Evaluation Brief

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Academic Supports Provided for Struggling High School Students

Trisha A. McGaughey, M.Ed.,
Julie H. Wade, M.A., and Huafang Zhao, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

This brief describes an evaluation of academic intervention supports available to high school students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) during the 2012–2013 school year. A website review identified information about academic supports available to students or parents within each high school's web pages. A survey of school staff gathered information about the purpose, course subject, target populations, successful aspects, and major challenges for academic intervention support courses offered.

Major Findings

A variety of information for high school student academic supports can be located, through perseverance, on most high school website pages. This information ranges from test preparation in SAT or ACT to high school organizations that offer peer tutoring during lunch or after school.

To gain an understanding of the academic intervention support courses, school staff were asked to complete surveys about each support course that principals in the 25 high schools (Appendix A) identified. Of the 169 courses named, 151 surveys were completed, representing 70 different course names (Appendix B). The most frequently offered course was Read 180, and 33% of the courses targeted all four high school grade levels. Almost every course supported English/reading or mathematics. Even though a majority of survey respondents indicated their support course did not target English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) or special education students specifically, the academic intervention support courses frequently contained 25% or more ESOL and special education students.

Staff members who responded to the survey reported positive experiences for students in their courses. Respondents indicated students in their academic intervention support courses were monitored more closely, most students successfully met the requirements for the course and experienced increased academic success, most of the courses had sufficient instructional materials, and courses met the needs of students. Staff survey respondents also identified successful aspects and challenges and suggested changes for the courses. One of the major concerns by staff was how to increase student "buy-in" or effort.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Explore ways to increase "buy-in" for students enrolled in the academic intervention support courses.
2. Do not repeat middle school reading programs for high school students.
3. Encourage schools to continue to maintain a small class size for these intervention courses.
4. Encourage continuing communication among administrators and all school staff members involved with students enrolled in academic support intervention courses.
5. Encourage schools to form a team of school staff members who participate in the selection, monitoring, and continued support of these students.

Background

In December 2011, the superintendent of schools announced three strategic priorities—Interventions, Community Engagement, and Professional Development. In a memorandum to the Montgomery County Board of Education dated March 21, 2013, the superintendent of schools addressed the topic of interventions (Starr, 2013). He described the historical definition as "tools, strategies, products, or programs that are implemented only after determining that a student is struggling academically or behaviorally." The memorandum concluded that a new holistic, team-based approach is needed for MCPS to realize its commitment to all students to support their academic, social emotional, behavioral, and intellectual needs. In order to achieve this new approach it is useful to look closely at the current interventions in place.

This study addressed the following two evaluation questions:

1. What academic supports were found in MCPS high schools in 2012–2013?
2. What were the high school academic intervention support courses and their purposes, course subject, target populations, course staff, successful aspects, major challenges, and suggested changes?

Methodology

Web review. With most families having easy access to the Internet, schools use their school websites to communicate with students and parents. Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) staff reviewed each of the 25 high school (Appendix A) websites from October to December 2012 for information about available academic support for students. The path to finding information on the web about academic support at each school varied from school to school. To locate supports available the review started on each school home page; upon leaving the home page, individual tabs were followed such as academics, counseling, students, or activities to search deeper into the school websites.

Survey. Principals of the 25 MCPS high schools were requested to provide a list by e-mail of the academic intervention support courses in their school, defined as courses offered to struggling students during the school day to provide academic support. Principals also were asked to provide the name of someone within their school who was knowledgeable about the course purpose, course subject addressed, target populations served, successful aspects, and challenges.

The 25 high school principals identified 169 courses, with 119 contacts to respond to the survey. Some course contacts taught or oversaw more than one course.

OSA evaluation specialists developed a survey, in consultation with the director of high school instruction and achievement. The same survey was used for all academic intervention support courses. The survey included a variety of questions to determine information about the purpose, course subject, population, success, and challenges of the courses provided.

An e-mail was sent to each course contact along with the name of the course(s) for which they were to complete a survey. The e-mail also provided a link to the survey or instructed the course contact to share the link with the course teacher in their school who was more familiar with the course. Two reminders were sent to course contacts to increase the response rate.

Of the 169 surveys to be completed for courses, 151 were completed, yielding an overall response rate of 89%.

Data analysis and reporting. Data gathered from the web reviews, principals' e-mails and course surveys were processed through descriptive statistics. The course contacts' comments were summarized into categories. The findings are presented by evaluation questions.

Results

Question 1: What academic supports were found in MCPS high schools in 2012–2013?

Review of each high school's website home page revealed a range of supports (Table 1). The most frequently listed supports available were for SAT (88%, n = 22) and ACT (76%, n = 19), followed by MCPS Summer School (40%, n = 10), George B. Thomas Learning Academy (36%, n = 9), High School Plus (28%, n = 7), ACCUPLACER (20%, n = 5), and eLearning (16%, n = 4).

Table 1
Academic Support Information Found on High School Website Home Pages (N = 25)

Support	*n*	%
SAT	22	88.0
ACT	19	76.0
MCPS Summer School	10	40.0
George B. Thomas Learning Academy	9	36.0
High School Plus	7	28.0
ACCUPLACER	5	20.0
eLearning	4	16.0

Note. Multiple supports were found on high school home pages.

Upon leaving a school's home page and looking deeper into the website (e.g., academics, career center, clubs and organizations, counseling, parents, staff, students, etc.) 20 of the 25 schools (80%) named school organizations that offered peer tutoring during lunch or after school (Table 2). Further examination showed that of the 20 schools naming organizations, the National Honor Society was named most often by 15 schools followed by various other individual Honor

Societies such as Chinese Honor Society, French Honor Society, and Mathematics Honor Society.

Table 2
Academic Support Information Found in Tabbed Sections Within High School Websites (N = 25)

Support	*n*	%
School organization tutoring schedules	20	80.0
Teacher tutoring availability	13	52.0
Writing labs, homework centers, media centers	11	44.0
Special time set aside for all students to get support	3	12.0
Other supports	5	20.0

Note. Multiple supports were found within high school websites.

Thirteen schools provided information on teachers, subjects, locations, and days and times students could be tutored at school; 11 named writing labs, homework centers, and media centers as places to receive academic support, and 3 had a special time of the school day set aside for all students to receive academic support. Five of the 25 high schools also named other academic supports available to students in their school including a mentoring program for minorities.

Question 2: What were the high school academic intervention support courses and their purposes, course subject, target populations, course staff, successful aspects, major challenges, and suggested changes?

The 151 completed surveys yielded 70 different course names (Appendix B). The most frequently offered course was Read 180 (11%, n = 17). The majority of courses were offered only once or twice.

Academic Intervention Support Courses

Reasons for offering course(s). A majority of respondents (82%) indicated their course was offered to provide support to struggling students (Table 3). About half indicated the course was offered to help students prepare for High School Assessments (HSA) (50%) or to help students prepare for the next level course (47%).

Table 3
Reasons Academic Intervention Support Courses are Offered (N = 151)

Reasons to offer	*n*	%
To provide support to struggling students	124	82.1
To help students prepare for HSA	75	49.7
To help students prepare for the next level course	71	47.0
To help students earn credit for a course required for graduation	53	35.1
To support students who previously failed this course or a related course	45	29.8
To improve or prepare for SAT, ACT, or ACCUPLACER	36	23.8
Other reasons course is offered	49	32.5

Note. Respondents could check more than one reason.

Of the 49 other reasons a course was offered (Appendix C), the one named most often was to improve reading skills or comprehension (17 of 49).

How course(s) differ from other academic courses. According to survey respondents, the majority of courses differed from other academic courses by providing more support to students (84%, *n* = 127) and more individualized instruction (75%, *n* = 113) (Table 4). Survey respondents also indicated students were monitored more closely in their course (70%, *n* = 106) and classes were smaller (68%, *n* = 103). The remaining differences included slower pace (48%, *n* = 73) and more focus on the whole child (34%, *n* = 52). Other differences identified by the respondents are provided in Appendix D.

Table 4
How Academic Intervention Support Courses Differ From Other Academic Courses (*N* = 151)

Differences	*n*	%
This course provides more support to students.	127	84.1
This course provides more individualized instruction.	113	74.8
Students are more closely monitored in this course.	106	70.2
The classes are smaller for this course.	103	68.2
The pace is slower in this course.	73	48.3
This course is more focused on the whole child.	52	34.4
Other ways this course differs.	26	17.2

Note. Respondents could check more than one reason.

Course subject(s) supported. According to survey respondents, about one fifth of courses (18%) provided English/reading support only (Table 5), but by including all courses indicating some support for English/reading, 72% of all courses supported this area; one fourth of courses (25%) provided mathematics support only, but a total of 69% of all courses supported some mathematics. One third of courses (33%) supported all four course subjects. Detailed information about course title and subject can be found in Appendix B.

Table 5
Course Subject(s) Supported by Academic Intervention Support Courses (*N* = 150)

	n	%
One subject per course		
Mathematics only	38	25.3
English/reading only	27	18.0
Social Studies only	3	2.0
Science only	1	0.7
Two subjects per course		
English/reading and mathematics	11	7.3
English/reading and science	2	1.3
English/reading and social studies	2	1.3
Three subjects per course		
English/reading, science, and social studies	11	7.3
English/reading, mathematics, and science	6	4.0
Four subjects per course		
English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies	49	32.7

Note. Other course subjects also were taught in some courses in addition to one or more of the four major course subjects reported above.

In addition, 17 courses supported other course subjects in addition to English/reading, mathematics, social studies, or science. These included six electives, four world languages, two life skills, and one each for writing skills, resource, college/career readiness, social skills, and social psychology/multiculturalism.

Grade level/Target population. According to survey respondents, about one third (31%, *n* = 46) of the surveyed respondent's courses were for students in all four grade levels (Table 6). The largest percentage of courses offered for a single grade was for Grade 9 only (15%, *n* = 22).

Table 6
Grade Level(s) for Academic Intervention Support Course Surveys
(*N* = 151)

Grade	*n*	%
Grade 9 only	22	14.6
Grade 10 only	3	2.0
Grade 11 only	1	0.6
Grade 12 only	10	6.6
Grades 9 and 10	32	21.2
Grades 10 and 11	3	2.0
Grades 11 and 12	11	7.3
Grades 9, 10, and 11	16	10.6
Grades 10, 11, and 12	6	4.0
Grades 9, 10, and 12	1	0.6
Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12	46	30.5

Courses for ESOL or special education students. The survey included a two-part question. Over three fourths of the 151 respondents indicated the course was not provided primarily for ESOL students (83%, *n* = 126) or special education students (75%, *n* = 113). However, nearly one third of 150 respondents (29%, *n* = 43) reported their course had 25% or more ESOL students and over half of respondents (57%, *n* = 86) reported their course had the same percentage of special education students (Table 7).

Table 7
Academic Intervention Support Courses for Students Receiving
ESOL or Special Education Services

	ESOL		Special education	
	n	%	*n*	%
Course primarily for ESOL or special education students (*N* = 151)				
Yes	25	16.6	38	25.2
No	126	83.4	113	74.8
Percentage of students enrolled in ESOL or special education program (*N* = 150)				
Less than 25%	107	71.3	64	42.7
Between 25% and 50%	24	16.0	51	34.0
More than 50%	19	12.7	35	23.3

Team member or individual to identify, monitor, and support. The survey included a two-part question. Of the 151 survey respondents, 83% (*n* = 126) indicated their course had a team or individual to identify, monitor, and support struggling students in need of academic support (Table 8). More than one half named the classroom teacher (73%, *n* = 92), counselor

(63%, *n* = 79), administrator (60%, *n* = 75), and special education teacher (51%, *n* = 64) as being that individual or member of the team.

Table 8
Staff to Identify, Monitor, and Support Students in Academic Intervention Support Courses (*N* = 151)

	n	%
Team or individual to identify, monitor, and support struggling students		
Yes	126	83.4
No	25	16.6
Team member or staff		
Classroom teacher	92	73.0
Counselor	79	62.7
Administrator	75	59.5
Special education teacher	64	50.8
ESOL teacher	38	30.2
Psychologist	22	17.5
Interpreter	2	1.6
Don't know	3	2.4
Other team staff or individuals supporting struggling students	34	27.0

Of the 34 other specified team members or staff, 10 resource teachers and 6 academic intervention/academic support teachers were identified most often (Appendix E).

Staff collaboration. In the first of a two-part question, 87% (*n* = 131) of 150 respondents indicated they collaborated with other staff members for the academic intervention support course (Table 9). Over half of the 131 who answered yes to collaborating indicated they collaborated with teachers in their building who taught the same course (56%, *n* = 85), with resource teachers (53%, *n* = 80), and with teachers in the same building teaching in the same course subject (50%, *n* = 75). A list of the other 19 staff teachers named by respondents as being collaborating staff is provided in Appendix F.

Table 9
Collaboration of Academic Intervention Support Course Teachers

	n	%
I collaborate with other teachers for this course (*N* = 150)		
Yes	131	87.3
No	19	12.7
I collaborate with the following staff (*N* = 131)		
Teachers in my building who teach the same course	85	56.3
Resource teacher	80	53.0
Teachers in my building who teach in the same course subject	75	49.7
Special education teacher	58	38.4
Counselor or psychologist	37	24.5
ESOL teacher	35	23.2
Administrator	33	21.9
Teachers outside of my building	26	17.2
Other collaboration staff	19	12.6

Note. Respondents could provide multiple responses as to who they collaborate with.

Successes and Challenges

Respondents were to provide their level of agreement with the success of their academic intervention support course. They also were to identify the most successful aspects, the challenges to success, and the changes needed to ensure success for their academic intervention support course.

Successful aspects. When asked to provide a level of agreement with statements about the success of the academic support courses, a majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most students experienced increased academic success (87%, *n* = 131 of 150) and the course met the needs of the students (87%, *n* = 130 of 149). They also agreed that most students successfully met the requirements for the course (87%, *n* = 129 of 148), and the course had sufficient instructional materials (75%, *n* = 113 of 150).

Of the 151 survey respondents, 141 identified the most successful aspects of their academic intervention support course. The three aspects named most frequently were:

- Smaller class size or groups of students provide instruction advantages (23%, *n* =32)
- The course provides individualized one-on-one instruction and practice (22%, *n* = 31)
- Provides the time and opportunity for students to learn, review, and practice skills (21%, *n* = 29)

The 32 respondents who stated that a smaller class size provided several advantages for students included 14 who supported multiple course subjects (English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies), 11 who supported English/reading only, and 7 who supported mathematics only. Regarding success as stated by one respondent, "smaller class size also allows for a lot of one-on-one attention and very specific feedback," and another respondent said, "smaller class size which translates to individual student needs being met," is a successful aspect of the course.

Challenges to success. Of the 151 survey respondents, 139 identified challenges to the success of the academic intervention course they taught or oversaw. The most common challenges identified were:

- Student attitude (buy-in) and lack of effort (17%, *n* = 24)
- Attendance problems (14%, *n* = 20)

The 24 respondents who named student attitude and lack of effort as a problem included 17 that support multiple course subjects (English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies). One respondent said the challenge for their course was "the lack of buy-in from students who already had Read 180 for 3 years in middle school and are therefore tired of it/think it is for the 'dumb' kids." Another survey respondent indicated students for their course "have taken the class in middle school, so they are tired of trying to increase their reading skills even though they desperately need to do so."

Changes to ensure success. Of the 151 survey respondents, 121 suggested changes to ensure the success of the academic intervention support course they taught or oversaw. The most common changes named were:

- More or continued support and communication as provided by school administration and school staff (17%, *n* = 20)
- The necessity of maintaining small class sizes (14%, *n* = 17)

The 20 respondents who indicated a need for more support and communication by administrators and other school staff included 14 that support multiple course subjects (English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies) and 5 that support mathematics only. Of the 17 respondents who identified the necessity of maintaining small class size, 13 support multiple course subjects (English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies) and 3 support mathematics only. One respondent shared the need for, "more collaboration among teachers from different schools including different ages. Many times, strategies that work with elementary school or middle school students can also be applied to high school and vice versa."

Summary

- The review of MCPS high school website home pages showed most academic support focused on test preparation in SAT or ACT. By delving deeper into school websites, academic support for students through tutoring was found to be provided mostly through school organizations such as the National Honor Society.

- Based on surveys of 151 academic intervention support courses, about one third of the courses targeted all four high school grade levels. Even though a majority of survey respondents indicated their support course did not target ESOL or special education students specifically, the academic intervention support courses frequently contained 25% or more ESOL and special education students.

- Almost every course (97%) supported English/reading or mathematics; 44% supported a combination of English/reading and mathematics. Academic support also covered science and social studies. Over three fourths of the survey respondents indicated their course was offered to struggling students and about half said their course was to help the students with HSAs by offering more individualized instruction.

- Respondents indicated students in their academic intervention support courses were more closely monitored. Respondents reported that most students successfully met the requirements for the course and experienced increased academic success. Respondents reported that most of the courses had sufficient instructional materials and met the needs of students. However, one fourth of survey respondents indicated that their courses did not have sufficient instructional materials.

- More than three fourths of respondents indicated students experienced increased academic success (87%), the course met the needs of the students (87%), and most students successfully met the requirements for the course (87%). The three most successful aspects of the academic support courses were 1) smaller class size;

2) individualized one-on-one instruction and practice; and 3) time and opportunity for students to learn, review, and practice skills.

- The most frequently named challenges to the success of the support courses included: 1) lack of students' buy-in or effort, and 2) student attendance problems. Staff indicated that changes were needed to ensure the success of the academic intervention support. The most common changes staff named were improved communication and maintained smaller class size.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Explore ways to increase "buy-in" for students enrolled in the academic intervention support courses.
2. Do not repeat middle school reading programs for high school students.
3. Encourage schools to continue to maintain a small class size for these intervention courses.
4. Encourage continuing communication among administrators and all school staff members involved with students enrolled in academic support intervention courses.
5. Encourage schools to form a team of school staff members who participate in the selection, monitoring, and continued support of these students.

References

Starr, J. P. (2013). *Update on Strategic Priority: Interventions.* Memorandum to the Montgomery County Board of Education, March 21, 2013. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

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Appendix A

Montgomery County Public School
High Schools (N = 25)

Bethesda-Chevy Chase
Montgomery Blair
James Hubert Blake
Winston Churchill
Clarksburg
Damascus
Albert Einstein
Gaithersburg
Walter Johnson
John F. Kennedy
Colonel Zadok Magruder
Richard Montgomery
Northwest
Northwood
Paint Branch
Poolesville
Quince Orchard
Rockville
Seneca Valley
Sherwood
Springbrook
Watkins Mill
Wheaton
Walt Whitman
Thomas S. Wootton

Appendix B

Course Titles and Course Subject(s) Supported as Indicated by Each Course Survey Respondent (N = 149)

Course	Total	Course Subjects					
		English/ reading	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Course Subject Combinations	All Four Course Subjects
Academic Internship	1						1
Academic Intervention	1						1
Academic Reading	4	1				2	1
Academic Reading (Basic)	1						1
Academic Reading (ESOL)	1						1
Academy Mentoring[a]	0						
Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)	2						2
Ambassadors Invested in Mentorship (AIM)	1						1
Algebra 1 (Double Period)	7		6			1	
Algebra 1 (Related Math)	1		1				
Algebra 1 (Double Period) Special Education	1		1				
Algebra 1A for Repeaters	1		1				
Algebra 2 (Double Period)	2		2				
Alternative 1/Resource	1						1
Alternative 1	4					1	3
Alternative 1 Program for Repeating 9th Graders	1					1	
Alternative 1 Human Behavior	1						1
Alternative 1/Internship	1						1
Alternative 1/Pilot	1						1
Advanced Placement Mathematics with Support	1						1
Advanced Placement National, State, and Local Government (NSL) with Support	1				1		
Advanced Placement Prep	1						1
Advanced Placement World History	1				1		
Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Seminar	1						1
Basic Reading	4	3					1
Bridge to Algebra 2	1		1				
College Prep Literacy 1-4	9	2				2	5
College Prep Literacy 1 for Reading Advantage	1						1
College Test Prep	4					4	
Connections	3						3
Connections/College Prep Literacy 2	1						1
Corrective Reading	1	1					

Continued

Course Titles and Course Subject(s) Supported as Indicated by Each Course Survey Respondent (N = 149)

Course	Total	Course Subjects					
		English/ reading	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Course Subject Combinations	All Four Course Subjects
Developmental Reading	2					2	
Developmental Reading and High School Assessment (HSA) Prep	1						1
English 9 Honors-All Girls	1	1					
ESOL 3 Lab	1					1	
ESOL Lab	1					1	
ESOL METS 1.5	1	1					
Geometry (Double Period)	1		1				
Geometry Support	4		4				
High School Assessment Workshop	1		1				
Honors Geometry-Gender Specific	1		1				
HSA Algebra Boot Camp and Bridge Projects	1		1				
HSA Biology Boot Camp and Bridge Projects	1			1			
HSA English Boot Camp and Bridge Projects	1	1					
HSA English Pullouts	1	1					
HSA Prep All	1						1
HSA Prep-Algebra	3		3				
HSA Prep-English	1					1	
HSA Remediation and Bridge	1					1	
HSA Workshop	6	2	2			2	
Human Behavior	3						3
METS 1	1	1					
METS Developmental Reading	1					1	
MyFoundations Lab	1					1	
Pullout Supports	1		1				
Quantitative Literacy	1		1				
READ 180 (ESOL)	1	1					
READ 180	17	11				3	3
Reading	1	1					
Reading in the Course Subject	1					1	
Related Math	9		8			1	
Repeat Geometry	1		1				
Resource	9					2	7
SAT/ACT Prep	2					2	
Scholars I & II	1						1
Skills for Success	1						1
Study Hall	3						3
Support-Bridge Projects	1					1	
Two-year Algebra 1	2		2				

Note. Two survey respondents did not identify the course name so this table does not include them.
[a]Academy Mentoring did not provide course subject information.

Appendix C

Other Reasons Specified for Offering an Academic Intervention Support Course (*N* = 49)

Other reason	*n*
Improve reading skills and comprehension	17
Complete Bridge project	6
Assist Advanced Placement (AP) students	5
Help with transition to high school	3
Provide study and test-taking skills	3
Support Individualized Education Plan goals	3
Provide behavior intervention	2
Academic and social motivation	1
Teach success strategies	1
Improve academic eligibility	1
Support Level 2 ESOL students	1
Increase vocabulary, test taking skills, academic language	1
Increase English language skills	1
Help capable students to work at Honors level	1
Help with social/emotional issues	1
Help students with interrupted education	1
Support students with weak academic areas	1

Appendix D

Other Ways Specified That an Academic Intervention Support Course Differs From Academic Courses (*N* = 26)

Differences offered	*n*
Focus on improving reading skills and strategies	7
More time for students to learn and concepts to be taught	4
Strategies taught to increase success and enhance learning	4
Frequent parent contact	1
More hands-on activities and visual aids	1
Emphasizes SAT preparation	1
Course meets student at their level	1
All students in AP	1
Focus on test preparation	1
Test prep/project focused	1
Students can work independently at home	1
Frequent feedback/data	1
Separate program from other academics	1
Supports academic courses	1

Appendix E

Other Individual or Team Member Specified (N = 34)[a]

Teachers	*n*
Resource teacher	10
Academic Intervention teacher/Academic Support teacher	6
Staff Development teacher	5
Coordinator	4
Academy/Team leader	3
Speech Therapist/Pathologist	3
Data Specialist	2
Special education team	2
AIM teacher	1
ALT 1 teacher	1
ED cluster staff	1
HSA analyst	1
Pupil Personnel Worker	1
Student mentors	1
Transition Support teacher	1

[a]Of the 34 staff respondents who chose other, they could specify more than one staff member.

Appendix F

Other Staff Specified by Academic Intervention Support Course Teachers for Collaboration (N = 19)[a]

Staff members	*n*
Teachers who teach the same students	6
Academic Intervention teacher	3
Read 180 community	2
Staff Development teacher	2
Teachers teaching other course subjects	2
All staff	1
Juvenile Justice System	1
Department of Recreation	1
Classroom teachers	1
Other Grade 9 teachers	1
School Testing Coordinator	1
Behavior Support teacher	1
Instructional Technology System Specialist	1
Alternative Program teacher	1

[a]Of the 19 staff respondents who chose other, they could specify more than one staff member.