

**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION
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**EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT
NEW BEGINNING**

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December 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project New Beginning is a program designed to meet the needs of students who satisfy the following three conditions: they (1) are new to the United States, (2) have limited English proficiency, and (3) have minimal or no prior schooling. Currently, the program exists at middle and senior high school levels offering instruction for students whose native language is Spanish or Haitian Creole. The program offers intensive Language Arts instruction through ESOL courses, as well as instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies via Bilingual Curriculum Content (BCC) courses. The goals of Project New Beginning include developing students' social and academic skills, reducing the high failure and dropout rates, and reducing the number of inappropriate referrals for evaluation and placement into Exceptional Student Education (ESE) courses. In MDCPS, the program currently exists in five middle and two senior high schools.

To explore the potential benefits of the program, two cohorts of students who had participated in the program were identified. The first one consisted of 84 students who participated in the program during the 1999-2000 academic year, and the second included 67 students who were in the program the following academic year. Academic results of program students during their post-program years were analyzed. This analysis included an examination of the coursework in mathematics, science, and social studies taken by the program students as well as their results on the Florida Comprehensive assessment Test (FCAT). In addition, students' retention, dropout, and graduation rates were analyzed. The rate of referral for psychological services was examined as well. Furthermore, teachers and students who participated in the program were surveyed.

The evaluation questions and results are presented below.

Evaluation Question 1: How well do program participants perform academically in their post-program years of schooling in the District? An analysis of the academic work by the New Beginning program students in their post-program years indicated that fewer program students took mathematics and science courses that were on or above grade level compared with all Districts' students. Program students who took on-grade-level courses in Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies were less successful in terms of end-of-course academic grades than were all District students. Additionally, the FCAT performance of the program students in their post-program years was lower than that for demographically similar students in the District in both reading and mathematics. All these findings suggest that the New Beginning students were less successful academically during the time after "graduating" from the program than were District students during the same period. It should be noted, however, that the "similar" District's students used in academic comparisons did not face the challenge of the deficit of previous schooling that the program students had to deal with.

Evaluation Question 2: What is the retention rate for students who had completed the program as compared to that for similar students in the District? An analysis of the in-grade retention rates during the middle school post-program years showed that the retention rate for program students was higher than that for demographically similar students in the District during the same period. This finding suggests that a lack of previous schooling had a lasting negative effect on the program students manifesting itself in a high retention rate. Program students were not able to overcome this detriment during their middle school years.

Evaluation Question 3: What are the graduation and dropout rates for students who had completed the program as compared to those for similar students in the District? An

analysis of dropout and graduation rates indicated that the dropout rate for high school program students was higher than that for demographically similar students in the District. Furthermore, the graduation rate for high school program students was lower than that for demographically similar students in the District. These findings appear to indicate that the program students were not able to overcome the negative and long-lasting effects of the deficit of previous schooling.

Evaluation Question 4: What proportion of program participants is referred to evaluations for ESE services as compared to that for similar students in the District? An examination of the rate of referral for psychological evaluations showed that this rate for the program students was about the same as that for demographically similar students in the District. One of the potential threats of the lack of previous schooling is that its negative effect on students learning might be confused with the detrimental effect of learning disability. The finding presented above suggests that this potential threat did not materialize.

Evaluation Question 5: What are the teachers' and students' views on the effectiveness of the program? The majority of teachers surveyed stated that the program was run well by the District staff. Most teachers reported that the program provided a good match between students' needs and teaching methods and materials used. Teachers provided suggestions on how to improve the program. One suggestion that was mentioned most often was to shorten the time between the initial identification of students potentially eligible for the program, and the final placement into the program. Teachers also stated that they would like to have staff development offered in the areas of technology integration and writing in content areas. Most students surveyed said that the program helped them a great deal in attaining English proficiency. All students stated that the program helped them in adjusting to school life in the USA. In addition, all students agreed that overall, the program played a major role in their school success.

It would be desirable to compare educational outcomes of students who participated in the New Beginning with those of students who had a comparable deficit of previous schooling and lack of knowledge of English, but who did not take part in the program. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find a group of such secondary students because virtually all students who were identified to have these characteristics participated in the program. In this evaluation, educational outcomes of the program students were compared with those of demographically similar students in the District. However, these demographically similar students in the District did not face the major obstacle to educational progress that the program students did: a deficit of previous schooling. Because educational outcomes of the program students could not have been compared to those of truly similar students, potential benefits of the program were not fully revealed.

Based on the findings presented above, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Establish a division of the program devoted to following students during their post-program school years with the goal of reducing the dropout rate and increasing the high school graduation rate.
2. Implement specific measures to reduce the time between initial student identification and placement into the program.
3. Provide staff development in the areas of technology integration, writing in content areas, or other relevant topics.

INTRODUCTION

Each year, thousands of new students enter the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). Many of these new students come from outside of the United States and are limited English proficient (LEP). Upon entry into the MDCPS, LEP students are enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program designed to increase the students' English skills and to help them deal with challenges of learning English. A number of these students face the additional challenge of having inadequate prior schooling. Project New Beginning is a program designed to meet the needs of these students. That is, the program is created to help students who satisfy the following three conditions: (1) they are new to the United States, (2) have limited English proficiency, and (3) have minimal or no prior schooling. Currently, the program exists at middle and senior high school levels offering instruction for students whose native language is Spanish or Haitian Creole.

Students who are eligible to participate in the program are identified by the schools where the students initially enroll. Each potential student is given a survey to determine the level of previous schooling. Based on the results of this survey, along with teacher recommendations, the student is identified as a candidate for the program. After the initial identification, a formal assessment of the student's academic skills is performed. This assessment consists of administering the Oral Language Proficiency Scale-Revised to determine the student's English proficiency level, assessing students' proficiency in reading and mathematics (in Spanish or Haitian Creole), and obtaining a writing sample. Students, who have been in the United States for less than one calendar year and who also have low levels of both English proficiency and native language literacy (below third grade level for middle school students and below fifth grade level for senior high school students) are eligible to participate in Project New Beginning. Program participation is voluntary, and it requires a written approval of the student's parents, Region office, and the District. Generally, a student participates in the program for one academic year. In rare instances, upon teacher recommendations and District approval, program participation can be extended to two academic years.

The program offers intensive Language Arts instruction through ESOL courses, as well as instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies via Bilingual Curriculum Content (BCC) courses. The goals of Project New Beginning include developing students' social and academic skills, reducing the high failure and dropout rates, and reducing the number of inappropriate referrals for evaluation and placement into Exceptional Student Education (ESE) courses.

In MDCPS, the program currently exists in five middle and two senior high schools. Of the five middle schools, three offer instruction for students whose native language is Spanish, and two for Haitian-Creole students. One of the senior high schools offers instruction for students who are native speakers of Spanish, and the other for Haitian-Creole students. If an eligible student lives outside of attendance boundary areas of any of these schools, transportation can be provided by the District.

The Division of Bilingual Education and World Languages requested an evaluation of Project New Beginning. This evaluation addresses the academic advancement of students in the program, their retention and dropout rates, as well as teachers' and students' opinions about the effectiveness of the program.

Specifically, the evaluation attempts to answer the following evaluation questions:

Evaluation Question 1: *How well do program participants perform academically in their post-program years of schooling in the District?*

Evaluation Question 2: *What is the retention rate for students who have completed the program as compared to that for similar students in the District?*

Evaluation Question 3: *What are the graduation and dropout rates for students who have completed the program as compared to those for similar students in the District?*

Evaluation Question 4: *What proportion of program participants is referred to evaluations for ESE services as compared to that for similar students in the District?*

Evaluation Question 5: *What are the teachers' and students' views on the effectiveness of the program?*

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Two cohorts of students who participated in the program were identified. The first cohort consisted of all students participating in the program during the 1999-2000 school year. The second cohort included all students who participated in the program during the 2000-2001 academic year. The numbers of students in each cohort disaggregated by school level and student language are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Number of Students in Each Cohort by School Level and Student Language*

| | 1999-2000 Cohort | | 2000-2001 Cohort | |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | Spanish | Haitian Creole | Spanish | Haitian Creole |
| Middle School | 45 | 9 | 28 | 12 |
| High School | 16 | 14 | 13 | 14 |
| Total | 61 | 23 | 41 | 26 |

As mentioned earlier, students in the program were faced with a double challenge of being LEP and lacking prior schooling. Because of this latter attribute, it was virtually impossible to identify a group of students in the District who were truly comparable to the program students in academic and demographic characteristics. Consequently, a method of using *similar students* in the District and computing weighted averages for comparison purposes was employed for answering the evaluation questions related to student academics (questions 1-4). The method is explained below.

Depending on the evaluation question considered, a specific statistic (such as the percentage of students scoring within an achievement level on the FCAT, or a dropout rate) was sought. Once such a statistic was found for the program students, the corresponding figure for all similar students in the District was found through the two essential procedures: *equating* and *weighting*. The term *equating* here means that for a specific group of program students considered, all students in the District who mirrored the particular program group in terms of the four factors: (1) grade, (2) ESOL level, (3) native language, and (4) free/reduced price lunch status, were found. The term *weighting* refers to a procedure of determining a weighted average of the statistic of interest for all students in the District who were found through matching. (This method is explained further in the Appendix A.)

To answer the last evaluation question (number 5), all 26 teachers who instructed the program students in the 2003-2004 school year were surveyed. Of these, 21 teachers returned the completed questionnaires (81% return rate). The Teacher Questionnaire was developed in cooperation with the Division of Bilingual Education and World Languages staff. This questionnaire inquired about the program's perceived effectiveness and ways to improve it (see Appendix B). The results of the teachers' survey were analyzed and tabulated.

In addition, a sample of students in the 1999-2000 cohort who had completed all graduation requirements by March of 2004 was identified. This sample consisted of six program students. The students in the sample were interviewed using a Student Interview Guide developed in

cooperation with the Division of Bilingual Education and World Languages staff (see Appendix C). The purpose of the interviews was to determine what program's features contributed to the students' success. Students' responses to the interview questions were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of analyses are presented below for each evaluation question individually.

Evaluation Question 1: How well do program participants perform academically in their post-program years of schooling in the District?

Coursework Analysis

The results of the post-program academic work for students in the two cohorts were analyzed. The analysis consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of an examination of the students' coursework during their post-program school years. The second part was an analysis of students' academic performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) during the same period.

Academic records of students in the two cohorts reflecting the period beginning with the school year immediately after “graduating” from the program and ending with the 2003-2004 school year were examined. The purpose of this examination was to see whether students who graduated from the program took academic courses at the level of a “typical” secondary student in the District. That is, the comparison group consisted of all District students in grades 6-12 who took the on-grade-level Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies courses. The list of courses in these academic areas that the typical MDCPS student takes in a secondary school was compiled with the assistance of the Department of Curriculum Development and Instructional Support. This list is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Secondary Academic Courses Taken by the Typical MDCPS Student by Grade Level and Subject Area*

| Grade | Mathematics | Science | Social Studies |
|-------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6 | MJ Mathematics I | MJ Comp. Science I | World Geography |
| 7 | MJ Mathematics II | MJ Comp. Science II | Civics |
| 8 | MJ Mathematics III | MJ Comp. Science III | U.S. History |
| 9 | Algebra I | Earth/Space Science | World History |
| 10 | Geometry | Biology | Elective |
| 11 | Algebra II | Chemistry or Phys. Science | American History |
| 12 | -- | -- | Am. Government/Economics |

Each course taken by a program student was classified as either at, below, or above the level of a typical same grade student in the District. The Language Arts courses were not included in the analysis because all program students were initially limited English proficient, and a large portion of their post-program coursework in this area consisted of Language Arts through ESOL courses. The Social Studies courses were not included in the “on-grade-level” analysis of the student coursework because, according to the Division of Social Sciences, virtually all District students take grade level courses in this area.

Results of the “on-grade-level” mathematics and science coursework analysis across all secondary grade levels for program students and for typical students in the District are presented in Figure 1.

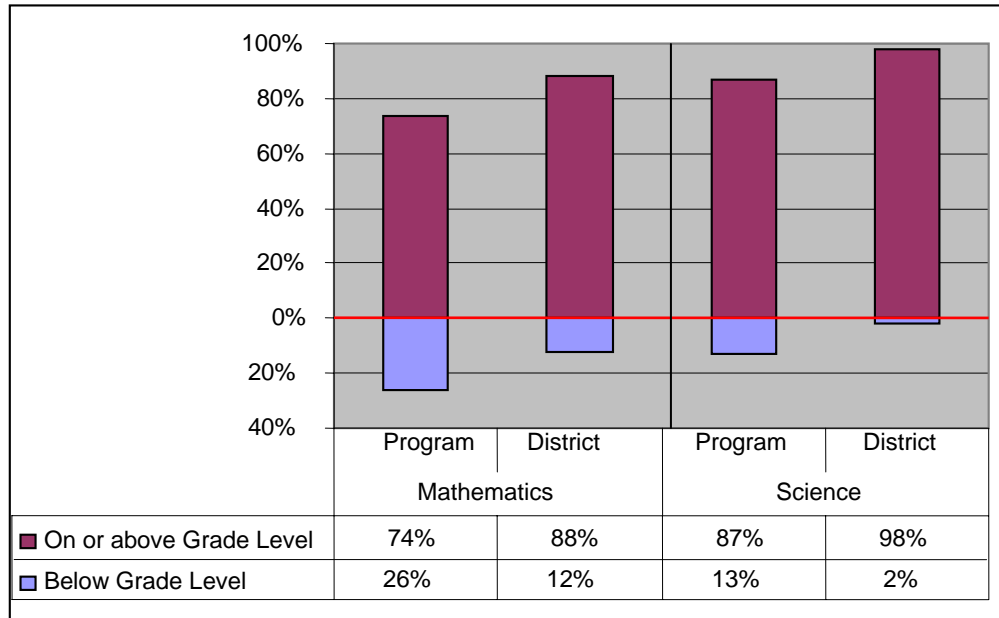


Figure 1. Mathematics and science coursework taken by the Program and District students.

Clearly, smaller proportions of program students in the two cohorts took mathematics and science courses that were on or above grade level compared with all Districts’ students. Nevertheless, almost three-quarters of program students in their post program years took math courses that were on or above grade level. Similarly, almost nine-tenths of program students participated in science coursework that was on or above grade level during their post program years.

In addition to examining what kind of courses students in the program take during their post-program years, the final course grades of those students in the program who took on-grade-level courses in Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies were analyzed and compared to those for all secondary students in the District who took the same courses. The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 2.

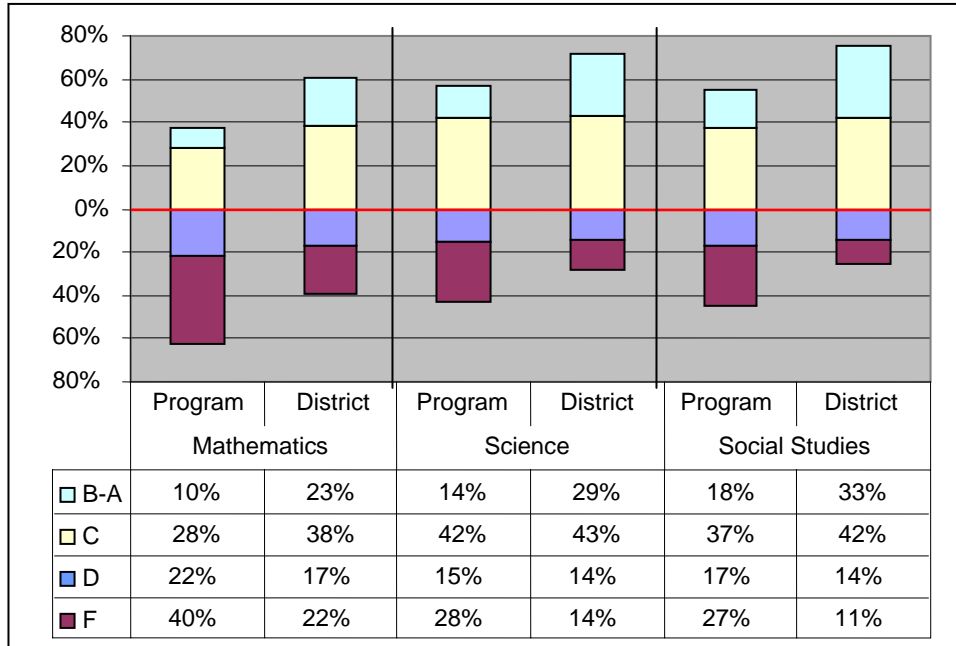


Figure 2. Coursework results of Program and District students.

Figure 2 shows that program students were less successful in their on-grade-level academic work in Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies than District’s students overall. Program students were about twice more likely to receive a failing grade than were students in the District. In addition, they were only about one-half as likely as the District’s students to earn grades of “A” or “B”.

The results presented thus far indicate that smaller proportions of the program students took courses in mathematics and science that were on or above grade level compared to all secondary students in the District. Additionally, those students in the program who took on-grade-level courses in mathematics, science, and social studies were less successful in terms of final course grades than were all secondary students in the District taking the same courses.

FCAT Performance Analysis

The coursework analysis presented above compared the coursework and its results for program students and for those students in the District who took on-grade-level courses. Of course, program students differed from typical students in the District in many respects. For instance, all program students were LEP during their time in and immediately after the program. The FCAT performance analysis presented below attempts to take into account this and certain other differences between program students and students in the District as a whole by comparing outcomes of program students to those of similar students in the District.

Performance of program students on the FCAT during their post-program years was analyzed separately for students in the 1999-00 and 2000-01 cohorts. In each case, FCAT performance of program students was compared to that of similar students in the District using the cluster-proportional weighting approach (see Appendix A).

ESE students were excluded from the FCAT performance analysis because there were only three ESE students with valid FCAT scores among the program students.

The numbers of program students in each cohort whose achievement results were used in the FCAT performance analysis and those for similar students in the District are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of Students with Valid FCAT Scores in Each Cohort during Post-Program Years and Number of Similar Students in the District for that Year

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| 1999-00 Cohort | 32 | 35 | 34 | 20 |
| District | 3497 | 5083 | 6459 | 5391 |
| 2000-01 Cohort | -- | 49 | 40 | 29 |
| District | -- | 3985 | 6329 | 5013 |

The results of the FCAT performance analysis for the post-program academic years are presented in Figure 3 for the 1999-00 Cohort and in Figure 4 for the 2000-01 Cohort.

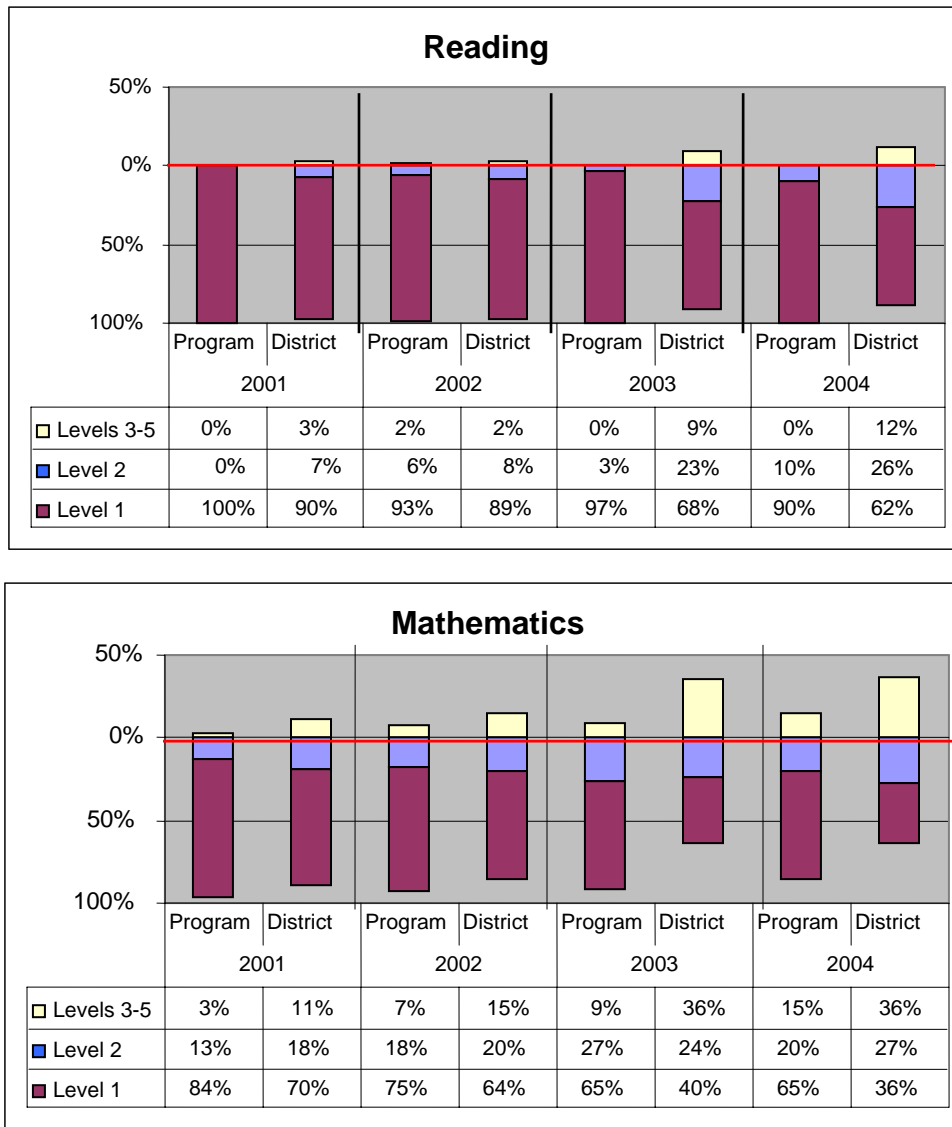


Figure 3. Percentages of students in the 1999-00 Cohort within particular achievement levels on the Reading and Mathematics FCAT during post-program years.

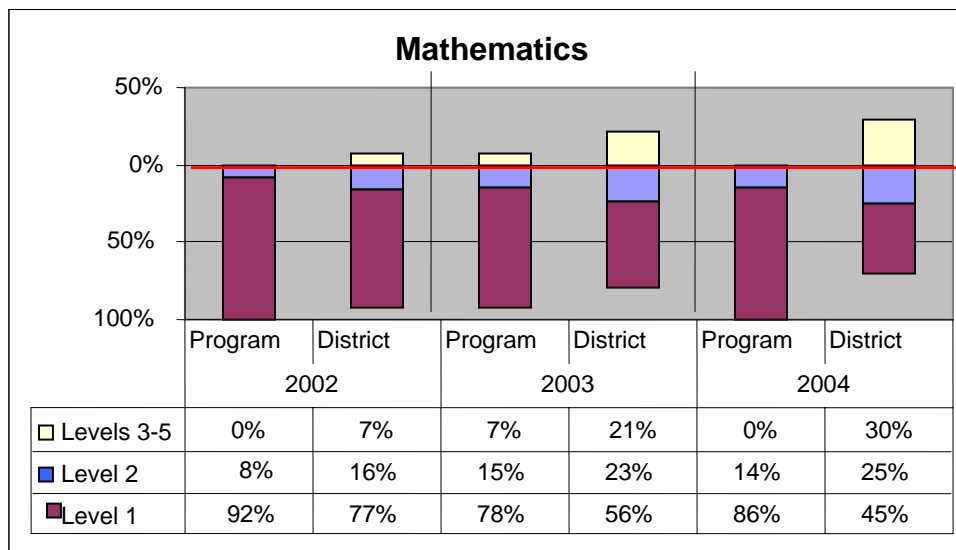
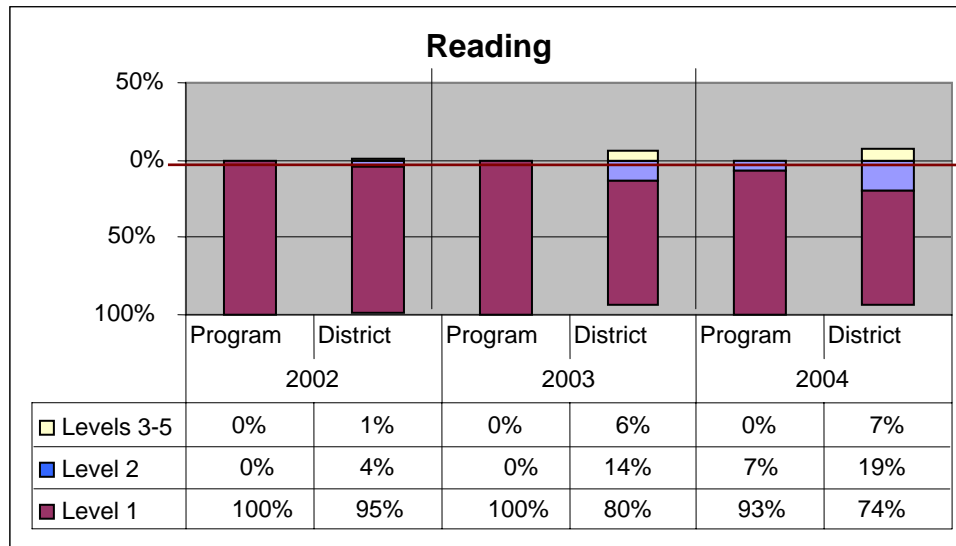


Figure 4. Percentages of students in the 2000-01 Cohort within particular achievement levels on the Reading and Mathematics FCAT during post-program years.

Figures 3 and 4 show that program students in both cohorts fell behind similar students in the District in terms of their reading and mathematics FCAT performance. Virtually none of the program students scored within achievement levels 3-5 on the reading component of the FCAT. In mathematics, the proportion of program students scoring within achievement levels 3-5 was less than half of that for similar students in the District across several test years.

The academic achievement results presented in Figures 3 and 4 suggest that the program students were not able to overcome the negative effect of the lack of previous schooling. When compared to demographically similar students in the District, the program students were less successful in terms of their FCAT performance during the period after “graduating” from the program.

Evaluation Question 2: What is the retention rate for students who had completed the program as compared to that for similar students in the District?

For this question, all program students in both cohorts who were in grades 6-8 in October 2001 were considered, and their grade promotion status recorded through October 2004. Senior high school students were excluded from consideration because for them grade level designation does not have the same meaning as for the middle school students. When a student is retained in a middle school grade, the student must repeat the entire curriculum for the grade. On the other hand, when a high school student is “retained”, that student must only repeat the failed course(s). Often, grade level designations for high school students change during the year or follow rather chaotic patterns.

Altogether, there were 40 program students in both cohorts enrolled in District’s schools in October 2001. Of those, five students were retained in middle school grades at some point in the October 2001-October 2004 period (during their post-program years). The corresponding retention rate was 13%.

The retention rate for the similar students in the District during the same period was also determined using the cluster-proportional weighting approach (Appendix A). In this analysis, similar students in the District had the same native language, initial free/reduced price lunch status, as well as grade and ESOL levels as the program students. The retention rates for the program and similar District’s students are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Retention Rates for the Program and District Students

| | Initial Number of Students | Retention Rate |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Program | 40 | 13% |
| District | 7808 | 7% |

Table 4 shows that the retention rate for middle school program students during October 2001 through October 2004 period was almost twice as high as that for similar students in the District.

It appears that a lack of previous schooling had a lasting negative effect on the program students manifesting itself in a high retention rate. Students were not able to overcome this detriment during their middle school years.

Evaluation Question 3: What are the graduation and dropout rates for students who had completed the program as compared to those for similar students in the District?

To answer this question, program students in both cohorts who were in 9th grade during the 2000-2001 school year were identified. These students were selected because they could have graduated from high school by the end of 2003-2004 school year. Altogether, 54 such students were identified. Of those, 33 had Spanish and 21 Haitian Creole as native languages. About two-thirds of these 54 students were identified as eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program, and all of them as LEP in October 2000. The final 2003-2004 status of the selected students is shown in Figure 5 below.

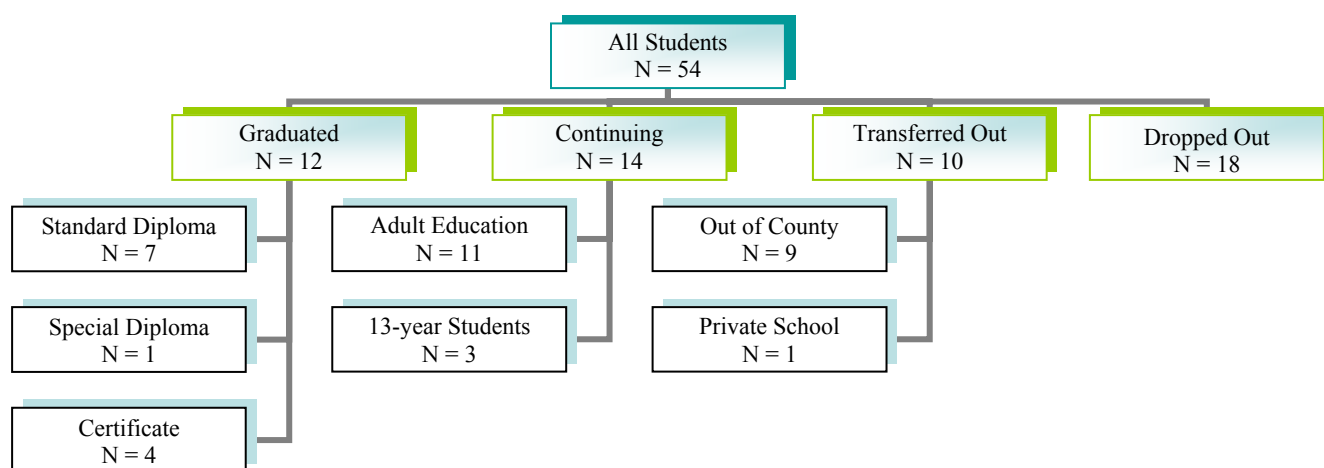


Figure 5. Final status of the 2000-2001 Grade 9 Program students.

Using the numbers from Figure 5, graduation and dropout rates for program students can be found. The graduation rate was defined as the ratio of the number of people who graduated from high school (including those receiving certificates of completion) to the difference between the initial number of students and the number of those who transferred out. Similarly, the dropout rate was defined as the ratio of the total number of dropouts to the difference between the initial number of students and the number of those who transferred out.

To contrast these rates with corresponding rates for similar students in the District, a cluster-proportional weighting procedure was employed. The District students considered for this procedure had the same native language, initial grade level, free/reduced price lunch status, and ESOL level as the program students at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year. Altogether, there were 3,053 such students in the District.

The resulting graduation and dropout rates are shown in Figure 6. Note that the methodology used here to compute the relevant rates is different from that used by the District when determining cross-sectional or longitudinal graduation and dropout rates.

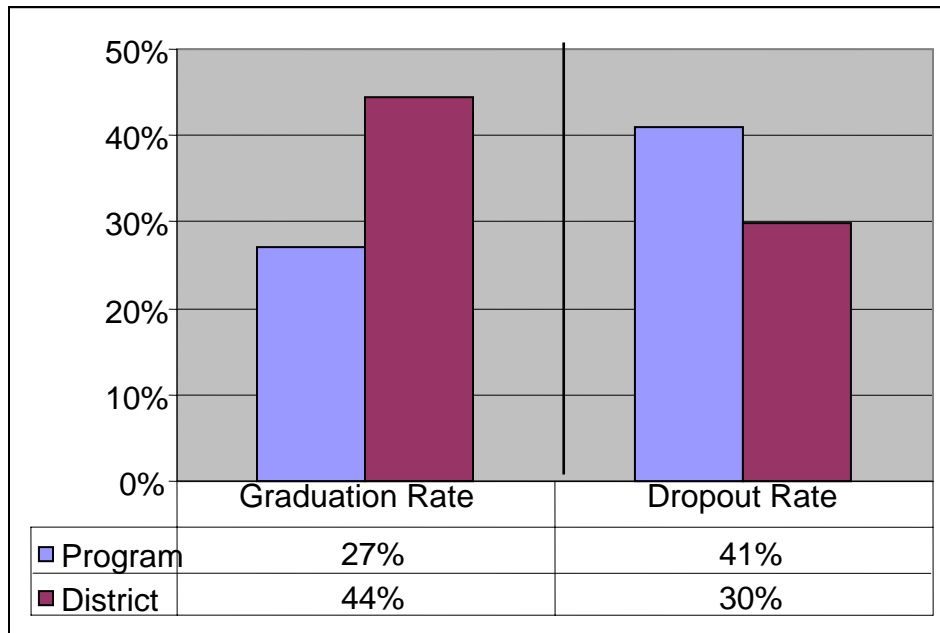


Figure 6. Graduation and dropout rates for the Program and District students.

Figure 6 shows that the graduation rate was lower and the dropout rate was higher for the program students than were the corresponding rates for similar students in the District. The graduation rate for the program students was about 1.6 times lower than that for the similar students in the District. The dropout rate for the program students was about 1.4 times higher than the corresponding District figure.

These figures suggest that the high school program students were not able to overcome the disadvantages of the deficit of previous schooling. They were more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate from high school than were demographically similar District students.

Evaluation Question 4: What proportion of program participants is referred to evaluations for ESE services as compared to that for similar students in the District?

A period from August 2000 through June 2004 was considered for determining ESE referral rates. The beginning date above was selected because program students in both cohorts were enrolled in the District’s schools during and after the 2000-2001 school year. Altogether, there were 142 students in both cohorts enrolled in MDCPS at the beginning and 80 at the end of this period. Of the initial 142 students, 7 were referred for psychological evaluations during the specified period. (Of these 7 students, 5 were placed in the ESE programs.) To determine the referral rate for similar students in the District, a cluster-proportional weighting approach was employed. The District students considered for this procedure were in secondary grades, had the same native language, free/reduced price lunch status, and ESOL level as the program students at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year. The referral rates for the program students and similar District students are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Referral Rates for the Program and District Students

| | Initial Number of Students | Referral Rate |
|----------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Program | 142 | 5% |
| District | 15762 | 4% |

Table 5 shows that the rate of referral for psychological evaluations for the program students was about the same as that for similar students in the District.

One of the potential threats of the lack of previous schooling is that its negative effect on students learning might be confused with the detrimental effect of learning disability. Consequently, a high percentage of program students might be needlessly referred to psychological evaluations. The figures in Table 5 suggest that this potential threat did not materialize.

Evaluation Question 5: What are the teachers’ and students’ views on the effectiveness of the program?

To answer this question, all 26 teachers involved in the program during the 2003-20004 school year were surveyed. The results showed that teachers in the program were experienced: the median time teaching in K-12 was 8 years. The median number of years teachers were involved in the program was 4 years. Most teachers had only secondary school experience. Of the 21 teachers who completed the questionnaire, only 2 (about 10%) had taught at the elementary level.

About 33% of teachers in the program had Bachelor’s, about 43% had Master’s, and the rest (24%) had Specialist/Doctorate Degrees. Teachers in the program had various areas of certification with about one-quarter of all teachers certified in multiple areas. About one-third of all teachers were certified in Mathematics; the same proportion was certified in ESOL. Smaller proportions of teachers were certified in other areas: 25% in Social Studies; 13% in Spanish, Science, or ESE; fewer than 10% in French, or Language Arts. According to the self-reported information, 4 out of 21 program teachers (19%) taught subjects for which they were not certified.

Teachers’ opinions about certain aspects of the program are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Teachers’ Opinions about the Program

| | Poor or Below Average | Average | Excellent or Above Average |
|--|-----------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| How well the program is run by the district staff | 14% | 15% | 71% |
| The match between the students’ needs and teaching materials | 19% | 24% | 57% |
| The match between the students’ needs and teaching methods | 5% | 24% | 71% |

Note: the percentages displayed in the table are based on 21 completed questionnaires.

Table 6 shows that most teachers agreed that the program was run well by the District staff. In addition, most teachers thought that the program provided a good match between students’ needs and teaching methods and materials used.

Responding to a question about areas in which they would like to have staff development, teachers chose technology integration (76% of all respondents), writing in the content area (62%), content literacy (43%), and reading instruction (33%).

Replying to an open-ended question that inquired about possible ways to improve the program, teachers frequently suggested shortening the time between initial student identification and placement into the program. This suggestion was offered by about one-quarter of all respondents. Other suggestions that were offered less often were to update/improve the language surveys; keep student/teacher ratios to a minimum; supply more books, computers, and other teaching

materials; implement after-school program for students and their parents; and provide workshops on how to teach students with a severe lack of previous schooling.

In addition to surveying teachers in the program, six students who had participated in the program in the past and who completed all graduation requirements by March of 2004 were interviewed. (Of the six students interviewed, five later graduated from high school with standard diplomas, and one received a certificate of completion.) The purpose of the interview was to determine what program's features contributed to the students' success.

Among the six students interviewed, four students came from Cuba, one from Haiti, and one from Peru. One student reported missing about two years of school prior to coming to the USA; one reported repeating a grade in home country, and four students reported not missing any school in the home countries. Most students enrolled in MDCPS almost immediately upon coming to this country; only two reported missing a few weeks.

Most students stated that the program New Beginning helped them a great deal in acquiring English language proficiency. Three students even said that the most English they learned was during the year they participated in the program, and all three of these students mentioned the same teacher: Ms. Irizarry from Jose Marti middle school. One of these students stated that because of this teacher, she was able to go from ESOL 1 to ESOL 3 level in one academic year. On the other hand, a student who participated in the program in Jackson senior high school stated that she did not learn much English while in the program because "Everything was in Spanish; even ESOL was in English and Spanish." Similarly, a student who participated in the program while attending Ruben Dario middle school said that she learned how to read and write in English, but not how to speak it.

All students stated that the program helped them to adjust to the life in the US. As one student said, "They explained everything about schools. They taught us how to approach people, how to take tests." Students reported that the program helped them to learn mathematics, though three of the six students stated that the level of mathematics they learned in the program was too low; lower than was they already learned in home countries.

All students agreed that overall, the program played a major role in their school success. It helped students to learn English, to adjust to a different life in the new country, and ultimately to succeed by graduating from high school.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An analysis of the academic work of New Beginning program students in their post-program years indicated that fewer program students took mathematics and science courses that were on or above grade level compared with all Districts' students. Additionally, program students who took on-grade-level courses in Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies were less successful in terms of end-of-course academic grades than were all District students. An analysis of the final course grades in these subjects indicated that higher proportions of program students received failing grades, and smaller proportions received grades of "A" or "B". Finally, the FCAT performance of the program students in their post-program years was lower than that for similar students in the District in both reading and mathematics. All these findings suggest that the New Beginning students were less successful academically during the time after "graduating" from the program than were District students during the same period.

An analysis of retention, dropout, and graduation rates indicated that the in-grade retention rate for the middle school program students was higher than the corresponding figure for similar students in the District. Likewise, the dropout rate for high school program students was higher than that for similar students in the District. Furthermore, the graduation rate for high school program students was lower than the analogous figure for similar students in the District. These findings appear to indicate that the program students were not able to overcome the negative and long-lasting effects of the deficit of previous schooling.

On the other hand, the rate of referral for psychological evaluations for program students was found to be about the same as that for all similar students in the District. This finding suggests that the program students were not subjected to a higher likelihood of mistaking the negative effect of the deficit of previous schooling on learning as learning disability.

It is important to remember that students who participated in the program had two major initial handicaps. One of them was the lack of knowledge of English language. This difficulty is not limited to program students. In fact, more than half of all students in the District are or have been identified as LEP. Analyses presented earlier attempted to take program students' LEP status into account. The second difficulty that program students were facing was the lack of previous schooling. It would be desirable to compare educational outcomes of students who participated in the New Beginning program with those of students in the District who had a comparable deficit of previous schooling, but who did not take part in the program. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find a group of such secondary students because virtually all of students who were identified to have these characteristics participated in the program. In this evaluation, educational outcomes of the program students were compared with those of demographically similar students in the District. However, these demographically similar students in the District did not face the major obstacle to educational progress that the program students did: a lack of previous schooling. Because educational outcomes of the program students could not have been compared to those of truly similar students, potential benefits of the program were not fully revealed.

The majority of teachers surveyed stated that the program is run well by the District staff. Most teachers reported that the program provides a good match between students' needs and teaching methods and materials used. Teachers also provided suggestions on how to improve the program. One suggestion that was mentioned most often was to shorten the time between the initial

identification of students potentially eligible for the program, and the final placement into the program. Other suggestions were to update/improve the language surveys, keep student/teacher ratios to a minimum, supply more books, computers, and other teaching materials, implement after-school program for students and their parents, and provide workshops on how to teach students with a severe lack of previous schooling. More than half of the teachers stated that they would like to have staff development offered in the areas of technology integration and writing in content areas.

Most students surveyed said that the program helped them a great deal in attaining English proficiency. All students stated that the program helped them in adjusting to school life in the USA. In addition, all students agreed that overall, the program played a major role in their school success.

Most people would probably agree that, of the various figures related to academic success of program students presented above, the most important is the high school graduation rate because it represents achieving the ultimate goal of secondary schooling: graduating from high school. That more than one-quarter of high school program students were able to overcome the lack of previous schooling and graduate from high school in the usual four-year period can be considered a success. However, in and by itself, this graduation rate is rather low, and the corresponding dropout rate is rather high. It may be possible to both decrease the high school dropout rate and increase the graduation rate for the program students, and the program should dedicate itself to reaching these goals.

Based on the findings presented above, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Establish a division of the program devoted to following students during their post-program school years with the goal of reducing the dropout rate and increasing the high school graduation rate.
2. Implement specific measures to reduce the time between initial student identification and placement into the program.
3. Provide staff development in the areas of technology integration, writing in content areas, or other relevant topics.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CLUSTER-PROPORTIONAL WEIGHTING

The method of cluster proportional weighting consists of the two essential steps: multidimensional equating and proportional weighting. These steps are explained below with the second step subdivided into two procedures: finding cluster-appropriate weights and applying proportional weighting.

Multidimensional Equating

For every program student, the following four dimensions were considered as relevant: (1) the student's grade level, (2) home language (Spanish or Haitian Creole), (2) free/reduced price lunch status, and (4) ESOL level. Therefore, many different clusters of students with particular combinations of the four factors can be formed. For example, when considering students' FCAT performance, a maximum of 100 (5 possible grade levels from 6 to 10, times 2 levels of native language, times 2 levels of the FRL status, times 5 possible ESOL levels) distinct clusters can exist. In practice, some of these potential clusters may have no corresponding students in the program (empty clusters). For any nonempty cluster of program students with a particular combination of these four factors, a subgroup of all students in the District with the same combination of levels of the four relevant factors is found.

Proportional Weighting

For every cluster of program students, its weight within the particular program group is found as the proportion of the number of students in the cluster to the total number of the program students. For example, 72 students in the 1999-2000 program cohort had valid scores on the 2001 FCAT. Of those, six students were sixth-graders who had Spanish as their native language, were eligible for FRL, and were classified as ESOL 2. The weight of this cluster of students with this specific combination of relevant factors was determined as $6/72$ or one-twelfth.

Applying Proportional Weighting

Once a specific statistic of interest (such as the percentage of students scoring within a particular achievement level on the FCAT) is found for the students in the program, the corresponding figure for all similar students in the District is found as the weighted average. That is, for every subgroup of students in the District that was found through multidimensional equating, the statistic of interest is determined and multiplied by the appropriate weight found via the proportional weighting. Then, all such products are added, and the result, the weighted average, is used for comparison purposes.

The effect of using the cluster-proportional weighting is similar to a one-to-one matching of students in the program with students in the District who match the program students on all four dimensions mentioned earlier. The difference is that instead of using a comparison group with the same number of students as in the program group (a rather small number), the cluster-proportional weighting ensures that the largest possible subset of all District's students is used, and the appropriate comparison statistic is computed.

APPENDIX B

**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION
PROJECT NEW BEGINNING TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Office of Evaluation and Research is conducting an evaluation of the New Beginning program. Your participation in the teacher survey is very important to the evaluation and subsequent program improvement efforts. Please answer all the questions below.

1. How many years have you been teaching in K-12?

First year _____ Years (include the current school year)

2. Of those, how many years have you been teaching in elementary schools?

None _____ Years (include the current school year)

3. How many years have you taught within the Project New Beginning?

First year _____ Years (include the current school year)

4. Indicate the highest level of education you completed.

Bachelor's Master's Specialist Doctorate

5. What is (are) your area(s) of certification?

6. What subject areas do you teach within the New Beginning Program?

7. In your opinion, how well is the program run by the district staff?

Poorly Below Average Average Above Average Very well

8. How good is the match between the students' needs and teaching materials used in the program?

Poor Below Average Average Above Average Excellent

PLEASE CONTINUE ON THE OTHER SIDE

9. How good is the match between the students' needs and teaching methods used in the program?

- Poor Below Average Average Above Average Excellent

10. How can the following areas of the program be improved?

Identification and Placement of Students:

Teaching Materials:

Teaching Methodology:

Parental Involvement:

11. What other areas of the program need to be improved?

12. What kinds of staff development would you like to see offered? Check all that apply.

- Technology Integration Reading Instruction Writing in the Content Areas
 Content Literacy Classroom Management

Other _____

**Thank you very much! Please send the completed questionnaire to
9020, OER, Alex Shneyderman.**

APPENDIX C

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION PROJECT NEW BEGINNING EVALUATION STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Student Name
2. What is your date of birth?
3. What is your place of birth?
4. Did you attend a school before coming to the US?
5. For how long?
6. What kind of school (public or private)?
7. What was your attendance like?
8. How well did you do in school?
9. What was the highest grade level you completed before coming to the USA?
10. When did you come to the USA?
11. When did you start attending a school?
12. In what grade?
13. You were enrolled in the New Beginning program during your first or second year here. How helpful was this program for you in
 - Learning English?
 - Learning other subjects?
 - Adjusting to school life in the USA?
 - Any other area (describe)?
14. You are going to graduate from high school this year. Did the New Beginning program play a role in your success?
15. In what ways?
16. What/who else contributed to your success?
17. In what ways?
18. What were some of the obstacles on your way to success?
19. How did you overcome them?
20. Do you work?
21. Where?
22. For how many hours a week?
23. What are your plans after high school?