

**PROJECT SAFE PATHWAYS:
THREE-YEAR COHORT REPORT**

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CHERYL M. ACKERMAN, PH.D.
SENIOR ASSOCIATE FOR EVALUATION



Delaware Education Research & Development Center
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716

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**PROJECT SAFE PATHWAYS:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

This evaluation report, prepared by the Delaware Education Research and Development Center, includes a description of a group of students who participated in the Safe Pathways program since it started in 1999. The belief is that programmatic impact will most likely be apparent in individuals participating for an extended period of time. Information related to student characteristics, student achievement, student behavioral and attitudinal indices, and parent involvement is presented and discussed. The following are highlights from this report.

Student Characteristics

- A total of 37 students, 16 elementary and 21 secondary, were included in the study.
- Among elementary students, two were classified as special needs and only in 1999. Between 26% - 35% of middle and high school students were classified as special needs across years.
- Retention data indicated that 43.8% (14) of students with data were retained at least once between 1999 and 2001. Five were elementary students and nine were secondary students.

Student Achievement

- Because only six students took the DSTP more than once between 1999 and 2001, no meaningful analyses were performed to examine change in performance over time and no conclusions can be made about individual improvement.
- In most instances, all students in the three-year cohort performed at the lowest two performance levels between 1999 and 2001 for all content areas.
- Secondary students had a higher percentage of students meeting the standard compared to elementary students, and a lower percentage well below the standard.
- Mean elementary student grades in reading and math usually showed an increase of one-half of a grade (eg. C to C+) from fall to spring.

- Mean semester math grades showed a steady decline from C to D+ between 1999 and 2002 for secondary students.
- There is too little district math test data to perform any form of analysis.

Student Behavioral and Attitudinal Indices

Student Survey Results

- In general, elementary students have better attitudes and behaviors regarding school than do secondary students.
- The majority of students (87.5% of elementary and 66.7% of secondary) indicated that they want to go to school every day. However, 16.7% of secondary students said they wanted to go to school once a month or less.
- All elementary students saw both math and reading as important to getting a good job. While most secondary students felt the same way, 16.7% believed they are not important.
- Most elementary students asked Safe Pathways staff (93.8%) for help with homework, and most middle and high school students went to Safe Pathways staff and their parents for help (63.2% each).
- Most of the elementary students spent more time doing homework than the middle and high school students.
- The majority of students reported that it is their choice to attend the Safe Pathways program (93.8% of elementary and 83.4% of secondary students).
- Over 90% of elementary students reported liking school better since they began participating in Safe Pathways, and 77.8% of middle and high school students reported positive impacts of the program on their attitude toward school.
- Approximately 90% of the three-year cohort students indicated that they would recommend the program to their friends.

Teacher Surveys

- According to teachers, 46% - 87% of elementary students and 21% - 60% of secondary students usually or always turned in homework on time, completed homework to the teacher's satisfaction, attended class, were attentive during class, performed satisfactorily or better academically, came prepared to class, persisted with difficult work, and asked for help when needed.
- Thirty-five percent of teachers included written comments related to the program on their surveys, most which were positive.

School Records

- Elementary students showed a decline in the mean number of absences between 1999 and 2002, while middle/high school students showed an increase.
- There was an increase in the percentage of students receiving suspensions in the middle/high school group between 1999 and 2002.

Parent Involvement

Student Survey Results

- Most elementary students (75.0%) indicated that their parents helped them with schoolwork almost every day, compared to 16.7% of secondary students.
- More than 50% of secondary students reported that their parents make sure they attend school more often since they began participating in Safe Pathways, while 12.5% of elementary students reported the same change.
- According to 41.2% of the secondary students, parents ask their children what they are doing in school more often since they began attending Safe Pathways, while 12.5% of elementary students reported the same change.
- Approximately 90.0% of the three-year cohort students indicated that their parents think the Safe Pathways program will help improve school performance.

Teacher survey results

- Parent involvement, as reported by teachers, is stronger among the parents of elementary school students in this study compared with secondary students' parents.
- All elementary teachers indicated that parents were interested in their children's class performance and 77.0% indicated that parents were actively involved in their children's education.
- Sixty-seven percent of secondary English/language arts teachers reported that parents were interested in their children's class performance and 44.4% indicated that parents were somewhat or very actively involved in their children's education. At least 30% fewer math teachers made similar reports.

The data examined in this study describe three-year cohort participants from several angles. Student-surveys, teacher surveys, achievement data, and school records paint a somewhat mixed picture of their educational experience, and the impact the Safe Pathways program has had on long-term participants. Both students and teachers reported that the program has had some positive impact on student behaviors and

attitudes. Achievement data were either insufficient to comment on, or indicated a small change over time for the three-year cohort. School records showed some consistent and differing patterns of absences and suspensions for elementary and secondary students. Parent involvement has also shown some changes according to students and teachers.

Considering all of the data in a broader context of typical student and parent attitudes and behaviors, is essential to interpreting these results. Additionally, the at-risk nature of the students participating in this study must be taken into account in order to fully understand the description of the three-year cohort provided in this study.

PROJECT SAFE PATHWAYS: THREE-YEAR COHORT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description of Safe Pathways program participants who regularly participated in the program since it began in 1999. In order to describe this group of students, student characteristics, academic achievement, academic behaviors, parent involvement, and perceived program impact were examined. The results discussed throughout this report are descriptive in nature and provide information about academic and behavioral indices related to the program and learning in general.

Students were selected to participate in this study based on their attendance in Safe Pathways during the first two-and-a-half years of implementation. Students considered “regular attendees,” that is those who attended at least 30 days each were asked to participate. Forty-one students were identified and 39 agreed to participate (See Appendices D and E for parent consent and student assent forms). Additionally, the math and language arts teachers of these students were asked to complete surveys on these students’ classroom behavior (See Appendix F for teacher consent form). Teacher surveys for 29 students were returned completed.

Most analyses were performed on three-year cohort participants as a whole, or on participants separated into elementary (grades 3-5) or middle/high (grades 6-9) school students. This disaggregation was done due to anticipated differences between the two groups. Also, as often as is possible, based on available data, information from the school year preceding the beginning of the program (1998-99) is reported and analyzed to provide a pre-program comparison.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

This section of the report describes several characteristics of the students included in the three-year cohort. These characteristics include school grade, gender, race, and

other standard school classifications. In some instances, data were not available for a portion of students, so any deviation from the total number of 37 participants is a result of missing data. Table 1 delineates the participant grade distribution. Included in the study are 16 elementary and 21 secondary, are included in the study. The percentage of males and females in the elementary and secondary student groups is similar, with approximately 64% males and 36% females (see Table 2). With the exception of a few Hispanic students, most students in the three-year cohort are African American (see Table 3).

Table 1 - Participant Grade distribution

| | Total | Grade | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th |
| Number of Students | 35* | 4 | 2 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 7 |

* Specific grade data was not available for two participants, except to say that they are in middle or high school.

Table 2 - Participant Sex by Grade Level

| | Sample Size | Male | Female |
|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| Elementary | N = 16 | 62.5% (10) | 37.5% (6) |
| Middle/High | N = 20 | 65.0% (13) | 35.0% (7) |

Table 3 - Participant Race by Grade Level

| | Sample Size | African American | Hispanic |
|-------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| Elementary | N = 16 | 87.5 % (14) | 12.5% (2) |
| Middle/High | N = 18 | 94.4% (17) | 5.6% (1) |

Special education classification frequencies are detailed in Table 4. Among elementary students, only two were classified as special needs. Examining change in special education status over time revealed two elementary students identified as special needs in 1999 that were no longer identified as special needs in 2002, while 14 students showed no change of any kind. There were between 26% - 35% of middle and high school students with this classification across years. Among these students, 17 showed

no change in special education status and one student who was not identified as special needs in 1999 was classified as such in 2001.

Table 4 - Special Education Status by Year and by Grade Level

| | 2000 | | 2001 | | 2002 | |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Elementary | 12.5% (2) | 87.5% (16) | 0% (0) | 100% (16) | 0% (0) | 100% (16) |
| Middle/High | 35.0% (7) | 65.0% (13) | 26.3% (5) | 73.7% (14) | 33.3% (7) | 61.9% (13) |

Other data collected include limited English proficiency status, free-reduced lunch status, school changes, and retention rates. Over the four-year period from 1999 to 2002, none of the three-year cohort participants were classified as limited proficiency English speaking students. All students in the three-year cohort for whom we received information on free and reduced lunch (N = 36), received free lunch every year between 1999 and 2002.

Most students in the three-year cohort made no within school-year school changes in the three years they participated in the Safe Pathways program. One elementary student and three middle or high school students changed schools once during 2002.

No data on grade level was available for five study participants. Therefore, retention data indicates that 43.8% of the “regular attendees” for whom data was available had been retained at least once between 1999 and 2002; 13 were retained one time and one student was retained twice between 1999 and 2002. Five elementary students and eight secondary students were retained once. One secondary student had been retained twice in that time period.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Class grades, performance levels on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP), and Colonial School District Math Test scores were used to examine student achievement in math, writing, and reading.

Delaware Student Testing Program and Colonial School District Math Test Scores

The Delaware Student Testing Program provides measures of student achievement in math, reading, and writing. Tables 5 and 6 show the average level of performance on the DSTP for elementary and secondary three-year cohort participants. In all instances, very few students took the DSTP in a given year. It is therefore inappropriate to make any conclusions about student test scores beyond a descriptive level of the data.

For elementary students (grades 3 and 5), no students scored at the distinguished performance level in any content area. Only in the year 2000 did any students exceed the standard. With the exception of the reading and math DSTP scores in 2000, at least 80% of elementary students performed at the lowest two performance levels in all content areas each year.

Table 5 - Elementary School DSTP Performance Level and District Math Test Scores, 1999 – 2001

| Test | Year | Sample Size | Mean & Standard Deviation | Well Below Standard | Below Standard | Meets Standard | Exceeds Standard |
|--------------------|------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Reading DSTP | 1999 | N = 2 | 1.0 (0.0) | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 10 | 2.4 (1.1) | 30% | 10% | 50% | 10% |
| | 2001 | N = 5 | 1.6 (0.9) | 60% | 20% | 20% | 0% |
| Writing DSTP | 1999 | N = 2 | 1.0 (0.0) | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 6* | 0.9 (0.9) | 50% | 50% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2001 | N = 5 | 1.6 (0.5) | 40% | 60% | 0% | 0% |
| Math DSTP | 1999 | N = 2 | 1.5 (0.7) | 50% | 50% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 10 | 2.3 (1.3) | 40% | 10% | 30% | 20% |
| | 2001 | N = 5 | 1.6 (0.9) | 60% | 20% | 20% | 0% |
| District Math Test | 2000 | N = 5 | 0.7 (0.1) | | | | |
| | 2001 | N = 11 | 0.4 (0.3) | | | | |

* Only 60% of the students who should have taken this test actually did.

Among secondary students who took the DSTP, which includes grade eight students only one student performed above performance level three, “meets the standard,” across years and content areas. Similar to the elementary students, most secondary students performed in the lowest two performance levels. However, the two groups differed in a couple of noticeable ways. First, in general, fewer secondary students scored at the lowest performance level, with the exception of test scores for the year 2000. Second, more secondary students were identified as meeting the standard. District math test scores for the secondary students were not included because only one student took the test in 2000.

Table 6 – Eighth Grade DSTP Performance Level Scores, 1999 - 2001

| Test | Year | Sample Size | Mean & Standard Deviation | Well Below Standard | Below Standard | Meets Standard | Exceeds Standard | Distinguished |
|--------------|------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| Reading DSTP | 1999 | N = 7 | 1.8 (1.1) | 57.1% | 0% | 42.9% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 8 | 1.8 (0.9) | 50.0% | 25.0% | 25.0% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2001 | N = 7* | 2.0 (1.5) | 14.3% | 42.9% | 42.9% | 0% | 0% |
| Writing DSTP | 1999 | N = 7 | 1.9 (0.9) | 42.9% | 28.6% | 28.6% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 6 | 1.5 (.84) | 66.7% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2001 | N = 8 | 2.1 (0.6) | 12.5% | 62.5% | 25.0% | 0% | 0% |
| Math DSTP | 1999 | N = 7 | 2.1 (0.9) | 28.6% | 28.6% | 42.9% | 0% | 0% |
| | 2000 | N = 8 | 1.9 (1.5) | 62.5% | 12.5% | 12.5% | 0% | 12.5 |
| | 2001 | N = 8 | 1.8 (0.9) | 50.0% | 25.0% | 25.0% | 0% | 0% |

* 87.5% of the students who should have taken this test actually did.

Because only six students took the DSTP more than once between 1999 and 2001, no meaningful analyses can be performed to examine change in performance over time and no conclusions can be drawn about individual improvement. However, it is possible that there has been improvement over time on the DSTP that cannot be detected by examining student performance levels. In cases where improvement was insufficient for a student to move from one performance level to another, DSTP scale scores would show even small changes in performance that are not detectable in the performance levels.

Class Grades

Math and reading grades were also included as measures of student achievement. In order for a student to be included in these analyses, grades for both quarters comprising each semester must have been available. Class grades for the Colonial school district are given in letter format and were converted to a numeric scale for data analysis purposes. A 12-point scale was used for students in grades 3-12 such that F=0, D-=1, D=2, D+=3 and so on to A+=12. For students in grades 1-2, the five codes used (BI, BP, NS, MS, ES) were mapped onto the 12-point scale such that BI=0 (F), BP=2 (D), NS=5 (C), MS=8 (B), and ES=11 (A) (See Table 7).

Table 7 – Grade Conversions

| Letter Grade | Elementary Code | Point Value |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| F | Below Standard – Not improving | 0 |
| D- | | 1 |
| D | Below Standard - Improving | 2 |
| D+ | | 3 |
| C- | | 4 |
| C | Near Standard | 5 |
| C+ | | 6 |
| B- | | 7 |
| B | Meets Standard | 8 |
| B+ | | 9 |
| A- | | 10 |
| A | Exceeds Standard | 11 |
| A+ | | 12 |

In Tables 8 and 9, means and standard deviations for semester grades for 2000-2002 are summarized for elementary and middle/high school students, respectively. In almost all cases, the standard deviation is more than half of the mean semester score. This is an indication that there is a large range of scores in each group.

Among the elementary students, only two had grades reported in 1999, therefore, this year was not included. The range of mean semester scores for both reading and

math is from C- to B-. In all cases except reading in 2000, the mean score for this group of students improved by approximately one half of a letter grade (eg. C to C+) from fall semester to spring semester. This pattern is the same for reading and math grades. Looking from year to year, grades in 2000 are higher than those in 2001 and 2002, which are very similar.

Table 8 - Mean Semester Grades in Reading and Math for Elementary School Students 2000-2002

| | Year | N | Fall semester Mean (SD) | N | Spring semester Mean (SD) | Mean Difference |
|---------|------|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Reading | 2000 | 11 | 5.4 (1.9) \approx C | 14 | 5.2 (2.8) \approx C | -0.2 |
| | 2001 | 14 | 3.7 (3.1) \approx C- | 15 | 5.2 (3.5) \approx C | 1.5 |
| | 2002 | 15 | 3.8 (3.9) \approx C- | - | - | |
| Math | 2000 | 11 | 6.3 (2.7) \approx C+ | 14 | 6.5 (2.9) \approx B- | .2 |
| | 2001 | 15 | 4.9 (3.1) \approx C | 15 | 6.1 (3.1) \approx C+ | 1.2 |
| | 2002 | 15 | 4.6 (3.4) \approx C | - | - | |

Table 9 - Mean Semester Grades in Reading and Math for Middle and High School Students 1999-2002

| | Year | N | Fall semester Mean (SD) | N | Spring semester Mean (SD) | Mean Difference |
|---------|------|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Reading | 1999 | 18 | 4.5 (3.3) \approx C | 19 | 3.7 (3.1) \approx C- | -.8 |
| | 2000 | 20 | 3.3 (3.3) \approx D+ | 20 | 2.7 (2.7) \approx D+ | -.6 |
| | 2001 | 17 | 3.4 (3.5) \approx D+ | 17 | 3.0 (2.9) \approx D+ | -.4 |
| | 2002 | 10 | 2.7 (3.0) \approx D+ | - | - | |
| Math | 1999 | 18 | 4.6 (3.2) \approx C | 19 | 5.0 (3.0) \approx C | .4 |
| | 2000 | 19 | 4.0 (2.7) \approx C- | 20 | 3.7 (3.3) \approx C- | -.3 |
| | 2001 | 19 | 3.5 (3.3) \approx C- | 19 | 3.1 (3.5) \approx D+ | -.4 |
| | 2002 | 12 | 3.4 (3.4) \approx D+ | - | - | |

The range of secondary students' mean semester grades for both reading and math is from D+ to C. With the exception of reading grades in 1999 and math grades in

2001, which both showed about a half-grade decline during the year, no other mean differences exist between semesters. When looking across years, there is a decline in mean semester reading grades from C to C- between 1999 and 2000. Mean semester math grades, however, show a steady decline from 1999 through 2002 from C to D+.

STUDENT BEHAVIORAL AND ATTITUDINAL INDICES

Information on student behaviors and attitudes was gathered through a student survey, a teacher survey, and school records. The following is a summary of some interesting findings from these data sources. The majority of this section uses frequency information to report results. In many cases, differences are noted between elementary students and middle/high school students. The complete survey results are included in Appendix A.

Student Survey Results

In general, elementary students have better attitudes and behaviors regarding school than do secondary students. This expresses itself in a variety of ways that will be noted in the following sections: academic attitudes, academic behaviors, students as learners, student attitudes toward the program, Safe Pathways impact on students, student comments, Safe Pathways impact on parent involvement, and parent involvement in Safe Pathways.

Academic Attitudes

The majority of students, 87.5% of elementary and 66.7% of secondary, indicated that they want to go to school every day. However, 16.7% of secondary students said they wanted to go to school once a month or less.

When asked if they enjoy reading and math, most elementary students reported that they enjoy these subjects most of the time, with more enjoying math (68.8%) than reading (56.3%). Secondary students also preferred math to reading with 50.0% enjoying math most of the time and 27.8% enjoying reading most of the time. Very few students indicated they enjoy these subjects infrequently or never, with the exception of 22.2% of middle and high school students responding this way for math. It seems that secondary

students are somewhat split in their enjoyment of math. All elementary students see both math and reading as important to getting a good job. While most secondary students feel the same way, 16.7% do not agree that math and reading are important to getting a good job.

Academic Behaviors

Table 10 shows students' descriptions of their school grades. While no elementary students reported doing poorly in school, 43.8% report fair performance. The remaining elementary students report getting good or excellent grades. Among middle and high school students 33.4% reported good or excellent grades while 66.6% reported poor or fair performance in school. When compared with their actual performance the first half of the 2001-2002 school year, a moderate positive relationship exists between student reports and actual performance. Pearson correlation coefficients for student report compared with reading and math grades are $r = .78$ ($p > .01$) and $r = .57$ ($p > .01$), respectively. Thus, these correlations indicate that most students appear to have a fairly accurate reporting of their reading grades, and a slightly less accurate perception of their math grades. For example, those who indicated they have excellent grades are typically receiving B's or better and those who reported fair performance are typically receiving D's. However, the terms "fair" and "excellent" are subjective and may have different meanings for the reader.

Table 10 – Student Reporting of School Grades

| | | Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| My grades in school are mostly | Elementary | 0% | 43.8% | 25.0% | 31.3% |
| | Middle/High | 27.8% | 38.9% | 27.8% | 5.6% |

When asked what they do when they need help with their homework, nearly all elementary school participants indicated that they ask a Safe Pathways staff member (93.8%). Most indicated they ask a parent (81.3%). Some reported asking a sibling (31.3%), a friend (18.8%), or a grandparent or their teacher the next day (12.5% each).

None of the elementary students indicated that they do nothing when they need help with their homework. Most middle and high school students also indicated that they ask Safe Pathways staff members (63.2%) or their parents for help with homework (63.2%). Some middle and high school students also go to their teacher the next day (36.8%), a friend (26.3%), or a sibling (15.8%). A small percentage of these students (5.3%) said they do nothing when they need help with their homework.

Student reports on the length of time they spend doing homework on a daily basis were surprising in that most of the elementary students spent more time doing homework than the middle and high school students. Most (87.5%) elementary students reported spending 45 minutes each day doing homework and the remaining 12.5% reported spending 30 minutes. Among secondary students, 44.4% said they spent 30 minutes a day doing homework and 33.3% said they spent 10 minutes on homework each day. Only 22.2% of secondary students reported doing homework for one hour or more.

The majority of elementary students reported studying hard for tests most of the time (68.8%) while others (31.2%) said they study hard for tests some of the time. Among secondary students, less than one fourth (22.2%) said they study hard for tests most of the time, while most (61.1%) indicated they study hard for tests some of the time.

When asked to respond to the prompt, “I turn my homework in on time,” elementary and secondary students were very similar in their responses. Approximately half reported that they turn their homework in on time most of the time, and half reported that they do so some of the time. Students also had a similar split in response to the prompt, “I quit when my schoolwork is too hard.” However, in this instance, approximately half reported that they quit some of the time, and half reported that they seldom or never quit.

Students as Learners

Students were asked a number of questions about how they see themselves as learners. Almost 70.0% of elementary and 83.4% of middle and high school three-year

cohort participants reported that they are important people in their classes. However, many of the participants feel frustrated in their daily classes. Approximately half of all three-year cohort students agreed with the statement, “It seems that no matter how hard I try, I never get the grades I deserve.” Additionally, most students felt that their teachers expected too much of them some of the time (62.5% of elementary and 27.8% of secondary students) or most of the time (18.8% of elementary and 44.4% of secondary students).

Student Attitudes Toward the Program

Almost all students reported that it was their choice to attend the Safe Pathways program (93.8% of elementary and 83.4% of secondary students). Additionally, more than 80.0% of the students felt that Safe Pathways is a safe place to come after school. When asked if they look forward to attending the program, more than half said that they look forward to it most of the time. Nearly all other students indicated that they look forward to Safe Pathways some of the time. Students also reported feeling comfortable talking with the Safe Pathways staff. More than 60.0% of elementary students and 80.0% of secondary students said they are comfortable most of the time.

Safe Pathways Impact on Students

Most elementary students (93%) reported that they like school better since they began participating in Safe Pathways and 87.5% indicated that they are doing better in school since they began participating in the program. Middle and high school students also reported positive impacts of the program on their attitude toward school (77.8%) and their school performance (77.2%). The high percentage of students reporting improvements in school performance as a result of program participation is somewhat inconsistent with the actual changes in mean math and reading grades between 1999 and 2002. Although some students have shown improvement in these content areas, it is much less than the number who reported improvement. While there may be many explanations for this, it is possible that academic performance has improved in other content areas not examined in this study.

With respect to the Lightspan computer software used in the Safe Pathways program, most of the elementary students (93.8%) reported that it has helped them in math and reading. Half of the secondary students felt Lightspan had helped them improve their math while 69.3% felt it has helped them with reading. The decrease in perceived benefits reported by the middle/high school students may be the result of the Lightspan software being limited to grades six and below. It is possible that the older students had more limited experience with the software. However, this may not be the case since many program participants have depressed academic achievement and may have used Lightspan activities below grade level.

When asked if participating in Safe Pathways has made it more likely that they would graduate from high school, more than 80.0% of the elementary and secondary three-year cohort students agreed that it has.

Student Comments

Students were asked whether they would recommend the Safe Pathways program to their friends. Approximately 90% of the students indicated that they would recommend the program to their friends. Seventeen students indicated *why* they would recommend the program.

Some students reported that the Safe Pathways program was instrumental in helping them complete their schoolwork in order to improve their grades (66.7%). One student wrote,

“I would recommend [the] safe pathways program because the program helps improve your grades. Also because Lightspan helps you get ready for tests that you have to take over [in] math”

Another student expressed that, “whenever I ever need help on my school work their [they’re] here to give me help.”

Students expressed that there is a feeling of safety and protection offered by the Safe Pathways program. They felt that it aided them in keeping them “out of trouble” and from experiencing drug-related activity or violent occurrences (27.8%). One student wrote, “[I would recommend the program] because safe pathway[s] is a good place to be after school so you will not get in any trouble”

Some students indicated that their involvement in Safe Pathways afforded them the opportunity to learn about computers, sports, and other important non-academic areas (22.2%). The following two quotes focus on different aspects of the program. “They also make it fun for you while you are learning about things that happen in everyday life,” was reported by one student. Another student’s comment was more specific. “When I finish my work they have fun and exciting things you can do such as learn about computers or play basketball.”

Some students felt that the Safe Pathways program staff members’ caring attitudes and actions contributed to their success (16.7%).

“I would recommend my friends to attend safe pathways because there’s a lot of encouragement here. Also, there are many helpers here that understand and acknowledge me. The last reason of why I would recommend my friends to attend this center is because all of the staff believes in me, as well as others.”

Two students stated that they would not recommend the program to their friends. One reported, “some of my friends play around too much and they wouldn’t make it in the program.” The other student indicated that the program was redundant and boring.

Teacher Survey Results

Math and language arts teachers were asked to complete surveys focusing on classroom behaviors, communications with students’ parents, and possible impact the Safe Pathways program has had on the students in the three-year cohort. Twenty-seven math teachers (15 elementary and 12 secondary) and 29 language arts teachers (16 elementary and 13 secondary) completed surveys. At the elementary school level, the math teacher and language arts teacher are usually the same person. However, at the secondary level, this is rarely the case. Summarized survey results for math and language arts teachers are located in Appendices B and C, and a copy of the teacher consent form is located in Appendix F.

Similar to the student survey results, classroom behavior as reported by both math and language arts teachers, was better among elementary students than secondary students. For example, between 46% and 87% of elementary students usually or always turned in homework on time, completed homework to the teacher’s satisfaction,

attended class, were attentive during class, performed satisfactorily or better academically, came prepared to class, persisted with difficult work, and asked for help when needed.

Between 21% and 60% of secondary students usually or always exhibited these classroom behaviors. In addition, math and language arts teachers report that more than 20% of the secondary students never engage in several of these classroom behaviors.

Some differences do exist between math and language arts teacher reports for the middle and high school students. For instance, approximately 30% of math teachers, as compared to 40% of language arts teachers, reported that their students usually or always turn in their homework on time, complete their homework satisfactorily, or perform satisfactorily or better academically.

Teacher Comments

Teachers who completed surveys about the students in the three-year cohort were asked to respond to the following prompt: “If there is anything you have noticed about this student’s academic performance that you can attribute to her/his participation in the Safe Pathways program, please describe it here.” Thirty-five percent of the teacher surveys included written comments related to the Safe Pathways program. Those comments addressing student behavior unrelated to the program will not be described in this report.

Most teacher comments were positive and were made by 78.9% of the teachers who wrote relevant remarks. Some teachers felt that the Safe Pathways program had positive effects on three-year cohort students. They stated that the program encourages students, and instills in them a sense of pride and enthusiasm. One teacher comment illustrates this point very clearly: “When [Samuel] attends the program he turns in all homework and feels proud about himself.”

Other teachers indicated that the program created a willingness to learn for some students and has taught them to be more independent learners who are comfortable asking for help when they need it.

“[He] has really shown great improvement in being a productive student. He has so much more energy and willingness to learn and he is enthused about correcting any mistakes or errors he has made.”

captures the sentiments of these teachers. Two teachers indicated that they saw no changes in student academic performance as a result of participation in the Safe Pathways program.

School Records

School records provided information about student retention, absence rates, and suspension rates between the years 1999 - 2002. It is important to recognize that at the time of gathering this data, information for the year 2002 contained only the first two marking periods.

Absence rates are summarized in Tables 11 and 12 for elementary and middle/high school students. The mean number of days absent and the standard deviation are provided for the years 1999-2002. These data indicate differences between elementary and middle/high school students. With the exception of 1999, students currently in middle/high school had many more absences than elementary students in the three-year cohort. This difference may be the result of varying definitions of school absence. Additionally, elementary students showed a decline in the mean number of absences over time, while middle/high school students show an increase.

Table 11 – Means and Standard Deviations of Elementary School Absence Rates, 1999-2002

| | N | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002* |
|----------------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Total Absences | 16 | 11.8 (14.8) | 10.3 (9.5) | 8.0 (8.4) | 2.3 (2.5) |

* 2002 included only the first two quarters of the school year, therefore, an approximation of the total year would be double the reported number, or 4.6

Table 12 - Means and Standard Deviations of Middle/High School Absence Rates, 1999-2002

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002* |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Total Absences | 11.8 (9.4) | 20.8 (20.5) | 23.2 (13.2) | 16.2 (12.3) |
| | N = 18 | N = 20 | N = 19 | N = 18 |

* 2002 included only the first two quarters of the school year, therefore, an approximation of the total year would be double the reported number, or 32.4

Student suspension data is summarized in Tables 13 and 14. Fewer elementary students had suspensions compared with the middle/high school students in the three-year cohort. Examining the elementary student data reveals no trend over time. However, there is a clear increase in the percentage of students receiving suspensions in the middle/high school group over time.

Table 13 - Elementary School Suspension Rates, 1999-2002

| Year | Total Number of Students | First Suspension | Second Suspension | Third Suspension |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1999 | 16 | 0 Students (0.0%) | 0 Students (0.0%) | 0 Students (0.0%) |
| | | | | |
| 2000 | 16 | 3 Students (18.8%) | 0 Students (0.0%) | 0 Students (0.0%) |
| | | Range of 1 to 5 days | | |
| 2001 | 16 | 2 Students (12.5%) | 0 Students (0.0%) | 0 Students (0.0%) |
| | | 2 days each | | |
| 2002* | 16 | 4 Students (25.0%) | 2 Students (12.6%) | 0 Students (0.0%) |
| | | 1 day each | Range of 1 to 3 days | |

* 2002 included only the first two quarters of the school year.

Table 14 - Middle/High School Suspension Rates, 1999-2002

| Year | Total Number of Students | First Suspension | Second Suspension | Third Suspension |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1999 | 18 | 8 Students (44.4%) | 5 Students (27.8%) | 3 Students (16.7%) |
| | | Range of 1 to 3 days | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 3 to 5 days |
| 2000 | 20 | 13 Students (65.0%) | 10 Students (50.0%) | 7 Students (35.0%) |
| | | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 1 to 3 days |
| 2001 | 19 | 16 Students (84.2%) | 12 Students (63.2%) | 11 Students (57.9%) |
| | | Range of 1 to 3 days | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 1 to 5 days |
| 2002* | 18 | 14 Students (77.8%) | 9 Students (50.0%) | 8 Students (44.4%) |
| | | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 1 to 5 days | Range of 1 to 5 days |

* 2002 included only the first two quarters of the school year.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement in their children's education and in Safe Pathways was examined using student and teacher surveys. Therefore, the information provided in this section of the report is based on student and teacher perceptions, not direct parent reports.

Student Survey Results

Parent involvement in the Safe Pathways program and in their children's education in general, as well as, the impact participating in Safe Pathways has had on parental involvement, was examined using a student survey. Student perceptions of their parents' involvement and programmatic impact are detailed in the sections below.

Safe Pathways Impact on Parent Involvement

Students were asked to report on their parents' involvement in their education and on how this involvement has changed since they began participating in the Safe Pathways program. Elementary students most often indicated that parents helped them with their schoolwork almost every day (75.0%). Some of the elementary students reported a decrease in parent involvement since they began attending the Safe Pathways program (37.5%). One possible explanation is that these students rely on Safe Pathways staff members for help more than they used to rely on them. However, other possible interpretations exist; and, while there are no data to explain why parent involvement has decreased in some households with elementary age children, a focus group with these students would shed light on this issue.

Fifty percent of the secondary students reported that their parents help them with their schoolwork once a month or less and 33.4% have parents who help them once a week or more. Most of the secondary students indicated that there had been no change in their parents' behavior regarding help with schoolwork since the program began.

All of the elementary students indicated that their parents make sure they attend school almost every day. They also reported that there has been little change in their

parents' behavior in this area. On the other hand, most secondary students (77.8%) reported that their parents make sure they attend school almost every day, and over half (52.9%) indicated that their parents make sure they attend school more often since they began participating in the Safe Pathways program. This change in parental involvement reported by the secondary student may be the direct result of the Safe Pathways rule stating that students cannot participate in the program unless they have attended school that day. Thus, parents may have become more insistent that their children attend school in order that they may participate in the after-school program.

In addition, the middle and high school students reported other changes in their parents' involvement that they attributed to participation in the Safe Pathways program. Fifty percent indicated that their parents have shown an increase in how often they make sure homework is completed. Parents are also asking their children what they are doing in school more often, according to 41.2% of the secondary students.

Parent Involvement in Safe Pathways

Three-year cohort students were asked about their parents' participation in Safe Pathways activities. Fifty percent of elementary and 44.4% of secondary students reported that their parents told them they *must* attend the Safe Pathways program. Approximately 90.0% of the three-year cohort students indicated that their parents think the Safe Pathways program will help them do better in school.

Students were also asked to report on their parents' participation in student and adult program events. Most parents, as reported by their children, attend Safe Pathways events with their children sometimes (37.5% of elementary and 52.9% of secondary) or often (56.3% of elementary and 23.5% of secondary). However, parents attended activities designed for parents less often than they attend their children's events. Many elementary (31.3%) and middle/high school (47.1%) parents never attended an adult program, according to their children. The remaining parents attended adult programs either sometimes or often.

Teacher Survey Results

Parental involvement, as reported by teachers, is also stronger among the parents of elementary school children in this study. Responses of teachers who had communications with their students' parents during the two months prior to completing the survey indicated that communications with parents of elementary students occurred more often than with parents of secondary students. Both teachers and parents of secondary students initiated contact in a more limited fashion. More than half of these teachers initiated contact only once or not at all during the two months prior to completing the survey. Seventy-five percent of secondary teachers also reported that the parents of their students never initiated contact during this time period.

Teachers were also asked their perceptions of parent interest in their children's class performance and whether parents were actively involved in their children's education. All elementary teachers indicated that parents were either somewhat or very interested in their children's class performance. Most (77.0%) also indicated that parents were somewhat or very actively involved in their children's education. Secondary teacher reports were different for math and English/language arts. Sixty-seven percent of secondary English/language arts teachers reported that parents were somewhat or very interested in their children's class performance and 44.4% indicated that parents were somewhat or very actively involved in their children's education. At least 30% *fewer* secondary math teachers reported parents being somewhat or very interested in their children's education or being actively involved in their children's education.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to describe a group of students who had participated in the Safe Pathways program since its inception in 1999. Because these students were regularly involved in the program for the longest possible time period, they would be most like to show programmatic impact. Information related to student characteristics, student achievement, student behavioral and attitudinal indices, and parent involvement were examined.

There are a few essential points to consider in interpreting the results of this study. First, program impact is extremely difficult to measure because there are typically many other factors simultaneously influencing change that cannot be separated out. Second, the rule of thumb when examining impact is that it can begin to be expected after five years of implementation, so three years of programming is limited in terms of showing program impact (Patton, 1997). Third, the information detailed in this report is descriptive in nature and intended to create a picture of what students participating in the Safe Pathways program for three years look like.

There were 37 students participating in this study, 16 elementary and 21 secondary. All program participants are considered at high risk for school failure. Over the three-year period, 35% or fewer were classified as special needs at one time or another. Fourteen of the 37 study participants were retained at least one time between 1999 and 2002.

Student achievement was examined using course grades and DSTP scores over time. In almost all instances, three-year cohort participants performed at the lowest two performance levels on the DSTP across all content areas. Because so few students took the DSTP more than once, it would be inappropriate to comment on individual or group change over time. Student grades ranged between D+ and B- in math and reading between 1999 and 2002 from C to D+.

To continue the pattern noted in the Project Safe Pathways: Interim Evaluation Report Year 2 (Ackerman, Robinson, & Benkstein, 2001), elementary students have better attitudes and behaviors regarding school than secondary students. However, most students indicated that they want to go to school every day, that both math and reading are important for getting a good job, and that they are important people in their classes. Additionally, three-year cohort participants reported positive impacts of attending the Safe Pathways program. More than 80% of study participants indicated that they attend the program by choice and that they would recommend the program to their friends. Most students also reported an improved attitude toward school as a result of program participation.

Teacher reports of student in class behaviors were consistent with student self-reports in terms of differences between elementary and secondary students. Teachers indicated that for a variety of classroom behaviors (eg. handing in homework, attendance, preparedness), on average, 20% more elementary students exhibited consistent positive behaviors compared with the secondary students in the three-year cohort. Teacher comments about program impact were largely positive.

Student records show that between 1999 and 2002 student absences decline for elementary students, but increase for secondary students. Additionally, there is an increase in the number of students receiving suspensions among middle and high school students during the same time frame.

Students and teachers were asked to report on levels of parent involvement. According to teachers of three-year cohort participants, parents of elementary students were more involved in their children's education than parents of secondary children. According to teachers, more elementary school parents were interested in their children's class performance and were actively involved in their education, than were secondary parents.

Student reports indicated similar patterns of parental involvement. They reported that fewer than 20% of secondary parents helped them with their homework on a daily basis, compared to 75% of elementary parents. However, at least 40% of secondary students reported that there was an increase in how often their parents made sure they attended school daily and asked them about school since beginning to participate in Safe Pathways. Additionally, approximately 90% of three-year cohort students reported that their parents think the Safe Pathways program will help them do better in school.

The data examined in this study describe three-year cohort participants from several angles. Student-self report, teacher surveys, achievement data, and school records paint a somewhat mixed picture of school experience and the impact the Safe Pathways program has had on long-term participants. Both students and teachers indicate that there has been some positive impact on student behaviors and attitudes in school during program participation. Achievement data are either insufficient to comment on, or

indicate a small change over time for the three-year cohort, although direction of change varied. School records show some consistent and some differing patterns of absences and suspensions for elementary and secondary students. Parent involvement has also shown some changes.

Considering all of the data in a broader context of typical student attitudes, behaviors, and achievement; and parental involvement, is essential to interpreting these results. Additionally, the at-risk nature of the students participating in this study must be taken into account in order to fully understand the description of the three-year cohort provided in this study.

References

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