The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) and the Over-Age Academic Center Task Force developed the John Leslie Patton Jr. Academic Center (Academic Center) to address growing concerns over graduation and dropout rates among Dallas ISD students. The Patton Academic Center opened in September 2010 and was an alternative school for over-age, under-credited students.

The goal of the Academic Center was to increase graduation rates throughout the district, decrease the number of over-age and under-credited students in the district, maintain academic rigor while providing a non-traditional learning environment, and use relationship-based strategies to allow at-risk students to further their education.

**Purpose and Scope of Evaluation**

This evaluation examined the implementation of the first operating year of the Academic Center. The scope of this plan included evaluating the Patton Academic Center implementation process with regards to their first year of operation in accordance with the goals outlined in program documents. The evaluation summarized program characteristics, described characteristics of the student population, measured the impact of the Patton Academic Center on students’ academic achievement, examined utilization of social services, and determined what professional development occurred as a result of the Alternative Education Learning Community program as well as describe Academic Center specific training.

**Program Characteristics**

Patton Academic Center held four nine-week sessions during the 2010-11 school year. Registration deadlines were not set at the beginning of the year and the evaluator was unclear as to whether the registration deadlines evaluated were those actually used during the 2010-11 school year. The school experienced some major issues with enrollment including needing to wait for each six weeks period to be over in the comprehensive high schools before enrolling students so that counselors could have access to up-to-date credit records. Anecdotal evidence also suggested there were multiple changes to the start and end dates for each session.

In order to be eligible to enroll at Patton Academic Center, students had to meet the following criteria outlined below. Nine percent of the 517 students attending the Academic Center during the 2010-11 school year did not meet the eligibility criteria.

- 17 years or older with less than 3 credits
- 18 years or older with less than 9 credits
- 19 years or older with less than 15 credits
- 20 years or older

The curriculum for the new school was designed to develop the skills recognized as translating effectively from school to the workplace (21st Century Skills). The curriculum focused on developing learning and information skills, information, media and technology skills, and life and career skills. Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses were also offered. The Academic Center offered a Communication Applications course within the English/Language Arts subject area, math and science TAKS labs, as well as small learning labs for core courses.

**Student Characteristics**

Students were between the ages of 17 and 26 with an average age of about 19.5. The majority of Academic Center students were freshman or sophomores, African American or Hispanic, male, were not documented as economically disadvantaged and were English proficient.

**Student Academic Achievement**

The Patton Academic Center struggled to meet its stated goals. Only about 23 percent of students were enrolled for all four quarters and 42 percent were only enrolled in one quarter. About 21 percent of the 517 students enrolled at the Academic Center throughout the year were not assigned to any periods and attendance issues, no shows, and failures due to excessive absences were common. The students earned fewer than two credits on average per quarter but this average increased over time indicating that Academic Center staff were improving their ability to serve students. The percentage of students earning no credits also decreased over time.

As one might expect, GPA, end-of-course grades, and ACP scores were fairly low. Average GPA ranged from between 64.66 and 74.70. Average end-of-course grades ranged between 55 percent to 80 percent for core courses, 62 and 86 percent for study skills labs and 49 percent and 90 percent for non-core courses.
ACP scores ranged from 60 percent to 72 percent. Average end-of-course grades were below passing for at least 50 percent of all classes (core and non-core).

Attendance was analyzed only for students who attended all four quarters of the 2010-11 school year. Attendance percentages ranged from 74 and 81 percent with freshmen attending least often. Thirty-eight students were reportedly not enrolled in any periods throughout the 2010-11 school year; however, records indicated they were attending courses and had an average attendance percentage of about 72 percent. This was likely due to the continued difficulties the school had in tracking its students.

The Patton Academic Center counselor provided graduation and promotion data for the 2010-11 school year and reported that 14 students were promoted and 27 students graduated.

The majority of students who took TAKS passed the reading and social studies exams (about 64% and 86%, respectively). Only 30 percent of students passed the math TAKS and only about 40 percent had passed the science TAKS.

Social Service Provision

The Academic Center planned to offer students services and resources to assist them with their differing needs. Social service advisors provided a range of services to Academic Center students; however, they failed to adequately document their service provision efforts. The social service advisors and social worker provided workshops, conducted one-on-one meetings, and made home visits to students. The staff tracked counts of students but did not keep attendance rosters. They were unable to provide documentation of the curriculum or any materials used during workshops or interventions. The social service advisors and social worker reportedly provided ten types of social services during the first quarter, 18 during the second, 16 during the third, and 18 during the fourth. The evaluator was told that the social service positions were removed for the 2011-12 school year and that only the social worker position would remain.

Professional Development

Patton Academic Center provided professional development specifically for their staff. Training focused on building teaching capacity and did not appear to focus specifically on alternative education. The Academic Center provided 41 professional development opportunities for its staff. The evaluator was unable to observe or collect any documentation about these sessions and did not receive attendance records or course materials for these sessions.

Barriers to Implementation

The Patton Academic Center experienced many barriers to successful implementation during the 2010-11 school year. The evaluator was not given access to the school or its records until February of 2011, hindering the evaluation. When the new Alternative Education Learning Community executive director came on board she ensured the evaluator was given access to all staff and had full cooperation. In addition, Patton Academic Center staff worked diligently to provide all data the evaluator requested at that time. In addition to problems with the evaluation, Patton had many problems of its own. The school experienced issues with unclear eligibility criteria, school calendar dates, and master schedule courses; inadequate student tracking methods; attendance issues; enrollment; and credit completion problems. These issues were due to inadequate preparation prior to the beginning of the school year and to poor leadership during the beginning of the year. In addition to addressing many of the issues outlined above and in this report, the school employed a new principal for the 2011-12 school year with a strong background in working in alternative education settings. This principal has already begun working with staff to ensure the 2011-12 school year is more successful than the last.

Recommendations

There were five recommendations as a result of this evaluation.

1) Finalize eligibility criteria for students entering Patton Academic Center.

2) Complete the master schedule and school calendar (including quarter beginning and end dates and registration deadlines) prior to the beginning of each school year.

3) Work with appropriate Dallas ISD departments to link Academic Center databases with Chancery to improve record keeping practices.

4) Develop replicable curricula and appropriate documentation for all social service provision.

5) Use electronic tracking procedures for all staff training and student service provision including professional development, one-on-one student meetings, and student workshops.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the John Leslie Patton Jr. Academic Center Report, EA11-136-2, which can be found at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/.