

QPAS PROGRAM REVIEW – FALL 2004

Program Title: Focus 2004

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Department/Office: Instructional Services/Office
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Services

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Program Intent

Program Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

The purpose of the Focus 2004 initiative, initiated in the FY 2001 Budget, is to provide additional resources to improve student achievement at Whitman Middle, Edison High, Falls Church High, Mount Vernon High, and Stuart High Schools. Funds provide strategic support for students at risk of failing end-of-course SOL tests through additional time for learning. Significant levels of poverty, mobility, and ethnic diversity characterize the schools selected for Focus 2004 funding.

Goal I: To improve student achievement at each of the Focus 2004 schools.

Objectives

- IA. By June 2004, there will be a 70 percent or higher passing rate for SOL tests in each of the Focus 2004 schools
- IB. By June 2004, each of the Focus 2004 schools will be fully accredited by the state of Virginia.
- IC. By June 2004, all seniors in the Focus 2004 high schools will have earned the required number of verified credits for graduation.

The purpose and goal of the Focus 2004 program have been maintained from the inception of the program. The original objective to increase passing rates on 9th grade SOL tests has been updated. During the school years 2000-2002, significant increases were made in 9th grade SOL tests in three of the four Focus 2004 high schools. In the current report, 10th and 11th grade SOL tests benchmarked to the passing rate required for state accreditation have been added to the original objective. Objectives 2 and 3 have been added to address 2004 accreditation and graduation requirements.

Nature of the Program/Intervention(s)

Each of the Focus 2004 schools is focusing on improvement on the SOL tests through the comprehensive analysis of student data and instructional intervention in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. Focus 2004 schools are characterized by an enhanced teacher-student ratio; specialized programs to support reading improvement and algebra achievement, a focus on study habits, and effective use of technology to support mastery

learning. Instruction in study skills, test-taking skills, note-taking, reading and writing strategies, research skills, inquiry, critical thinking and problem-solving strategies, computer technology skills, and time management are typical. Schools have established teams of teachers to address the needs of students. In some cases, funding is used to provide teachers additional planning time during the summer recess. Focus 2004 schools increase instructional time by adding a late bus day, improving the student-teacher ratio, or by offering after-school and Saturday extended learning opportunities. Two of the Focus 2004 high schools operate under a modified calendar, which permits them to offer two school-based summer sessions during summer 2003 and summer 2004.

The schools have maintained close contact among students, parents, counselors, classroom teachers and administrative staff. A spirit of commitment to students in the program crosses curricular lines. This has led to a high level of professional collaboration among teaching staffs and improvements in teacher retention.

Number and Location of Sites

The five Focus 2004 schools identified at the outset of the program, Edison High, Falls Church High, Mount Vernon High, Stuart High, and Whitman Middle School, continue to participate in Focus 2004. The schools include highly diverse student populations, a large percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and a large number of students with limited English proficiency.

Groups Targeted for Impact

While the Focus 2004 schools serve all students within their populations, the schools have identified target populations of students for the program. At Whitman Middle School, for example, the school identified a target group of those students whose scores fell in the 375-399 range on previous years' SOL tests. Edison High School and Stuart High School identify the ninth grade students as a key focus of their programs. Falls Church and Mount Vernon High Schools have focused on those students who have failed any of the SOL tests.

In each of the Focus 2004 schools, the involvement of staff has increased beyond an initial cadre of teachers and either department chairs or a steering committee, to a wider group of teachers focusing on the objective of the program.

The student population has changed over the course of the Focus 2004 implementation. Each of the schools report larger numbers of students in the ESOL programs as additional immigrant families move into their attendance areas. The schools further report increasing numbers of students designated for special education services as implementation of updated ADA and IDEA policies has continued. The trends correspond with the changes in FCPS demographics. It is reasonable to expect that the trends will continue through the current school year.

Program Organization

Program Staff

Focus 2004 funding has included staffing to improve the ratio between teachers and students to provide more adult contact. At Edison High School, Focus 2004 has permitted the school to deploy six additional staff positions: four content teachers, one team coordinator, and one position for technical support. At Falls Church High School, additional teaching staff has improved the student/teacher ratio. Mount Vernon High School has hired teaching staff for summer programs that provide academic support for students struggling to earn required standard and verified credits for graduation. Stuart High School has used funding for an extra period for department chairs for instructional coordination. At Whitman Middle School, an additional teacher supports the team approach in a block schedule. The funding also provides an extra .5 school-based technology specialist (SBTS) position assisting with integration of technology and it provides for the expenses of Extended Day instruction for students two days a week.

The level of staffing has remained generally constant, though adjustments have been made as needs of the student population have been analyzed. Membership on teams has shifted to include additional members of the teaching staff.

Organizational Structure

Each of the sites maintains an organizational format unique to the individual school and staff. In each case, the building principal assumes the responsibility for the program and is assisted by key instructional leaders in the school—team leaders, department chairs, and assistant principals. Records of progress and communication are maintained at each school site. Coordination among the sites is managed by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and by the Directors of High School and Middle School Instruction.

There are new building principals at two sites: a new principal joined the Edison staff in 2003; a new principal joined the Mount Vernon staff in 2004. The organizational structure has been maintained over the course of the two-year cycle and is expected to continue through this school year.

Training/Staff Development

Teacher training has dominated the staff development in Focus 2004 schools. In the initial phase of the program, the Focus 2004 schools worked to ensure that a high percentage of teachers completed the Standards Based Instruction course designed by Instructional Services.

Additionally, individual schools have identified areas of need within their staffs. Edison High School has focused its staff development on development of schoolwide initiatives such as common grading designs, cross-curricular instruction, reading and technology integration initiatives, problem solving, reading, and character education. Falls Church focused on multiple intelligences, learning styles, differentiation, note taking, assessment, routines and procedures, literacy, as well as learning differences between boys and girls. As a result of an ISD program

review in spring 2004, Mount Vernon High School invited ISD staff to work with SOL subject departments on topics such as curriculum mapping, common assessments, and implementation of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP).

Stuart High School continues to focus its staff development opportunities on reading and algebra instruction, curriculum mapping and instructional design. Whitman Middle School has provided training with materials related to the topics of reading instruction, best practices, creating instructional environments for effective instruction, and leadership skills development for teachers.

The training shifted, particularly at the high school level toward meeting the needs of students scheduled to graduate in 2004 and beyond. At each of the schools, feedback from teaching staffs has been used to make decisions about subsequent training. This has meant that training has become more concentrated in the area of remediation and test preparedness. Careful analysis of student achievement data continues to determine staff development needs.

Program Implementation

Implementation across the five Focus 2004 sites includes important similarities. Each of the schools has determined that achievement in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies is the primary emphasis of the program. Further, the Focus 2004 schools agreed to underscore the importance of reading, algebra, and technology integration. Though the specific initiatives toward those emphases vary with the unique student and teaching populations at each school, for example, the staffing variations described earlier, the desired outcomes are the same.

Implementation has changed over the course of the two-year cycle in response to the changes in achievement marked by the spring SOL test scores each year. Each school has sought to refine its implementation, to include more departments in the program, and to continue to implement best instructional practice as indicated by research.

Program Impact

Between 1999 and 2004, SOL scores across FCPS improved significantly. Often the increase in passing rate for Focus 2004 schools was more dramatic than the division average. As of June 2, 2004, end-of-course SOL passing rates for Focus 2004 high schools were 70 percent or higher in all subject areas with the following exceptions: Falls Church and Mount Vernon had less than a 70 percent passing rate in biology and chemistry; Mount Vernon also had less than 70 percent passing rate in Algebra I (Objective IA). Please see Attachment A for tables that illustrate the increases at each program site for all SOL tests.

Each of the Focus 2004 schools is fully accredited by the state of Virginia for the 2003-04 school year (Objective IB).

By June 2004, with the exception of one or two students, the seniors at each of the Focus 2004 high schools had earned the required number of verified credits for graduation (Objective IC).

Verified Credit Report

Name of School	# of Seniors Without Required Verified Credits for Graduation in June 2004	Total # of Seniors
Edison High School	2	365
Falls Church High School	2	291
Mount Vernon High School	1	328
Stuart High School	2	248

Each of the seniors without the required verified credits for graduation had recently exited from an ESOL program. Several of those seniors passed the required SOL tests during the summer 2004 testing window.

One of the Focus 2004 sites, Stuart High School, has received widespread national recognition within the last two years for its student achievement gains. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) named Stuart as one of their first *Breakthrough High Schools*: “This diverse, learning-focused high school found success by instituting a systematic and connected professional development plan that incorporates high expectations for all students, literacy instruction, and standards-based curriculum.” The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the International Center for Leadership in Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Trust and *Education Week* have all recognized Stuart High School as an exemplary example of a high poverty high minority school that sustains high academic achievement for all of its students.

Program Budget and Expenditures

Funding between FY 2002 and FY 2004 remained constant. FY 2004 funding was \$2.3 million and provided 29.0 positions for Focus 2004. Part-time hourly funding of \$241, 247 represented approximately 10.6 full-time equivalent positions to compensate teachers working with students beyond contract time. Funding also provided for supplemental materials and staff development training that enabled teachers to develop strategies to support at-risk students. Increases in the FY 2004 budget were due to compensation adjustments.

Staffing and funds for teacher training at Whitman Middle School are in the baseline budget. Staffing allocations for Edison, Falls Church, Mount Vernon, and Stuart High Schools are currently in the school’s baseline budget; additional resources are allocated annually based on proposals submitted to ISD.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The Focus 2004 program has supported student achievement at each of the five sites, and there have been significant improvements in SOL test scores. The state of Virginia fully accredited

each of the Focus 2004 schools for the 2004-05 school year and Stuart High School has earned national recognition for its dramatic and sustained gains in student achievement.

But there are still challenges ahead. Mount Vernon's new principal has invited ISD to participate monthly in their administrative staff development planning meetings for the 2004-05 school year. Substantial effort is being given to greater use of data analysis to determine test categories of greatest need, more consistent team planning, common assessments to monitor student understanding, and additional coordination with Mount Vernon Center.

Although, each of the Focus 2004 schools is fully accredited for the 2004-05 school year, challenges remain. Building students' skills to comprehend textual material in content courses continues to be a priority across the Focus 2004 sites. Acquisition of language skills in English hampers many ESOL students. Special education students struggle to demonstrate mastery of SOL skills and content. Schools across Fairfax County are focused on closing the achievement gap.

For the 2003-04 school year, each of the four Focus 2004 high schools met the NCLB Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) on a schoolwide basis; one made AYP in all subgroups; two made AYP in five out of six subgroups; and one made AYP in four out of six subgroups. Focus 2004 high schools, like other Fairfax County Public Schools, will continue to engage in sharing best practices for increasing the academic achievement of all students.

This year AYP stakes are even higher. To earn AYP in 2003-04, schools had to demonstrate that 59 percent of their students in each subgroup (Black, Hispanic, Students With Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, and Economically Disadvantaged) passed the math Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) and 61 percent passed the English AMO. For the 2004-05 school year 70 percent of the students in each subgroup must pass.

To earn a standard diploma students in the graduation classes of 2004-2006 are required to pass the two SOL English End-of-Course (EOC) tests plus four additional choice EOC tests. By 2007, to earn a standard diploma, students will be required to pass the two SOL English EOC tests, plus one EOC math, one EOC science, one EOC social studies and one EOC choice test.

In recognition of the increased verified credit requirements for the graduating class of 2007, ISD recommends the Focus 2004 program name be changed to Focus 2007. In addition, ISD recommends a reallocation of some Focus 2004 funds. ISD proposes the middle school program stay the same at Whitman and staffing allocations stay constant at the four designated high schools. However, ISD proposes reallocating the remaining \$331,512 based on a combination of AYP status, critical needs, and accountability plans. This proposal does not require any additional funding for FY 2005.