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AUTHOR Adler, Laurel
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ABSTRACT

The East San Gabriel Valley (California) School to Career Partnership encompassing the eastern sections of Los Angeles County and serving an ethnically diverse population, uses design-based learning (DBL) to teach academic and career skills to at-risk students in small groups. Key features of DBL classroom activities include the following: (1) interdisciplinary lessons; (2) use of three-dimensional activities and projects; (3) collaborative groups of students and teachers; (4) projects that involve problem solving with multiple solutions; (5) activities that challenge students to design their own solutions; (6) activities that are not limited to the four walls of the classroom; (7) academic skills that use real-life situations; (8) use of mentors, tutors, and other adults to form one-to-one and small-group learning situations; and (9) activities tied to the state academic and technical standards but not tied rigidly to scope and sequence. A recent study of grade point averages (GPAs) of previously expelled students who participated in the pilot DBL program showed that the average entry GPA was 1.20, while the average exit GPA was 2.38--a 97 percent growth in 1 year. Use of this methodology showed modest 1-year improvement in standardized test scores for middle school students whose baseline GPAs were in the A and B ranges; however, baseline C students' test scores increased 300 percent and D students increased their scores 400 percent. (Contains 23 references.) (KC)

# SCHOOL TO CAREER ACTIVITIES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE EAST SAN GABRIEL VALLEY PARTNERSHIP

**LAUREL ADLER**
**East San Gabriel Valley ROP Technical Center**
**1501 W. Del Norte**
**West Covina, CA 91790**

## ABSTRACT

The East San Gabriel Valley School to Career Partnership encompasses the eastern sections of Los Angeles County and serves an ethnically diverse population. Twelve years ago the partnership began a rigorous evaluation program, in cooperation with the University of California Riverside. These early studies demonstrated that students who had failed in larger school environments succeeded in completing high school, often with dramatically higher GPAs and standardized scores when taught in small groups organized around careerrs, and where academic skills were taught within the context of career oriented projects.

More recent UCR research indicated that the Partnership programs are statistically more successful raising students' academic grades, increasing scores on required state testing, and producing students who go on to post secondary and careers at greater rates than similar students who did not participate.

The Partnership uses an innovative approach to teaching academic and career skills in small groups to at-risk students: Design-based learning (DBL). Key features of DBL classroom activities used in the Partnership include: **1)** interdisciplinary lessons, **2)** use of three dimensional activities and projects, **3)** collaborative groups of students and teachers, **4)** projects which involve problem solving where there are multiple solutions, **5)** activities which challenge students to design their own solutions, **6)** activities which are not limited to the four walls of the classroom, **7)** academic skills which use real life situations, **8)** use of mentors, tutors and other adults to form one to one and small group learning situations, **9)** Activities which are tied to the state academic and technical standards but are not rigidly tied to scope and sequence.

In a recent study of grade point averages of the previously expelled students who participated in the pilot program using DBL strategies the average entry GPA was 1.20 while the average exit GPA was 2.37 -- a 97% growth in one year.

Use of this methodology showed modest one-year improvement in standardized test scores for middle school students who's baseline GPAs were A and B. More significantly, baseline C students' test scores increased 300% and D students increased their test scores 400% (Stolz, 1998). Two hundred C average eleventh grade students who had been in career cluster programs utilizing DBL strategies increased their pre-post standardized reading scores (Stanford 9) by as much as 28%.

This paper discusses the impact of Design Based Learning and other School-to-Work strategies, such as career counseling and career paths on student achievement, and makes recommendations for future studies.

## OVERVIEW

The East San Gabriel Valley School to Career Partnership now includes more than 30 community-based organizations and 800 businesses, as well as 17 public agencies and 12 school districts. The geographic area served by the Partnership encompasses the eastern sections of Los Angeles County and serves an ethnically diverse population. The East San Gabriel Valley ROP Technical Center is the coordinating LEA of the Partnership. Although the partnership has been operating for many years, there has been an acceleration of change and an increase in services during the last half of the 90s. For example, during five years of operating a Federal School to Work grant (1995-2000), system-wide key improvements included: **1)** A growth from 7% to 84.6% of seniors enrolled in career pathways; **2)** An increased use of interdisciplinary curriculum from 17.5% to 41%; **3)** An increase in the number of work based internship sites from 348 to 819; **4)** An increase in the number of teachers completing business job shadowing from 2 to 592. **5)** An increase of 11th grade students who participated in work-based internships from 7% to 35.3%. **6)** An increase in the number of community volunteers from 1,693 to 5,883. **7)** An increase of 164 to 2,337 in the number of 12$^{th}$ graders who took advantage of tech-prep agreements to receive the college credit and **8)** 78.2% of students who participated in paid job training positions were hired permanently.

The activities described above, impressive, as they may appear to be, do not give us a complete picture. They are basically descriptions of process changes, that in of themselves, do not tell us about student achievement. If School to Work activities are to have the credibility needed for sustainability they need to result in data that demonstrate actual student achievement as a result of STW involvement, even for (or especially for) those students who are most at risk of failure and dropping out. This paper will review the impact of certain School to Work activities on students' achievement, including those "at-risk".

## INDENTIFIED NEEDS OF AT RISK YOUTH WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP

Prior to the implementation of the Partnership's School to Work grant in 1995, a local survey of educationally and economically disadvantaged youth in the target schools indicated that, for the most

part, students who are at risk of being expelled or dropping out of high school were: 1) deficient in the basic academic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, 2) lacked the ability to apply that which is learned in school to the work world, 3) lacked the specific job skills to be self-sufficient; and, 4) lacked the necessary skills to continue a program of education after graduation. The students perceived a lack of direct help from schools in guiding them to prepare for, acquire and hold a job. These precisely mirror the factors long known to contribute to social problems in inner cities (e.g. Abrahamson, Mizruchi, & Hornung, 1976; Fine, 1991, 1998; Spergel, *et.al.*, 1990). "Students who begin with the greatest economic disadvantages receive the least enriching education and end up with fewer, less valuable, and historically deflating diplomas." (Fine, 1991, p. 26). (*For the purposes of this paper, "at-risk" is defined as a youth under the age of 18 who has been truant, behind in credits, expelled or suspended, or who has demonstrated behaviors which can lead to suspension/expulsion, truancies and dropping out such as substance abuse, fighting, theft, violence, low achievement, lack of credits, poor attendance.*) Significantly, 66 % of the "at risk" students surveyed reported that while they would continue in school if possible, they were not confident they had the academic skills to do so. Interviews of at risk students found that one of the biggest barriers to successful school completion was a sense of hopelessness - they were so far behind that they believed there was not enough time to catch up and graduate from high school. Thus, it was important for the partners to determine if students (including at-risk) who received services from the Partnership were not only able to stay in school, but also increase their achievement.

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

### PRIOR DATA:

Twelve years ago the partnership began a rigorous evaluation program, in cooperation with the University of California Riverside. Results of these research studies have been published in a number of journals and accepted by the Program Effectiveness Panel of the U.S. Department of Education (Hemsley and Dick, 1992; Hemsley, 1995; Adler, Cragin and Searls, 1996). These early studies demonstrated that students who had failed in larger school environments succeeded in completing high school, often with dramatically higher GPAs and standardized scores when taught in small groups organized around careers,

and where academic skills were taught within the context of career oriented projects. These results were compatible with research on other programs emphasizing both academic skills and career subjects, which also showed positive changes in student performance (Center for Field Research & School Services, 1973; Foley, 1984; Gifford, 1987; Paul, 1982; Rolls, 1980; Sheridan School District, 1979.) Key characteristics of the Partnership were described in case studies of the East San Gabriel Valley Partnership by AED and UCR. They were: a cooperative, team-based and horizontally managed staff structure; an emphasis on research-based curriculum design and evaluation; a structure where students take on more responsibility for their own success, making them partners with educators and employers; opportunities for students to acquire both the academic and technical skills, and attitudes needed to cope with future changes in the economy and in their own plans (Hemsley, 1994, 1995; Hubbard , 1995).

UCR also identified specific activities in the Partnership's model which may be clues to its success: **1)** Cooperative partnerships that link the student with both businesses and colleges, allowing accessibility to both jobs and to post-secondary education for at-risk students would not have otherwise considered college. **2)** Accessible, ongoing monitoring and support services which track student progress, identify potential problems, and provide additional services. **3)** Business Internships that enable students see the application of learned academic skills on the job. **4)** A combination of instructional approaches that emphasize high achievement for all students, how to solve problems having multiple solutions, utilizing critical thinking skills, cooperative learning groups, and tutoring/mentoring. **5)** Active participation of students and parents in the student's education plan. (Dick, 1993) (Hemsley/Mitchell, 1996, 1998)

**RECENT DATA**

More recent UCR research on high school students indicated that the Partnership programs are statistically more successful raising students' academic grades, increasing scores on required state testing, and producing students who go on to post secondary and careers at greater rates than similar students who did not participate (Hemsley, 97,98; Stolz, 1999). Other research studies have reinforced the credibility of these outcomes. "It appears that potential dropouts can experience success if placed in special programs designed to meet their needs and those aimed primarily at vocational training. The idea is that a 'school within a school' is the most productive use of resources..." Weis, *et.al.,* 1989). A

recently published study of the small schools programs in Chicago (Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland Gladden and Mosak, 2000) has provided data that small learning environments, serving disadvantaged urban students, have increased student achievement, and reduced attrition and violence. Many of the characteristics of successful small learning environments reported in the Chicago study are the same as those identified in the AED and UCR studies of the ESGVROP/TC cited above (Hubbard, 95. Hemsley, 98).

In addition to involving students in individualized career paths, there are two specific approaches used by the Partnership that appear to have had a meaningful impact on at-risk students. These are: **1)** Design Based Learning, and **2)** Individualized Career Counseling.

**Design Based Learning as a Strategy for Teaching Contextual Academics**

The Partnership uses an innovative approach to teaching academic and career skills in small groups to at-risk students: **Design-based learning (DBL).** DBL, sometimes called Project Based Learning, has been utilized for over 20 years in schools in the U.S. and other countries. It is a multi-disciplinary approach where students design and operate such projects as city governments or a new business and all the skills and products necessary. Students address government, city services, transportation design, population analysis, business plans, etc. All subjects (both academic and career) are reinforced in a contextualized manner through this approach (Nelson, 1984). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) describes DBL as a set of teaching strategies which: **1)** Enhance flexible thinking skills, **2)** Promote self-directed learning and assessment, **3)** Develop students' interpersonal and communication skills, **4)** Cultivate responsible citizens (Davis 1997). Lawson describes the steps that teachers use with students when using Design Based Learning: **1)** Identifying & defining problems, **2)** Gathering & analyzing information, **3)** Determining performance criteria for successful solutions, **4)** Generating alternative solutions & building prototypes, **5)** Evaluating & selecting appropriate solutions, **6)** Implementing choices, and **7)** Evaluating outcomes. (Lawson, *How Designers Think*, 1990)

Key features of DBL classroom activities used in the Partnership include: interdisciplinary lessons, use of three dimensional activities and projects, collaborative groups of students and teachers, projects which involve problem solving where there are multiple solutions, activities which challenge students to design their own solutions, activities which are not limited to the four walls of the classroom, academic skills

which use real life situations, use of mentors, tutors and other adults to form one to one and small group learning situations, activities which are tied to the state academic and technical standards but are not rigidly tied to scope and sequence.

At the high school level, 100 previously expelled and/or suspended students have been enrolled in a pilot that has utilized DBL as a part of a business/marketing career cluster. Seventy middle school students also participated in a DBL based instruction pilot. An additional 200 high school students with C averages were enrolled in career pathways using DBL instructional strategies. (Students typically spend around one to two hours of their school day on DBL activities.) At both the high school and the middle school levels, students design and develop student run businesses, solve environmental problems, design buildings and cities both 3 dimensionally and using computer technology, and then share and modify their designs with teams of students both within the class and with other classes through on-line conferencing. Students seek assistance, information and resources throughout the school and community to get the information necessary to complete these complex projects. These activities allow students to utilize their academic and technical skills to solve real problems. The 1995 case study of the ESGV Partnership by the Academy for Education Development (AED) reported an atmosphere of high expectation for all students. (Hubbard, 1995) These high expectations are carried out in DBL. In a recent study of grade point averages of the previously expelled students who participated in the DBL pilot program the average entry GPA was 1.20 while the average exit GPA was 2.37 – a 97% growth in one year. (Griffin, 2000) (see appendix) Many of these same students who started the program with "D" averages have now graduated from high school and gone on to college, many receiving scholarships.

For the middle school students, results of Cal Poly Pomona data, using Stanford 9 Achievement Test data as the norm, indicated that while use of this methodology showed modest one-year improvement for students whose baseline GPAs were A and B, baseline C students' test scores increased 300% & D students increased their test scores 400% (Stolz, 1998). More recently, in October 2000, the two hundred average eleventh grade students who had been in career cluster programs utilizing DBL strategies increased their pre-post standardized reading scores (Stanford 9) by as much as 28% (score increases ranged from 11% to 28% depending upon career cluster – see appendix). Additional study will

be conducted in 2001, to see if these preliminary results hold out in a larger study utilizing control groups.

These results are in contrast to other research on strategies for at risk students, which have produced mixed results at best for traditional compensatory education programs. (e.g. Feuerstein, 1980; Phillips, Crouse and Ralph, 1996). The literature shows that the more effective strategies for at-risk students emphasize: 1) enriched curriculum and 2) smaller learning environments – which are the essence of the DBL pilot project.. Accelerated instruction for children from low-income communities has also been shown to be more effective overall than the usual remedial education approach (Knapp, *et.al.*, 1992; Peterson, 1989) The literature review is reinforced by the Cal Poly data where in the DBL pilot, students accelerated their learning in course content, and they also increased their GPAs and standardized test scores.

**Impact of Individualized Career Counseling**

Results of a 1999 U.C. Riverside survey of teachers from two schools within the partnership serving large numbers of at-risk student populations sharing similar demographics, were evaluated to compare teacher attitudes regarding various School-to-Work practices. Teachers at two large high schools that had large numbers of "at-risk" students, and one small alternative high school located within the same census tract were surveyed. The survey responses were revealingly different between the two large "at-risk" high schools. The teachers at the large high school having individualized **career counseling** on campus showed more positive attitudes and a higher percentage of personal involvement in systemic School-to-Work practices than did the teachers from the other large high school which has a less individualized career counseling program. By examining the actual activities of the career counseling staff at the "high-responding" large high school, a descriptive definition of an "Individualized career counseling" staff can be defined as having the following **key elements**: **1)** Provides personal mentoring to students encouraging higher achievement. **2)** Provides specific on-campus activities for career awareness. **3)** Maintains high involvement in professional in-service training. **4)** Assists teachers with revisions in curriculum development. **5)** Coordinates recognition of achievements for the full scope of students. **6)** Broadcasts student and school achievements to parents and the public in general. **7)** Actively participates

in extra-curricular activities among students. **8)** Maintains highly visible education and career resources. **9)** Furnishes post-secondary financial aid information and assistance to **all** students (not just college track). **10)** Provides assessment for Student career interests and aptitudes. **11)** Assists teachers with arranging for business and community based learning experiences. Responses to questions on the survey are shown below:

**"How often do you assess student learning by what students know and are able to do, using the following assessment elements?"**

| **Teachers routinely using the element:** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assessment Strategy | Smaller School | Larger school (Career Counseling) | Larger School (Standard Counseling) |
| Skills Certificates | 16.7% | 25.8% | 0.7% |
| Exit Portfolios | 16.7% | 29% | 9.7% |
| Senior Project | 0% | 38.7% | 6.5% |
| District Proficiency Standards | 50% | 54.8% | 45.2% |

**"How many of the following approaches to providing students with career awareness are used on a constant, routine basis at your school or in your classroom? (Elements include small group career development or career awareness classes, small group work readiness classes, career development activities integrated into academic or career classes, use of career interest surveys, career counseling, and career fairs.)"**

| **Out of six mentioned elements:** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Smaller School | Larger school ( Career Counseling) | Larger School (Standard Counseling) |
| 3 | 6 | 2 |

**"Some educators believe high schools should provide structured workplace experiences such as job shadowing, paid or unpaid work experience, and internships. What is your opinion?"**

| Teachers strongly agree: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Smaller School | Larger school (Career Counseling) | Larger School (Standard Counseling) |
| 100% | 80.6% | 54.8% |

**"Some educators believe career information should be a component of core curricular areas (i.e., math, English, social studies, and science). What is your opinion?"**

| Teachers strongly agree: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Smaller School | Larger school (Career Counseling) | Larger School (Standard Counseling) |
| 100% | 77.4% | 58% |

It appears that when Individualized Career Counseling is provided in a high school setting, it not only provides multiple services to students, but has a positive impact on teacher's activities, how they view their roles, and where they place their priorities. In 2001-02 these 2 schools will be compared on actual student outcomes including: high school graduation rates, standardized test scores, post-secondary transition, and movement into careers.

## SUMMARY

More study needs to be undertaken to determine if design based learning, individualized career counseling and other school to work strategies are as effective on a large scale as they appear to be based upon this study. In 2001-02, the East San Gabriel Valley Partnership (in cooperation with the University of California Riverside and California Polytechnic University Pomona) is planning a much larger study of the effects of these and other treatments. A major focus of that study will be the impact of the partnership activities on student academic achievement, high school graduation, 12th grade GPA, and transitioning into careers and/or post secondary education. It is hoped that other school systems will partner with research universities and colleges of education to conduct similar research. If School-to-Work activities are shown to be effective strategies for increasing student achievement, then they are more likely to be sustained and nurtured within school systems. This study indicates that the potential

for these strategies increasing the quality of instruction and levels of achievement especially for at-risk students is, at the very least, encouraging.

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## SCHOOL-TO-CAREER OBSERVATIONS

### A Comparison Between Figures Compiled for the Partnership in the 1995-1996 Year With the 1999-2000 Year

- In 1995-1996, only 7% of seniors were enrolled in career pathways or pathway components. For 1999-2000, they had reached 84.6%.

- Teacher awareness, support of, and use of curriculum integration elements has increased form 17.5% in 1995-96, to 41% in 1999-2000, for counselors it increased to 65%, with 33.6% of the administrators.

- The proportion of seniors meeting and exceeding performance standards measured through various formats has increased from 30.4% in 1995-96 to 55.3% in 1999-2000. For 1999-2000, 68.4% of adult education students have met the ESLR requirements of the various districts; 28.5% of seniors have successfully taken district proficiency tests; and 7% of seniors successfully performed a senior project in place of an exit exam or portfolio.

- For 1999-2000, 35.1% of instructors have participated in staff development exercises as opposed to 18.7% in 1995-96.

- For 1999-2000, 7% of the teaching staff have become part of local, regional, state, and national organizations related to education. This compares to 2.1% in 1995-96.

- The number of work site job training programs has increased form 348 in 1995-96 to 819 in 1999-2000.

- For 1999-2000, 592 educators completed job shadowing opportunities as opposed to only 2 educators in 1995-96.

- In 1995-96, 9.9% of high school and adult students had Individualized Training Plans (ITPs); this increased to 23.1% in 1999-2000.

- For 1999-2000, 78.2% of students participating in paid job training positions were hired permanently.

- 35.3% of 11$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ grade students in 1999-2000 participated in work-based learning experiences compared to .7% of students in 1995-96.

- In 1995-96, there were 1,693 individuals from the community (non-educators) providing volunteer service to the partners, compared to 5,883 in 1999-2000

- In 1995-96, there were 190 businesses, labor organizations, non-profit, and government organizations partnering with the schools, compared to 1,609 in 1999-

2000. From these organizations, in 1995-96, there were 2,619 individuals participating; compared to 4,142 in 1999-2000.

- In 1995-96, the partnership showed that only 164 12th graders took advantage of the articulation agreements to receive the college credit afforded. In 1990-2000, there were 2,337 seniors intending to go to college and receive college credit for their articulated classes.

- In 1995-96, there were 190 STC programs working together within the partnership; in 1999-2000 this has increased to 360 programs both school-based and work-based.

- In 1995-96, the partners had little information on students with barriers within their areas. For 1999-2000, all district had logged poverty level, welfare, and teen parent information; some still have to develop methods to track their physically and mentally challenged students.

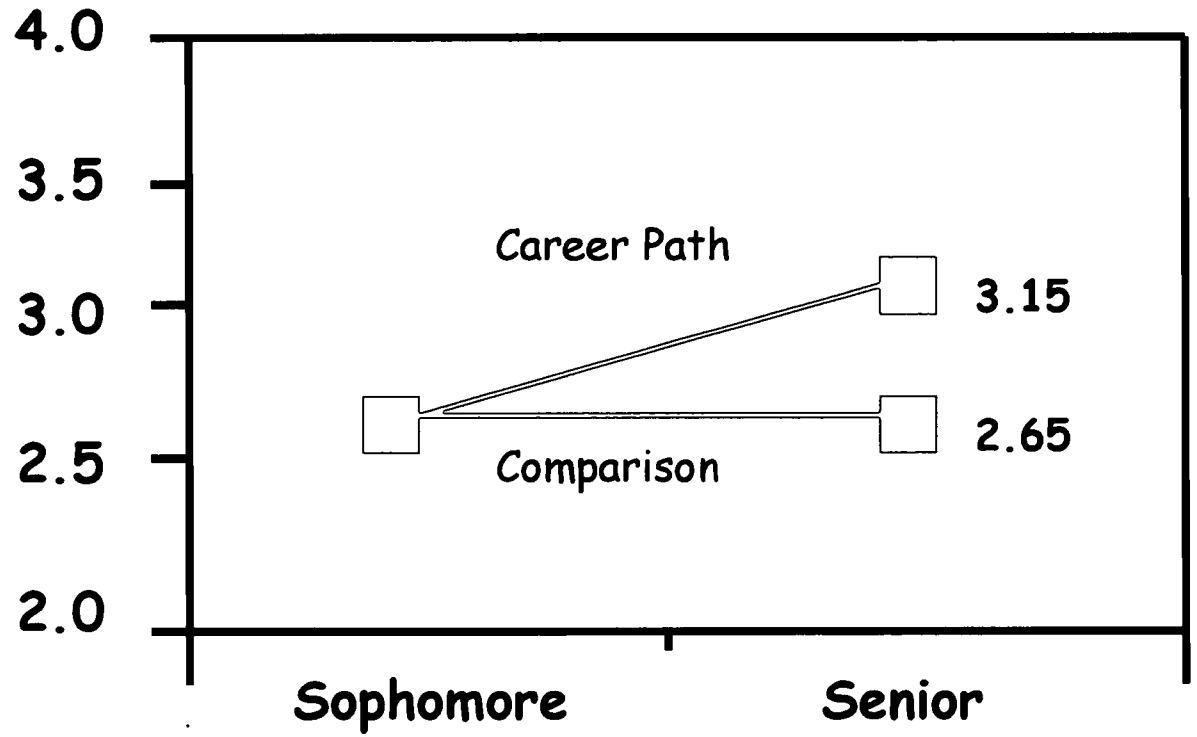
**APPENDICES**

# KEY FEATURES

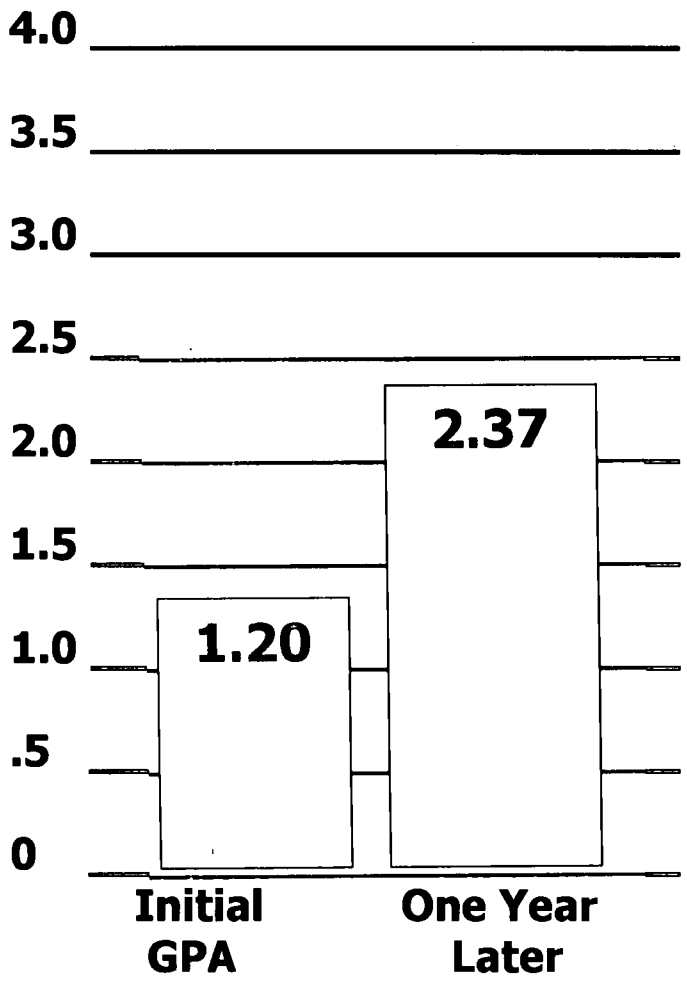
## Of Design Based School to Work Activities

- Interdisciplinary integrating academic and technical subject areas
- Three dimensional
- Collaborative among students and teachers
- Involves problem solving where there are multiple solutions
- Challenges to students to design their own solutions
- Not limited to the four walls of the classroom
- Academic skills applied to real life situations
- Multi-level organizational collaboration (ex: Sec/Post Sec)
- Community participation (mentors, internships)
- Standards-based
- Not rigidly tied to scope and sequence

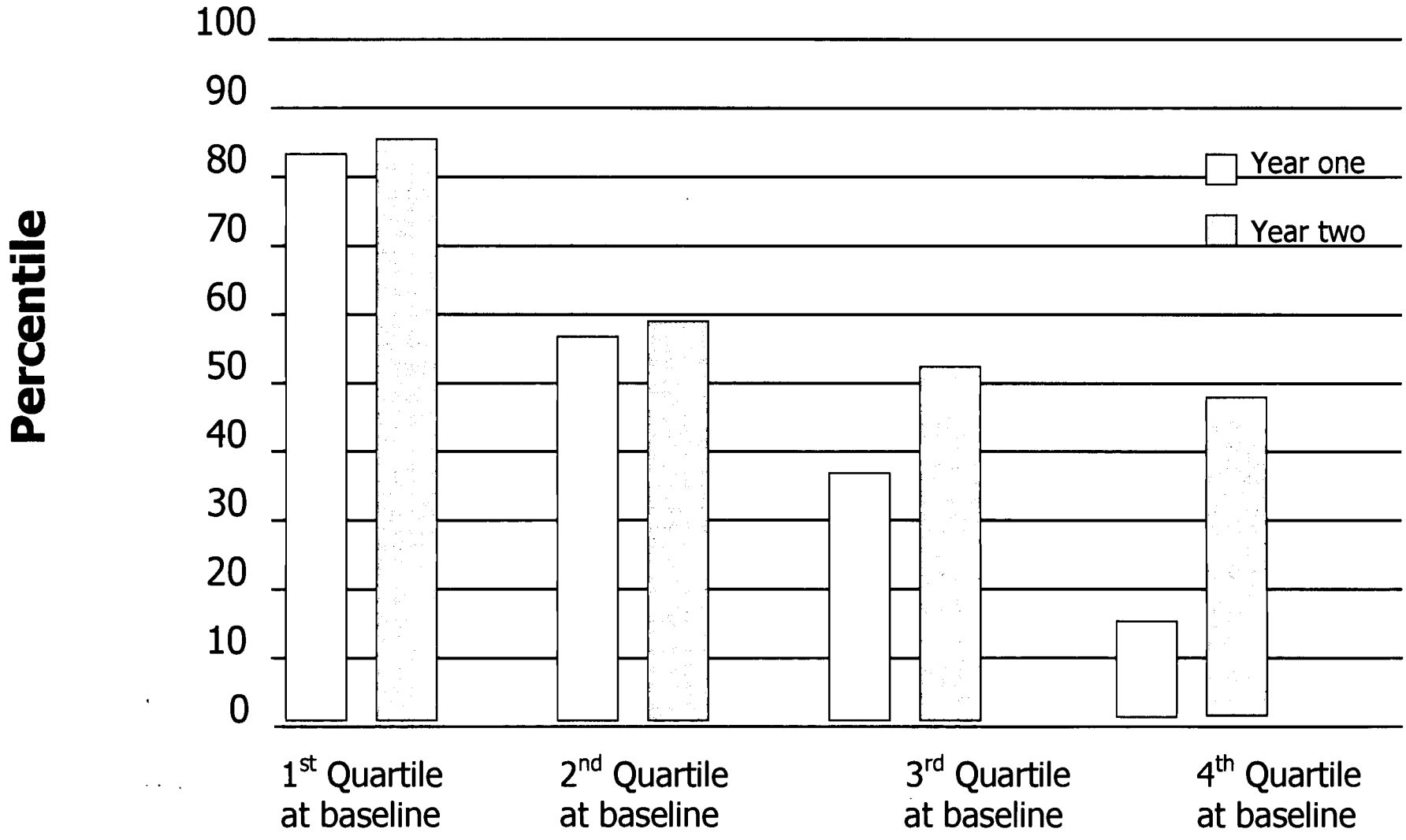
# GPA COMPARISON



# At Risk/Expelled Students
# ONE YEAR GPA INCREASE

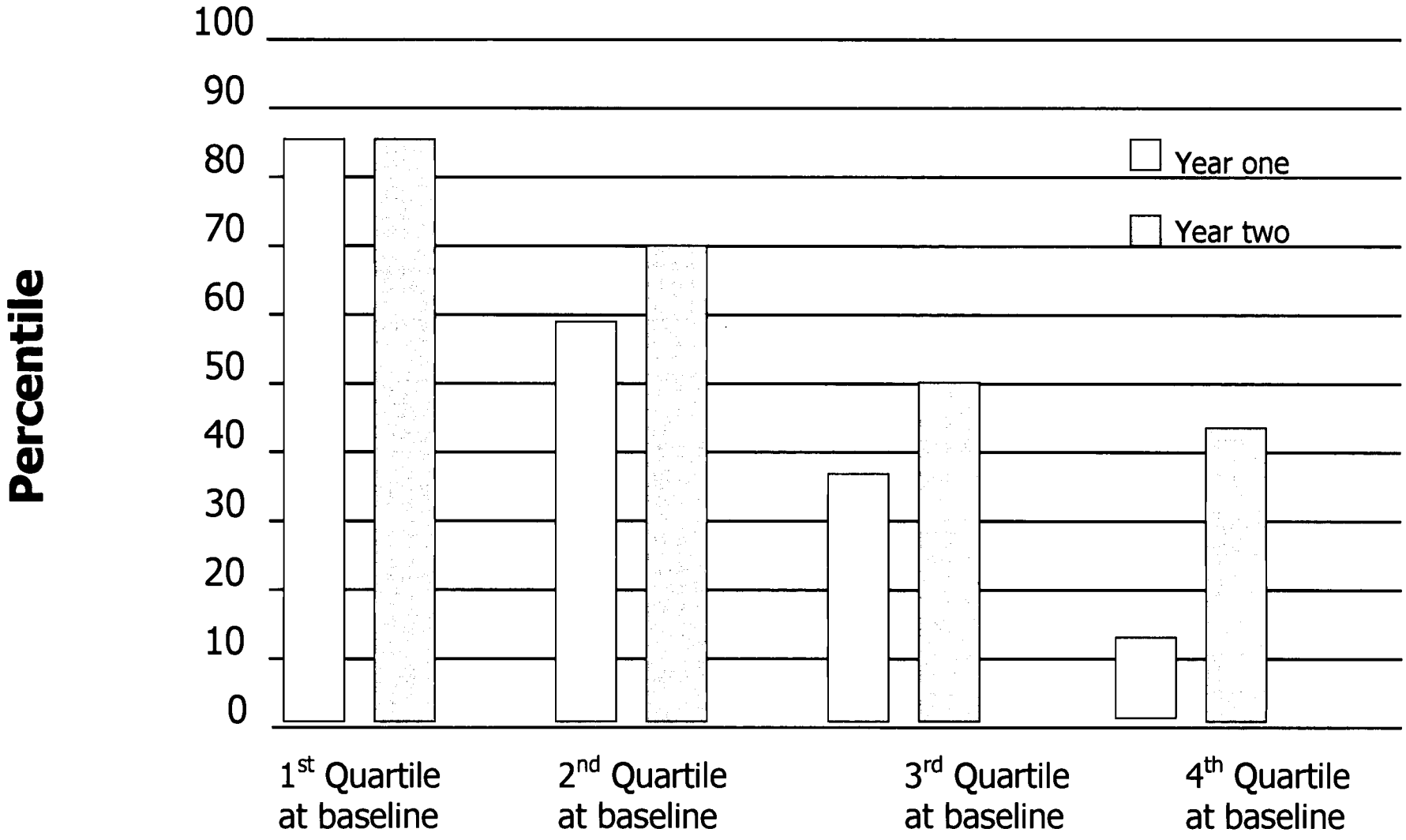


# Middle School DBL SAT-9 Reading Results




**N=70**

# Middle School DBL SAT-9 Language Results




**N=70**

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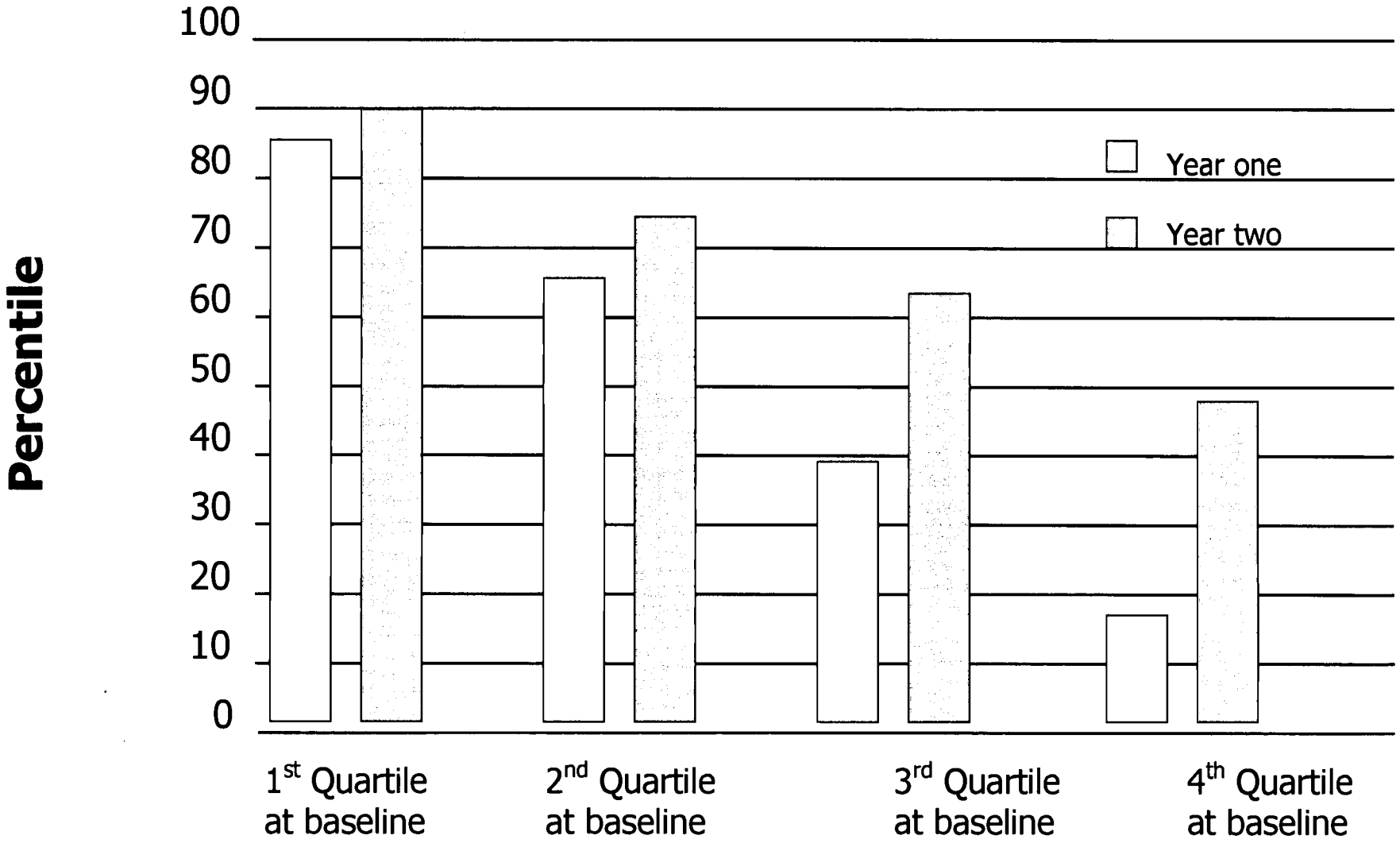
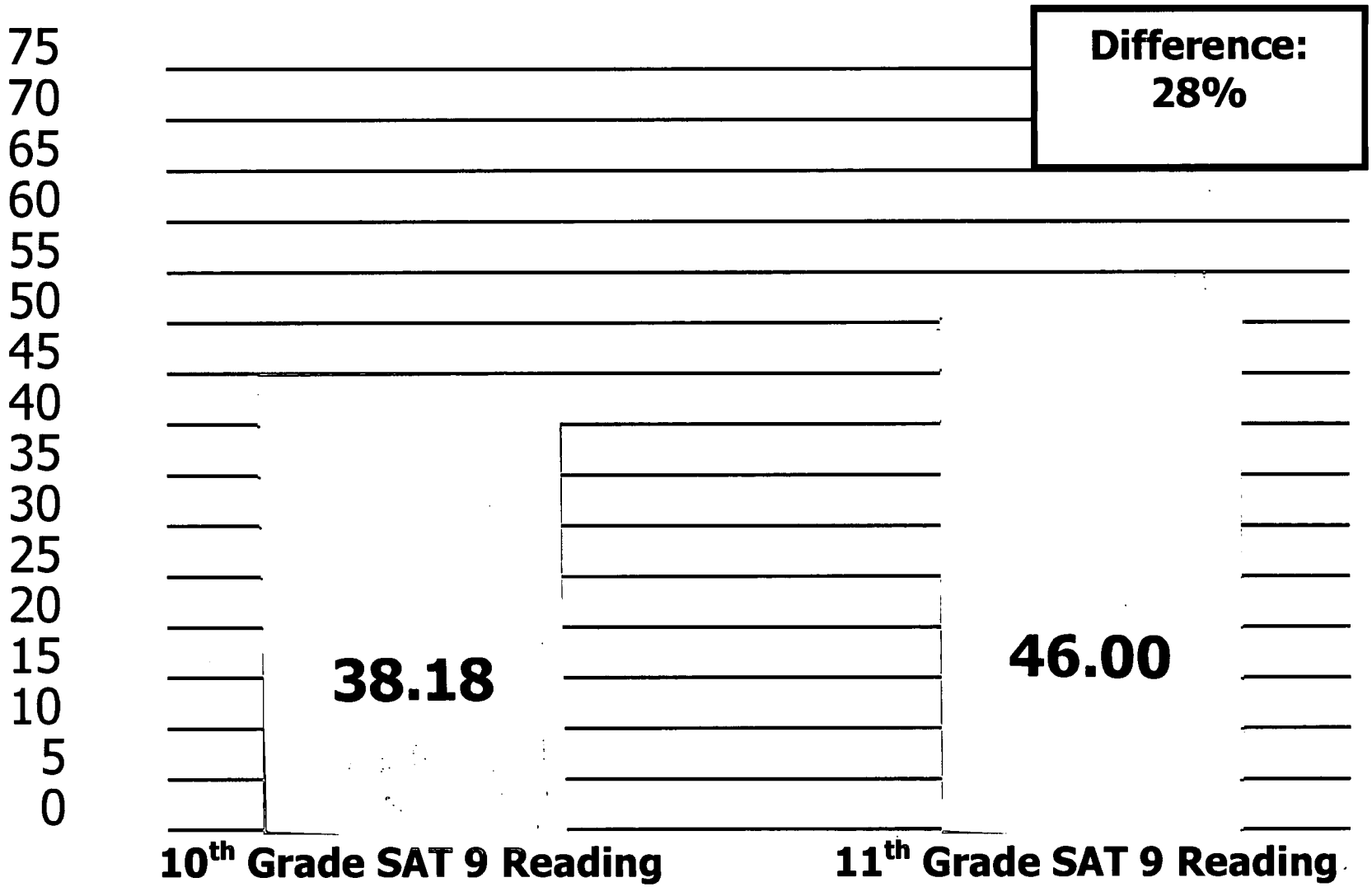
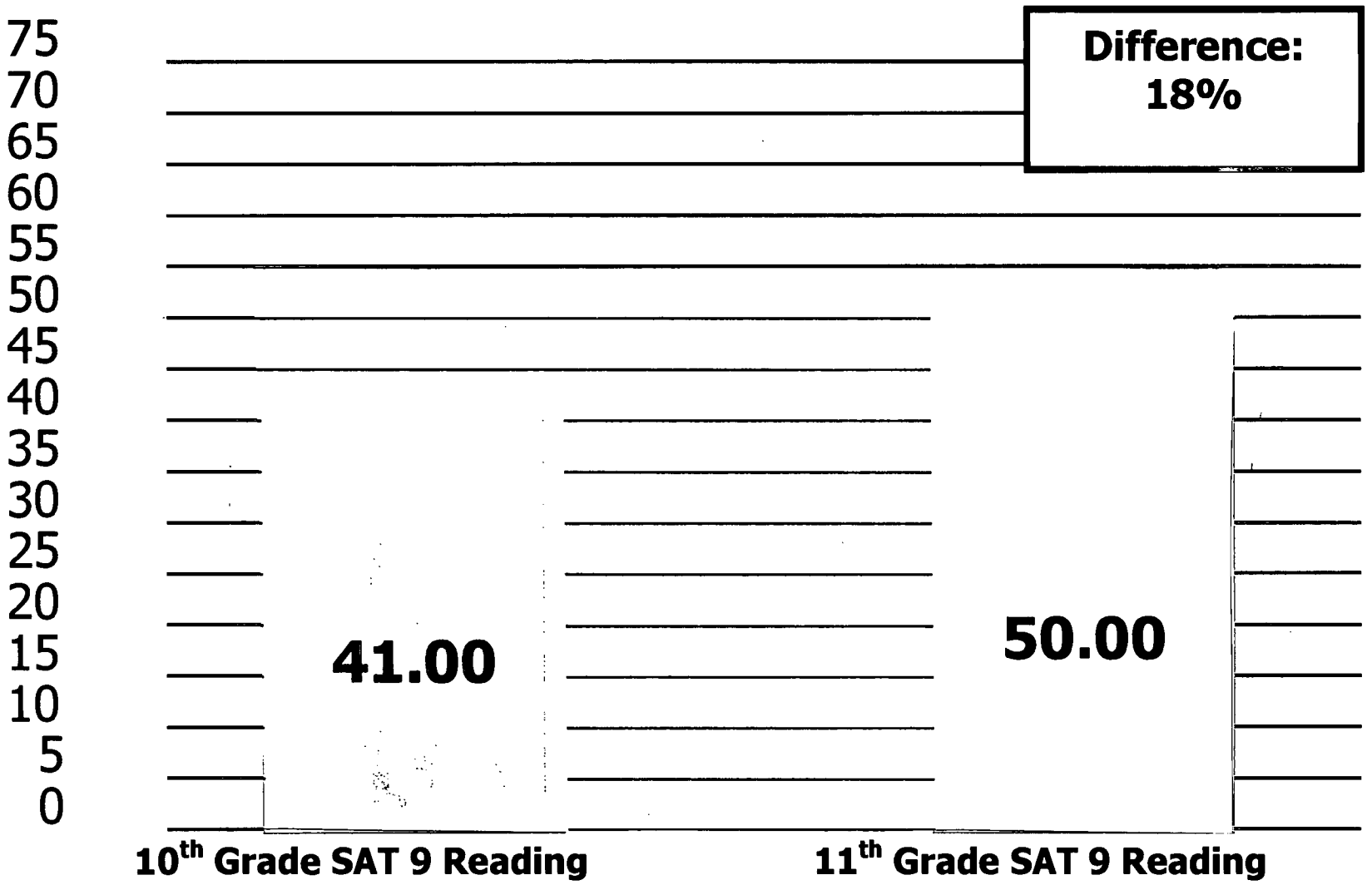



**N = 70**

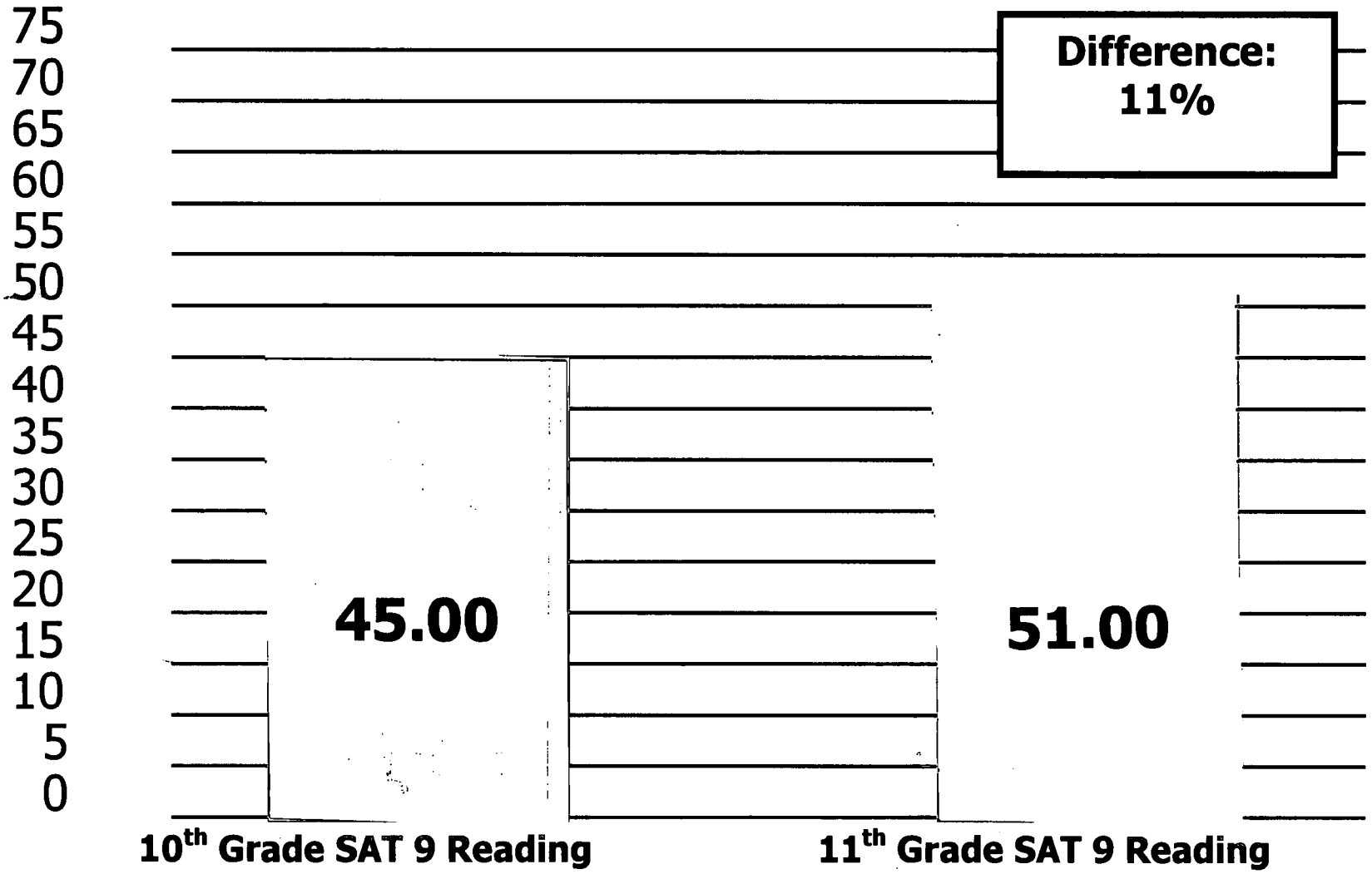
# CHILD DEVELOPMENT/TEACHING CAREER MAJOR



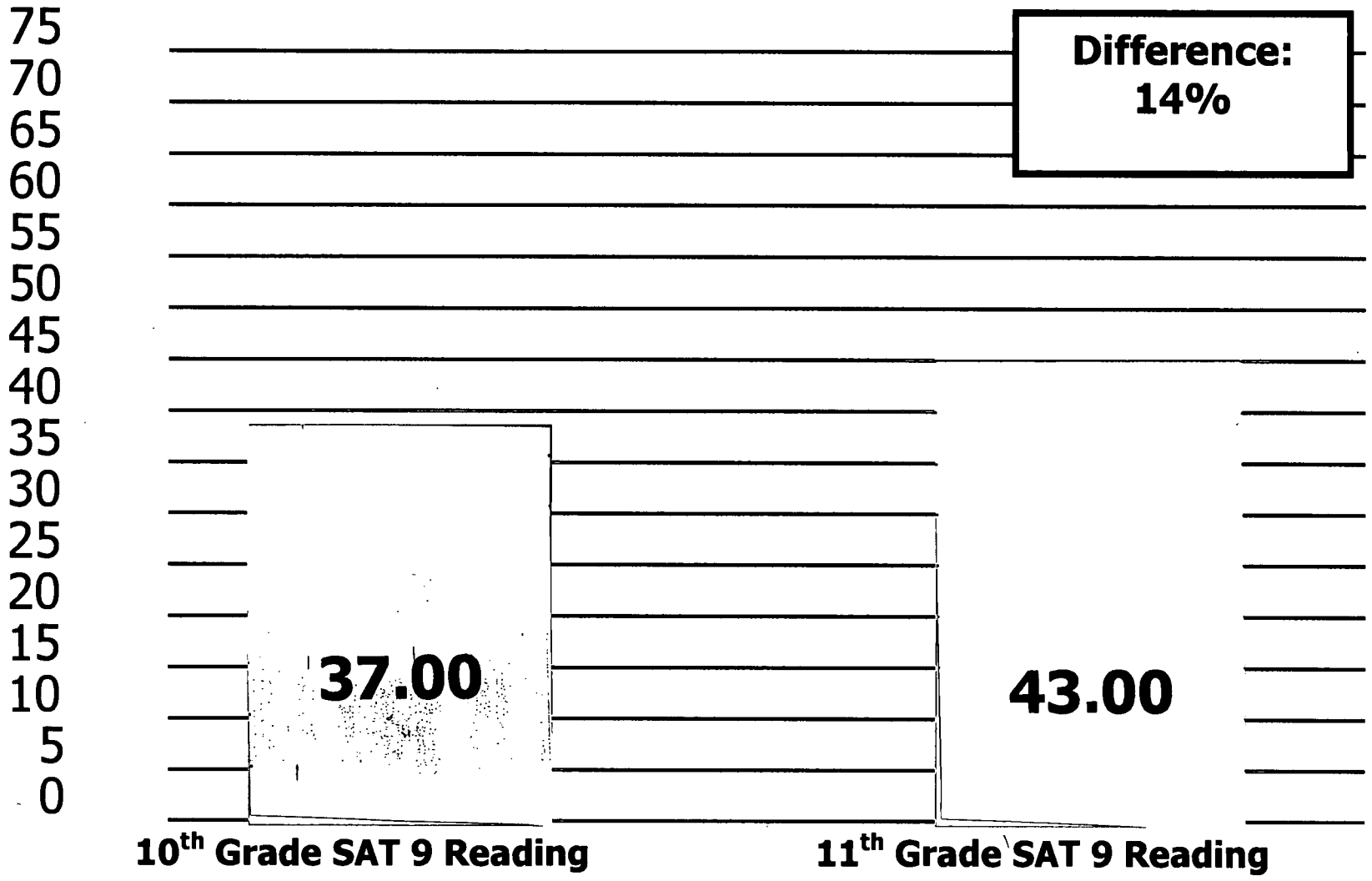
# MEDICAL CAREER MAJOR



# MARKETING CAREER MAJOR



# ELECTRICAL/CAD CAREER MAJOR



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