

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

APRIL 2019

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
TRI-STATE AREA SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL
PITTSBURGH, PA

I. INTRODUCTION

The Extra Mile Education Foundation is a partnership with the Diocese of Pittsburgh Catholic elementary schools with the goal of helping at-risk students in the greater Pittsburgh area. The University of Pittsburgh Tri-state Area Study Council was commissioned to conduct an assessment of the current progress in three specific operational domains during the 2018-19 school year, including 1) school climate; 2) classroom best practices; 3) student academic achievement. This study was conducted with the guiding principle of the Extra Mile's mission and vision statements to provide a caring and high quality learning environment in these urban schools. Three consultants represented the Tri-state Area Study Council conducted the reviews, data collection, and analysis with a timeframe outlined by the Board of Directors of Extra Mile.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The Pitt consultant team conducted assessments and collected data through the cooperation of the building principals, teaching staff, and the Extra Mile staff. The team distributed and analyzed school climate surveys to educational staff, parents/guardians and students in grades six, seven, and eight. A classroom visitation instrument was utilized to assess the use of certain best practice teaching strategies. A review of the student academic achievement was determined by analyzing three years of national normed assessments such as the Terra Nova testing and the Iowas Assessments along with appraising the DIBELS early learning assessment.

III. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In April, 2019, the consultants from the University of Pittsburgh presented their findings to the Board of Directors of the Extra Mile Education Foundation. The results presented to the Board were categorized as follows: 1) School Climate; 2) Curriculum Management/Classroom Visitations; 3) Student Performance.

A. School Climate

The instrument for assessment used was the Pennsylvania Department of Education Office of Safe Schools 2015, modified for appropriate usage. The population surveyed across the three Extra Mile Education Foundation schools included parents/guardians (127 responses); professional staff (67 responses), and students grades 6-8 (145 responses). The particular school climate surveys used in the study were collected online through Qualtrics. The results of each of the surveys were combined from all three schools.

COMMENDATIONS: Staff

1. Based on the results, the staff indicated that all three schools provided a safe environment for teaching and learning.
2. The staff identified the schools were NOT affected by community crime and violence.

3. The staff believes the school provides a positive experience for parents.
4. Staff stated that bullying, based on race, religion, weight or sexual orientation, is not apparent in the schools.
5. Staff members utilized devices such as Option C, SeeSaw App, and Remind App for effective parent communications on a regular basis.

COMMENDATIONS: Parents

1. Parents identified their children were acquiring a good education at the school.
2. Vast majority of the parents repeatedly acknowledged the children liked their teachers.
3. Parents believe that adults in the schools have high expectations for their children.
4. Vast majority of parents feel they are actively involved in their child's education

COMMENDATIONS: Students

1. A vast majority of the students feel safe in the classrooms, school and outside around the school.
2. A high percentage of the students indicated that teachers and other staff in the school are willing to give students help.
3. Majority of students identified that most students in their school treat each other with respect.
4. A large percentage stated that most students in their school DO their BEST, even when their schoolwork is hard.
5. Less than half believe that students in their school are bullied.
6. The vast majority of the students feel the teachers care for them in their school.
7. A majority of students feel strongly the teachers attend to their learning needs and help them do better work in school.
8. All students in grades 6, 7, and 8 responded to the student survey in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the climate survey analysis, the teachers, with the support of the building leadership, need to provide students with strong and effective anti-bullying strategies and techniques on an on-going basis to support and enhance social and emotional wellbeing.
2. Based on the climate survey analysis, the building leadership needs to provide collaboration time (team meeting) and team building for teachers across grade-levels and content areas. The staff may in turn develop common activities, assessments, teaching techniques, student engagement strategies, unit curriculum maps and strategies addressing individual student needs.

B. Curriculum Management/Classroom Visitations

The consultants employed a classroom visitation instrument which afforded a set of "best teaching practices" to gain evidence for further analysis. Ten classroom visitations were completed in each of the

three elementary schools. The visitation included grade levels pre-K through grade 8. There were a total of 30 classroom visitations completed and analyzed.

COMMENDATIONS

1. The classroom teachers communicated the goals and objectives of daily lessons, thus setting high expectations for learning to occur.
2. The schools' cultures demonstrated a welcoming climate, friendliness and politeness throughout our visitation experiences.
3. The building leadership including principals, support staff, and majority of the teachers employ positive effective classroom management techniques in the classroom and hallways which ensure a positive, safe, and nurturing learning environment for students.
4. The teachers foster proper effective student/teacher/parent relationships. This enhances feedback and knowledge of students' degree of learning.
5. Students are respectful in their interactions with peers, adults and visitors in the building. They were well behaved and treated with respect and dignity by the professional staff.
6. Students demonstrate respect and responsibility for their behavior in accordance with classroom and building procedures.
7. Staff members utilized devices such as Option C, SeeSaw App, and Remind App for effective parent communications on a regular basis
8. The professional staff and building leadership have been trained and have implemented successfully using the Danielson's Framework for Teaching.
9. Teachers are keeping weekly grades in the content areas and providing nightly homework assignments. Based on the survey, the students feel the teachers help them learn.
10. Professional staff development was provided to teachers in understanding and implementation of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Step-By-Step learning and prescriptive assessment. DIBELS is a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills. They are designed to be short (one-minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the evidence, a **focus on a curriculum management** system including curriculum mapping, allows leadership and staff to identify the "essential" academic standards, skills, and concepts that each student needs to comprehend and demonstrate. The written, taught, reinforced and tested curriculum is fundamentally important to how high-performance schools operate. An absence of curriculum management, articulation, and alignment inhibits classroom staff and leadership in developing effective lessons.
2. The schools currently have a scattered curriculum approach to what is taught and what student skills levels are needed. There is inadequate curriculum consistency and alignment in student learning and preparing students for one grade level to the next and across the three schools. It is therefore recommended, that **professional staff development** workshops be implemented to complete unit curriculum mapping in the subject areas of reading/English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies grades K to 8. This type of curriculum management and design should be implemented so that curricula vertically and horizontal are aligned across all three schools (Understanding By Design, McTighe & Wiggins, 2008). The curricula must address standard-based content and skills, incorporate thematic and project-based learning, and provide a variety of formative and summative assessments.

3. **Professional staff development** is recommended so that teachers may acquire the tools and techniques that generate productive student engagement strategies that are relevant and meaningful to the curricula and instruction.
4. **Professional staff development** and training is necessary in lesson planning strategies design that enables teachers to plan to be “facilitators of the learning process/activity” rather than being the “lecturer and dispenser of information and facts”. This allows the students to be more actively engaged during the lesson implementation.
5. **Professional staff development** is necessary regarding training staff to structure and organize students in large and small group configurations more frequently so as to provide more active student engagement with curricula, instructional materials and technology devices/software as needed.
6. Provide classrooms with needed resources to support learning through technology assisted programs, software and hardware where it is warranted. As a result, a “**Technology Needs Assessment**” committee would be advisable based on student/curricular needs and the school’s fiduciary responsibilities.
7. Attention to the consistency of leadership in all three schools must be given so that stability of programs, procedures, and supervision may be provided.

C. Student Performance

The building leadership provided the study team with the student achievement data that was reviewed and analyzed for this report. The findings were determined for kindergarten, first and second grades using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Grades three through eight academic student achievement data was determined using the nationally normed Terra Nova Testing Program and the Iowa Assessments. Also, the study team reviewed the average student daily attendance records. Three years and the most current attendance and academic data were analyzed for this study.

COMMENDATIONS

1. **All schools** utilize the DIBELS assessment to measure early literacy skills in grades Kindergarten, 1 and 2.
2. The kindergarten achievement is trending upward in average growth over three years with a range of 53 to 73.
3. For first grade, the achievement is trending upward in the students’ acquisition of early literacy skills over a three-year period with a range of 40 to 49.
4. Over a three-year period, two different nationally normed tests were taken by the students in grade three through eight in all three schools. The two tests measure very similar reading/language arts and mathematics concepts and skills. It should be noted there is a small upward trend in reading/language arts average national percentile scores from 2015-2016, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, which moved from the 48th percentile to 52nd percentile across all three schools.
5. The average daily attendance of the students is over 95%, which correlates with the student climate survey findings that students like their schools and their teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Immediate consideration and based on the national percentile scores, the curriculum alignment and articulation in content areas of mathematics and reading/English language arts grades K to 8 must be a priority.

2. Professional staff development may be implemented for teachers across the second grade to more strongly align the current literacy curriculum including the current reading series (i.e. Reading Street) with the skills tested on the DIBELS early literacy skills assessment. The purpose would be to strengthen the students' achievement in this content area.
3. Student academic achievement data needs to be warehoused in a centralized location and analyzed on a regular basis by the Extra Mile Education Foundation leadership and the administrative team. The benefits of analyzing student academic achievement data will prioritize the areas of curricular improvement and more personalized instruction.

IV. STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 THROUGH 2025

In response to the performance assessment, the school principals and the Extra Mile Education Foundation leadership team established a timeline with the Tri-state Area School Study Council consultants and contracted their services to build-upon the commendations/strengths and to address the recommendations from the study. The contracted services agreement is currently addressing the written, taught, and tested curricula as outline below:

For the 2019-20 school year, Prek-Grade 8 Math became the 1st curriculum to be addressed by the teachers in all three schools. The Math Curriculum Mapping Project was completed in June 2020, with additional benchmark testing procedures and instruments developed during the 2020-21 school year. Textbooks and other learning materials were purchased and/or developed to accompany the learning outcomes.

For the 2020-21 school year, Prek-Grade 8 Reading and English/Language Arts became the 2nd curricular area to be addressed. Similar to math, updated texts and other learning resources and materials were purchased and benchmark testing procedures were put into place.

For the 2021-22 school year, Prek-Grade 8 Science and Social Studies have been identified as the curricular areas to be addressed. As with Math and Reading/ELA, updated learning materials are to be adopted, along with testing materials to accompany the two curricula.

For the 2022-23 school year, the newly developed Prek-Grade 8 Science and Social Studies curricula will be fully implemented, with appropriate revisions to the curricula made as necessary.

For the 2023-24 school year, the four major curricula will be further reviewed and revisions made as may be appropriate based upon teacher feed-back, along with results from the various student performance measures in-place—both national achievement testing and benchmark testing.

For the 2024-25 school year, the University of Pittsburgh, Tri-state Area School Study Team will be again commissioned to conduct a formal performance assessment process as it had done during the 2018-19 school year. A formal report will be made to the Extra Mile Education Foundation Board of Directors in April 2025.