The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) and the Over-Age Academic Center Task Force developed the John Leslie Patton Jr. Academic Center (Patton) 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 report summarizes demographic, academic, and student support services data for the 2011-12 school year for the Patton Academic Center. The scope of this plan included evaluating the Patton Academic Center implementation process with regards to their second year of operation in accordance with the goals outlined in program documents. This evaluation report includes:

- A description of the characteristics of the student population served at Patton Academic Center.
- An examination of students’ academic achievement at the campus.
- A summary of student support services provided at Patton.

Program Characteristics

Patton Academic Center held four nine-week sessions during the 2010-11 school year. In order to be eligible to enroll at Patton Academic Center, students had to meet the following criteria outlined below.

- 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

In addition, the handbook stated that the superintendent or designee (such as campus principals) could assign and transfer a student to Patton if the student met the above criteria. The Patton principal indicated that campus principals could transfer students to Patton if they determined that the student would benefit from enrollment even if they did not meet the above criteria.

There were three 16 year olds enrolled at Patton. The criteria did not include students of this age. In addition, the average number of credits for 17 and 18 year olds was above the allowable number at entry. Seventeen year olds should have had less than three credits but the average number of credits at entry was just above three and the maximum number of credits at entry was 17 credits for this group. Eighteen year olds should have had less than nine credits at entry but the average was just above nine and the maximum number of credits at entry was about 33.

Student Characteristics

There were 831 students enrolled at Patton over the course of the 2011-12 school year (four quarters). Not all students attended all quarters. About 78 percent of the total Patton student population was enrolled during the first quarter. The number of students enrolled at Patton dropped after the first quarter (from 649 to 560). Just under half of students remained enrolled at Patton for all four quarters (47%) while another 44 percent were enrolled in only one or two quarters.

Students were between the ages of 16 and 27 with an average age of just under 20. The majority of Patton students were juniors (20%) or seniors (40%), African American (53%) or Hispanic (43%), male (52%), and were English proficient (93%). The majority of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors were promoted at the end of the school year; however, there were a noticeable amount of withdrawals for each group (37%, 43%, and 26%, respectively). A majority of seniors either met graduation standards but failed the TAKS (24%) or were retained (48%). Another 16 percent of seniors withdrew from the school. It appeared that student discipline improved over the course of the year. The majority of offenses were level II or III and were directed at personnel rather than other students.

Student Academic Achievement

Attendance issues continued to be a problem. As one might expect, end-of-course grades, Assessment of Course Performance (ACP) scores, Texas
Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) pass rates were fairly low. Average end-of-course grades ranged from between 55 percent to 73 percent for core courses and between 49 and 80 percent for non-core courses. ACP scores ranged from 54 percent to 74 percent. The majority of students passed the reading (67%) and social studies (83%) TAKS exams but less than half passed the math (33%) and science (50%) exams. A small group of first time ninth graders took the STAAR exam. The majority of students did not pass these exams.

Social Service Provision

The social worker at Patton provided a range of social services to Patton students. Most students visited the social worker for assessment, assistance and counseling services. Assistance included securing resources such as shelter, food, clothes, medical or dental care, or legal aide. Assessment included the evaluation of a student's basic needs for housing, food, clothing, or medical or dental care. The social worker also spent time making phone calls to students or to agencies on behalf of students. Phone calls to students were most likely regarding attendance issues. The majority of students visited the social worker only once during the school year (74%). There was also a community liaison staff member at Patton during the 2011-12 school year. The community liaison most often provided assistance with job and college preparedness. The community liaison served between 52 and 83 students throughout all four quarters.

Professional Development

The evaluator sent a link to an online professional development survey to all alternative education campuses including Patton. The survey was open and available for staff to complete from May 1st through May 21st, 2012. Seventy-eight teachers and twelve other staff such as academic coordinators, teaching assistants, and counselors completed the survey. Respondents described the student populations with whom they worked and described what professional development topics related to working in alternative education would be useful to them in the future.

Respondents reported that the students with whom they worked were at-risk students, academic low performers, behind on credits and over-age for their grade level, came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had attendance and truancy issues, and had behavior issues and special needs such as lacking social skills, having stress and anger management difficulties, drug dependency issues, and weak interpersonal skills when relating to peers and adults. Several respondents indicated that students had the potential to be good students but had too many academic, social and behavioral deficits to be successful.

The most common request was for behavior modification training. This included training in areas regarding drug and alcohol abuse, dealing with difficult family issues, teaching social skills, understanding the effects of poverty on students’ well being, teaching stress/anger management, teaching conflict resolution, and dealing with bullying. Other requests were for training regarding academic issues such as motivating students, special education issues, teaching multiple grades in one classroom, academic strategies for at-risk students, classroom management techniques, motivating students and keeping them engaged, incentive ideas for students that do not cost any money, individualized instruction, dealing with different learning styles, developing project-based curricula, dealing with poor reading skills, how to boost attendance, teaching students with large gaps in learning, use of technology in the classroom, and working with over-age students. There were also requests for training on how to teach parenting skills and how get students engaged in career and advanced education planning and goal setting.

Recommendations

There were three recommendations as a result of this evaluation.

1. Add social services staff to better provide assistance with the varying behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students at Patton.

2. Increase professional development opportunities for teaching staff focusing on behavior modification, dealing with the academic needs of at-risk students, and the social and emotional needs of these students.

3. Review students final course grades, ACP scores, and TAKS and STAAR scores to determine where the academic curriculum could be strengthened or additional tutoring or academic services added.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the John Leslie Patton Jr. Academic Center Report, EA12-136-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252.