The Barbara M. Manns Education Center was designed to be an alternative school for over-age, eighth-grade students who were behind on courses or who had been retained. The school intended to reduce the dropout rate among middle school students. The school began accepting students during the 2011-12 school year and could accommodate approximately 200 students during six, six-week sessions. As of September 1, 2012 there were a total of 2,656 overage eighth grade students in the district, almost 27 percent of the eighth grade population. The school utilized an adjusted, online curriculum (E2020).

Figure 1. Percentage of Overage Students in Dallas ISD as of September 1, 2012

Interviews with students and staff indicated that Manns was a troubled campus where students, teachers, and other campus staff felt overwhelmed, anxious, and disheartened. The school originally attempted to screen students to identify those best suited for the online instructional environment. Low enrollment caused the school to abandon the screening procedures and enroll any overage eighth grade student.

Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

This report summarizes the student support services provided, classroom issues faced, academic support systems in place, and behavioral/disciplinary issues occurring during the 2012-13 school year at the Barbara M. Manns Education Center (Manns). The evaluator used a mix of both qualitative (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative methods (statistical analyses of data files).

Student Support

Teachers reported that they talked with students about social support needs on at least a monthly basis; however, more teachers reported that they referred students to the campus counselor for these kinds of issues. Campus staff reported that Manns students needed assistance from Dallas ISD Psychological Services, licensed social workers, and additional counseling staff. The counselor at Manns reported that she did not have the training or licensing necessary for dealing with some of the students’ mental health issues. Primarily, students at Manns needed social support services that were not available on the Manns campus. The school’s workscope and budget did not allow for sufficient teaching or social service staff on the campus, leaving the campus unable to provide valuable resources to students.

Teacher Classroom Issues

In the classroom, Manns teachers were dealing with students who did not know how to, or were not able to, follow instructions. In addition to student issues such as problems with drug abuse, pregnancy, mental health issues, and inadequately addressed special education needs, teachers also reported that their classrooms lacked proper air filtration, were often too hot or too cold, and lacked adequate lighting. Results indicated that students’ social service needs needed to be addressed before their academic needs could be properly served. Students and staff would benefit from smaller class sizes and better facilities. A lack of professional development and ineffective leadership were also identified as barriers to effective instruction.

Academic Support Services

The student population at the Barbara Manns Education Center was primarily Hispanic or African American (about 59% and 38%, respectively), male (approximately 65%), and age 16 (about 69%). About 62 percent of students were English proficient, 12 percent were Special Education, approximately 26 percent were on free or reduced lunch, and 97 percent were considered At Risk of dropping out. Attendance was a major concern for campus staff. About 48 percent of Manns students attended classes less than 90 percent of the time during the 2012-13 school year.
Attendance issues became more severe during the second semester.

With regard to course, ACP, and STAAR passing rates, results indicated that course passing percentages did not correspond with equally high passing percentages for the ACP and STAAR exams. In addition, the course passing percentages were very low for science, reading, and social studies. The percentage of students passing the ACP and STAAR was highest in reading. According to Manns students, there were no academic support services available to them outside of regular classroom time. Before- and after-school tutoring used to be available, but students reported that it was canceled due to busing issues.

**Behavioral and Disciplinary Concerns**

Student discipline was a major issue on the Manns campus during the 2012-13 school year. Student discipline referrals were at their highest during the third and fourth six weeks, with referrals jumping from 29 during the second six weeks to 186 during the third and 273 during the fourth.

![Figure 2. 2012-13 Disciplinary Referrals by Six-Week Period and Level of Offense](image)

Results of a *t*-test showed that Manns students had almost two more referrals during the 2012-13 school year than did other eighth grade students. The most common offenses were classroom disruption, dress and grooming code violations, profanity or obscene gestures towards personnel, fighting, and drugs.

Teachers asked for additional support from leadership in creating systems for dealing with discipline issues. Staff reported that if students’ social services needs could be met, behavior would be likely to improve. The addition of electives such as music, art, and sports were recommended so that students could express themselves and become more engaged in campus life. Manns students reported that classroom disruption regularly prevented students from learning. Students reported that it was a problem that any overage eighth grade student could enroll at Manns. They stated that students with a history of behavior problems were being allowed to enroll and that was making it difficult for those students who wanted to learn to do so. In addition, students reported that they were not making the progress they expected and were frustrated that they were not succeeding. Students expressed dissatisfaction with classroom temperatures, odd smells, and unclean restroom facilities. Students also reported the lack of sports, art, music, and good food affected their satisfaction with the campus.

In conclusion, the Barbara Manns campus should make adjustments in its workscope and budget to allow for additional services such as additional core content teachers to allow for smaller class sizes; Special Education (SPED) instructors to support a campus population of struggling learners, many of whom could potentially be undiagnosed as SPED; additional counselors and social work staff to support students’ social service needs, as well as psychologists to diagnose and deal with mental health concerns. The Manns campus should mirror the Patton Academic Center in program structure, potentially including accelerated instruction and removing the current use of online learning as the only means of delivering curriculum. Smaller class sizes, more direct instruction, and more electives would help improve the success of the campus. Effective school leadership is an absolute necessity. Addressing students’ socialization needs should be a top priority for the campus. Finally, building infrastructure issues such as air filtration, available space, no windows, heating and cooling, and unclean restroom facilities should be alleviated to provide the most positive and healthy learning environment for students and working environment for staff.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations for the 2012-13 school year were: revise the campus workscope and budget to allow for more core content and special education teachers; discontinue the use of online learning as the only means of delivering curriculum; research the possibility of relocating the Manns campus to a more appropriate building location; add and least one social worker position, increase the number of days Psychological Services personnel are on the campus, and add one additional counselor position; ensure appropriate Special Education resources are available on the campus; create a screening procedure for selecting the most appropriate students for the Manns campus; offer professional development to teachers regarding educating alternative education students and over-age students; and determine how many 2012-13 Manns students continued to the ninth grade in the 2013-14 school year.
Additional information may be obtained by consulting the Barbara M. Manns Education Center Report, EA13-523-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252.