E&R RESEARCH ALERT

Effective Practices

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH MULTIPLE NEEDS

School-level practices can make a difference in promoting the achievement growth of multiple-risk students. At the elementary school level, the following elements seemed to support achievement for multiple-risk students:

- *high expectations,*
- *positive attitudes about being able to meet students' needs with the resources available,*
- *supportive administrative leadership that allocates resources effectively,*
- *professional training,*
- *formal and information collaboration to help students, and*
- *more frequent use of teacher-led instruction.*

Analysis of Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) End-of-Grade (EOG) performance results indicates that WCPSS students with the most difficulty reaching accountability standards are those with more than one of the following characteristics: are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), have disabilities (students with disabilities, or SWD), and/or have limited English proficiency (LEP).

The Curriculum and Instruction Department (C&I) requested a study from the Evaluation and Research Department (E&R) to identify effective school practices that:

- promote the achievement of students with multiple-risk factors (FRL, SWD, and LEP), and
- provide schools with hope that they can meet the challenge of helping students with multiple needs grow academically.

Our study compared characteristics and practices of schools that were having greater and lesser success in promoting achievement for students with multiple risk factors (Baenen et al., 2006). E&R staff conducted special effectiveness index analyses that included only students who had two or more of the characteristics of interest (FRL, SWD, and LEP). We identified sets of elementary schools that either consistently had residual averages in the top or bottom 25% of schools in the district, or which showed an upward or downward trend in residuals for multi-need students. Based on this definition, we identified three higher-growth and three lower-growth schools for further study.

We first analyzed student demographics, teacher characteristics, resource allocations, and the overall percentage of students performing at grade level. These analyses helped us determine if we could eliminate these demographic variables as an explanation for differences in achievement. We then explored school climate, which we felt could be a key factor in improving achievement.

We collected data in the schools through observations (of the whole school and individual teachers), staff interviews, and staff checklists. We also analyzed school improvement plans, discussed recommended practices with C&I staff, and conducted brief reviews of the literature. We grouped findings by factors that promote effective instruction for students based on research.

WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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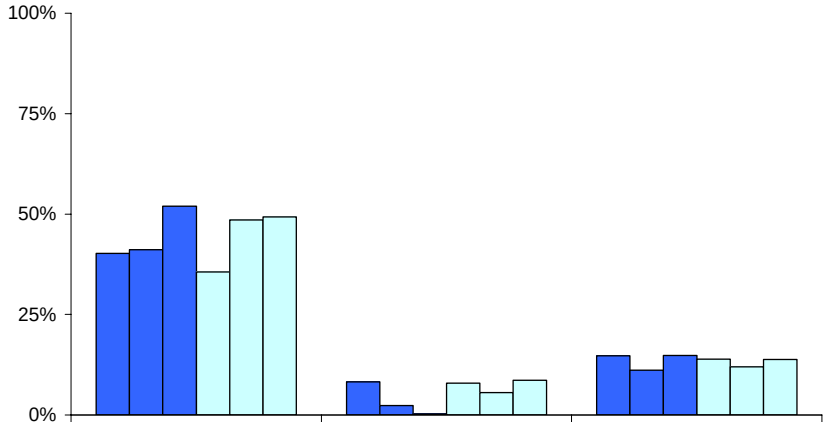
Risk Group Demographics at Elementary Schools in Study



	% FRL Students	% LEP Students	% SWD Students
Higher Growth 1	40.26%	8.25%	14.69%
Higher Growth 2	41.13%	2.30%	11.17%
Higher Growth 3	51.96%	0.23%	14.78%
Lower Growth 1	35.61%	7.89%	13.86%
Lower Growth 2	48.52%	5.54%	11.99%
Lower Growth 3	49.26%	8.62%	13.79%

MAJOR FINDINGS

Demographically, the higher- and lower-growth elementary schools were similar in terms of the distribution of FRL and SWD students within the schools (see figure above). However, elementary schools considered most effective in promoting achievement for multi-need students had ***fewer LEP students***, and these students had ***stronger English skills*** than LEP students in lower-growth elementary schools.

We found differences in attitudes and practices between the sets of higher- and lower-growth schools. The provision of challenging learning experiences for all students, instructional leadership, professional learning opportunities, data use, and curricular coherence all revealed differences between the groups.

Challenging Learning Experiences for All Students: School staff at the elementary level who achieved higher achievement for multi-need learners seemed to have ***higher expectations*** for the students, had ***more positive attitudes*** towards them, and emphasized building ***strong student-teacher relationships***. They also used a different ***balance of instructional strategies***.

Short observations of all classrooms were conducted using Valentine's rubric (2005), which classifies instructional practices based on who is leading the learning and the nature of the instructional activity. Teacher-led instruction was most common in both sets of schools. However, teachers in schools that achieved higher growth for multiple-risk students used ***teacher-led instruction*** more often and student learning conversations less often. Greater structure and more explicit instruction may be important for students with multiple risks.

Instructional Practices Observed at Elementary Schools in Study

	Higher-Growth Elementary Schools	Lower-Growth Elementary Schools
Complete Disengagement	0%	1%
Student Work with Teacher not Engaged	0%	7%
Student Work with Teacher Engaged	36%	31%
Teacher-Led Instruction	53%	37%
Student Learning Conversations	9%	22%
Student Actively Engaged in Learning	2%	1%

Professional Learning Opportunities: Differences in staff training and collaboration were evident. Higher-growth elementary school staff completed more ***professional training*** related to FRL, SWD, or LEP students. Staff mentioned both ***formal and informal collaboration***, and the nature of this collaboration at higher-growth elementary schools seemed ***more positive in tone*** than the respective reporting from lower-growth schools.

Instructional Leadership: We found evidence of ***strong administrative leadership*** more often in the schools that achieved higher achievement for multi-need learners. At the elementary level, strong administrative leaders supported teachers in a variety of ways, including more effective resource allocations for needy students.

Effective Use of Data: All elementary schools in the study reported using data to support student learning. It was difficult to tell whether quality or frequency of use was consistently greater in the higher schools. One of the higher-growth schools, a Project Achieve school, mentioned assessing students approximately every two weeks and then regrouping them for re-teaching or enrichment based on the results.

Curricular Coherence: Both higher-growth and lower-growth schools mentioned use of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NC SCoS) to guide their work, and most mentioned modifying the curriculum to meet student needs. Higher-growth schools used resources related to NC SCoS such as ***pacing guides more often and expressed more positive opinions*** about the curriculum. Higher-growth schools actually used the C&I Web site a little less often than lower-growth schools.

In terms of resources to deliver the curriculum, we observed ***more adults in the classroom*** in higher-growth elementary schools than in the lower-growth schools. Actual resources provided by the system were similar, with the exception of extra resources for special education at one school that had more special education students.

IMPLICATIONS

Some elementary schools do show more positive achievement patterns for students with multiple needs. Compared to schools with less positive patterns of achievement, higher-growth schools:

- Have staff more likely to believe that all students can learn with appropriate support;
- Have staff with more positive attitudes about their ability to meet these students' needs with the resources available;
- Have strong administrative leadership that allocates resources effectively;
- Use curricular and other resources well (extra adults in the classrooms);
- Have training that has contributed to helpful attitudes, confidence, and skill levels;
- Collaborate positively with other school staff in both formal and informal ways; and/or
- Balance the use of instructional strategies differently from the lower-growth schools.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

E&R plans to explore strategies used with individual multi-risk students this school year. In the mean time, school staff are encouraged to consider the implications of these initial findings for their own school. Questions for discussion:

- What does your school do when students have not learned?
- What has worked successfully?
- How can you build success with multiple-risk learners?
- What kind of student work might be optimal for these students while still meeting the needs of other students?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

See the full report: www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research/reports/2006/0603effectiveness03_06elem_middle.pdf

Baenen, N., Ives, S., Lynn, A., Warren, T., Gilewicz, E., Yaman, K. (2006). *Effective practices for at-risk elementary and middle school students.* Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System.

Valentine, J. (2005). *Instructional practices inventory (observer training manual).* Columbia: University of Missouri, Middle Level Leadership Center. Unpublished manuscript.