively mandated over 15 years ago which requires development and attainment of Local Option Goals to determine school growth.

Therefore, the School Improvement Plan for 2012-14 was challenged to meet the new state accountability model regarding student growth, the Title One Priority School requirements for a 60% graduate rate AND the old accountability model for attaining Local Option Goals. Whenever possible, goals were aligned in all three areas listed above but with minimum success. Practically speaking, we were developing plans for three purposes, collecting data and hosting monitoring visits three times over.

In sum, DRS acquired three levels of school accountability compared to the two traditional high schools that were only focusing on one.

Progress Report and Summary of Results

Effective school improvement planning should overlap in all priority areas. For example, improving instructional delivery and integration of technology requires extensive staff development which is necessary to meet goals for instructional change and producing globally competitive students; Priority 1 (Globally Competitive Students) cannot be attained in isolation but requires progress in Priority 2 (21st Century Professionals). Likewise, increasing access to mental health and substance abuse services for students (Priority 3) is dependent on increasing partnerships with local mental health agencies (Priority 4). Below we have identified major accomplishments in each priority area but have minimized duplication of accomplishments if overlapping between priority areas.

- **Priority 1: Globally Competitive Students**

This priority area focuses on high test scores, increasing the graduation rate, and moving students towards self-directed learning where students take greater ownership in their academic progress. With the additional funds available through the Priority School grant, DRS was able to implement several new programs that resulted in students earning more course credit than in prior years.

Opportunities to earn credits were significantly increased through new extended learning options. First, we implemented “Senior Boot Camp” to support seniors who did not complete senior project requirements in one semester. This assisted students in working 30-45 additional instructional periods to meet that graduation requirement rather than repeating the course. Six students completed Senior Project requirements who would have otherwise repeated the course, thus delaying graduation. Second, after-school tutoring sessions were offered twice weekly throughout the year with bus transportation available. This eliminated the obstacle of students not making up time or work due to lack of transportation. Ninety-percent of the students that participated increased the number of credits earned. One additional opportunity was the summer program that hosted 21 students who earned a total of 33 credits. Two participants completed graduation requirements and therefore, did not have to return for an additional semester.

The creation of the “I Will [succeed]” program resulted in many hours of parent meetings and creative interventions to increase academic progress. New staff positions were responsible for a significant increase in home-school communications. Over 300 non-traditional contacts were made with families to increase participation in their child’s education. These included home visits, mini-conferences at the parents’ workplace and in rendezvous locations such as parking lots and at other schools when parents lived over 20 miles away from DRS. Students had increased tutoring and small group instruction opportunities and individuals who were otherwise unsuccessful increased school success.

The process of dropping out is not a single event but rather an evolution; students who drop out often have personal or academic obstacles over time that contribute to quitting school. This past year, we engaged more students and kept them focused toward the goals of graduation. It is difficult to put a number on success when working with students who are ‘at risk’ of dropping out but students who failed academically previously met greater success through the effort of the “I Will” program.

Unlike many alternative schools in NC, DRS supports students who will graduate from BHS or RHS and issues the 21+ credit diploma to a select population of students who would not otherwise graduate in 4 years at a traditional high school (average 7 annually). In 2012-13, DRS graduated 9 students on the 21+ diploma option and served 11 seniors who graduated from BHS. The overall graduation rate for Transylvania County Schools (TCS) was 86% and for DRS was 22%. Unfortunately, the students that we support who graduate from a traditional high school do not count in our overall graduation rate.

Both high schools had fewer dropouts than ever before with DRS having 21 dropouts, a consistent number with past years. Our efforts to increase the graduation rate, decrease the dropout rate and keep students engaged in school are slowly bringing positive effects to the district.

Regarding state test scores, DRS made expected growth compared to the two traditional high schools that did not meet growth expectations. Specifically, DRS made expected growth for the past three years in Algebra compared to the traditional schools that did not. Student growth in English 10 was comparable to the traditional high schools. While student growth in Biology met growth expectations for the past two years, we did not make growth last year, similar to one of the traditional high schools.

- **Priority 2: 21st Century Professionals**

School improvement for this area involves providing professional development that fosters significant paradigm shifts in the classroom - teachers must utilize technology differently and cultivate team collaboration with students both in the classroom and beyond. We seek to implement effective online course delivery options where students take greater ownership in their achievement. In addition, goals in this area focus on cultivating teacher leadership.

Staff members at DRS participated in several Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Each staff member earned between 1-3 continuing education credits sponsored by the school. Staff members who were not already trained in prior years completed 10 or more hours of instructional activities focused on these areas: understanding the nature of at risk learners; increasing writing skills and critical thinking skills; technology integration and online coursework. All certified teachers completed in excess of ten hours of professional development to increase understanding of new state curriculum standards. Four teachers completed literacy training and several attended or presented at national, state and local conferences. DRS teachers took lead roles in Common Core Training for English, and presented to middle schools in the county. All content areas teachers worked collaboratively with colleagues in other schools in Transylvania County.

Throughout the year, we learned from our mistakes regarding technology usage. In fall, we embraced Moodle-based instruction that was later modified for greater effectiveness with students.

We also made major revisions to online course delivery by abandoning the use of older software to adopt a newer version of web-based coursework. Much time, effort and frustration resulted in implementing new software that still presents challenges to this day.

- **Priority 3: Healthy, Responsible Students**

Mental health services and funding have been declining in Transylvania County for the past few years. In response to this, DRS partnered with local agencies to bring much-needed services to our students. During 2012-13, we offered therapy and counseling through three agencies. This required significant effort from DRS staff to coordinate referrals and service delivery brought through partner agencies. Twenty-two students completed brief screenings for potential referral to mental health or substance abuse services, 19 students received on-site therapy or counseling and 30 students participated in research based substance abuse education programs that focus on reducing at-risk behaviors. The local mediation center provided Guided Problem Solving training to 27 students and conducted 8 mediations (5 concerning conflicts between students; 3 for school attendance).

We incorporated character education, team building, goal setting and incentive programs by hosting activities with Camp Greenville both on site and at the camp. Outdoor club activities for girls, recreational athletics for students and their families, a young mothers' club and many anti-bullying activities were offered. The summer program enabled more DRS students to become eligible for and participate in competitive high school athletics than ever before. Since students are 50% less likely to drop out of school if involved in sports or extracurricular activities, we sponsored these activities to foster more healthy responsible students.

- **Priority 4: Leadership**

Efforts in this area were largely focused on maintaining partnerships, increasing parent engagement in school, and increasing positive perceptions for DRS students and programs. Last year, we had over 27 agencies and 52 community members involved with our students and staff. We surpassed our goal and exceeded the number of people supporting our students than in prior years. One new and exciting partnership developed with a local church that supported DRS through financial donations, mentors and senior project judges, and sponsoring summer graduation activities. Church members tutored students, proctored during exam week, sponsored recreational activities including a softball team and basketball team and developed a school/church/community garden with our students. Countless hours of volunteer time resulted as well as new mentoring opportunities for our students.

More activities were conducted than in past years to inform the community of the successes of our students and the programs at our school. Presentations were made by staff on the local radio and to civic groups. One teacher was recognized by a local TV station for his outstanding work with students and numerous articles were published in the local newspaper to acknowledge DRS programs.

Our Taiko drumming group performed at local festivals, the Arts Council, school activities and in events such as 5th Career Expo, and summer workshops. Connections were made with the

local Rotary Club and local foundations that resulted in donations to support Taiko and performance opportunities increasing.

For the first time ever, DRS partnered with three higher education institutions. Students from Brevard College scored senior portfolios and papers, helped with campus renovation activities and worked in classrooms. Staff from Western Carolina University observed teachers, worked with students and piloted research activities that will increase data on methods to improve student skills in literacy.

- **Priority 5: 21st Century Systems**

This last priority area supports the other areas. We accomplished the goal of developing online tutorials for both the new coursework software and using student laptops ('Chromebooks'). We developed and evaluated the effectiveness of moodle instruction and modified in several classes to better meet student needs. In addition, we identified the need for additional support staff to assist with the one-to-one computer initiative and support students in academic classes. Priority School funding was used to add a staff position to DRS for the 2013-14 school year.

Reflections, Lessons Learned, and Next Steps

While Priority School funding was awarded to implement new initiatives to increase the graduation rate, further work is needed to measure the effectiveness of the "I Will" program, the extended day and extended year learning opportunities for DRS. We plan to offer the summer program again but to increase student attendance by offering transportation to all areas of our school district. In addition, we will continue to seek leadership opportunities for our staff members, to obtain support from community for our programs and acquire evidence based practices to increase student achievement and the graduation rate.