

CREDIT RECOVERY AS A PATH TO ON-TIME GRADUATION

by

Matthew J. Sanger

An education leadership portfolio submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Matthew J. Sanger

Approved:

Chrystalla Mouza, Ed.D.
Director of the School of Education

Approved:

Gary T. Henry, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education and Human Development

Approved:

Douglas J. Doren, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and Dean
of the Graduate College

I certify that I have read this education leadership portfolio and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Lauren Bailes, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of education leadership portfolio

I certify that I have read this education leadership portfolio and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

J. Scott Lykens, Ed.D.
Member of education leadership portfolio committee

I certify that I have read this education leadership portfolio and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Robert Hampel, Ph.D.
Member of education leadership portfolio committee

I certify that I have read this education leadership portfolio and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Nadine Larkin, Ed.D.
Member of education leadership portfolio committee

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ABSTRACT

Students fail ninth grade more than any other grade in high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Failure to recover credits at an accelerated pace threatens a student's ability to graduate on time and increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school. This portfolio examines the impact of Garden Spot High School's (GSHS) credit recovery (CR) program, the Spartan Academy, which has served students at risk of dropping out at Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District since 2015. At the end of the 2018 school year, the program was eliminated due to a grievance against the district. As a result, the district has integrated CR into its existing online programming – *ELANCOonline* (EOL).

This portfolio begins with my efforts as the high school principal to complete a program evaluation of the Spartan Academy. Specifically, I was interested in the impact of the Spartan Academy on students at risk of dropping out at GSHS. I began by reviewing extant literature to identify best practices in CR throughout the country. The artifacts that I created based on this review illustrate my efforts to ensure a research-based approach as CR transitioned to the district's online programming. I also interviewed former Spartan Academy students to understand what motivated them while they were enrolled in the program. I learned that students held a favorable opinion of the Spartan Academy and a majority of them acknowledged that they would not be on-track to graduate had they not been enrolled in the program.

Graduation data supported these claims – multiple students who were enrolled in the Spartan Academy graduated on time.

To inform CR as it transitioned to the district’s online programming, I recommended the implementation of consistent incentives as part of the CR program. In addition, I recommended that CR programming must be customized to meet the individual needs of each student. A majority of students who participated in the interviews attributed much of their success in the program to being able to work at their own pace. On-track indicators allow districts to identify students at risk of not graduating on time while students are still early in their academic career. ELANCO’s Early Warning System (EWS) allows the district to identify at-risk students and to support these students as they transition to GSHS. The final recommendation included evaluating ELANCO’s CR program annually and refining the program as needed so students, teachers, and administrators have a clear understanding of the impact CR has on students at risk of not graduating on time and dropping out.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

High schools across the country are implementing credit recovery (CR) programs to address an increasing number of course failures of students at-risk of not graduating on time and dropping out (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007; Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015; Rickles et al., 2018). The Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District requires students at Garden Spot High School (GSHS) to earn 28 credits to graduate. Students must earn four credits in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, students must earn two-and-one-half credits in health and physical education, two credits in humanities, and nine and one-half elective credits. Traditionally, when students failed a course at GSHS, they were required to retake it either during summer school or the next school year. However, these options did little to allow students to get back on the path to on-time graduation.

To address this challenge, GSHS offered a CR program – the Spartan Academy. GSHS established the program before the start of the 2015-2016 school year. The GSHS Administrative team created it as part of a comprehensive high school transition program to address Goal #4 of ELANCO’s strategic plan. Goal #4 reads, “Establish a district system that fully ensures barriers to student learning are addressed in order to increase student achievement and graduation rates” (ELANCO,

2015). The CR program served the lowest academically-performing students at GSHS. Allensworth and Easton (2005, 2007) suggest, a student's academic performance during the first year in high school is the strongest predictor of graduation. As a result, GSHS established programs and supports to address the challenges students face during the transition to high school, including course failures. Moreover, the Spartan Academy endeavored to provide a path to on-time graduation by offering credit recovery at an accelerated rate.

To be considered for the Spartan Academy, students had to meet one of the following criteria: (a) A freshman failing three or more classes during the first semester of 9th grade; (b) A freshman who is more than four credits behind at the end of the 9th grade; (c) Students who should be in the sophomore cohort but are more than four credits behind; (d) Students who should be in the junior cohort but are six or more credits behind; or, (e) Students who should be in the senior cohort but are six or more credits behind.

In addition, students who were disruptive in the classroom and met any of the criteria listed above would be the first selected for the program. We implemented this approach to improve the learning environment for other students. Many of the students who qualified for the Spartan Academy also struggled academically and disrupted the learning of others. To address behavioral challenges, Spartan Academy students received ongoing counseling and mentoring from the school counselors and their respective Spartan Academy monitor.

We placed qualifying students in a self-contained classroom, with limited access to the traditional high school setting. We provided greater degrees of access as students attained weekly academic and behavioral goals. Students had access to a Spartan Academy monitor and the curriculum was provided in an online format using GradPoint, making it a blended setting. This model allowed students to accelerate the rate of credit recovery. Traditionally, unless students enrolled in more than eight classes, the ability to accelerate the number of credits in a 4x4 block schedule was impossible. The only other CR options were either summer school, correspondence courses, or courses taken during the next school year.

The Spartan Academy improved the pace of credit accumulation for 90.6% of participants. Students highly regarded the program because it increased their motivation to graduate on time. However, ELANCO eliminated the program in 2018 due to a union grievance against the district. This portfolio explores the impact of the Spartan Academy as it relates to CR and on-time graduation. Further, it informs the transition of CR from the Spartan Academy to *ELANCO Online* (EOL).

My efforts to address this challenge began by conducting a program evaluation and a literature review of the challenges associated with the transition to high school. The Spartan Academy was ELANCO's first attempt at a CR program, but it was never evaluated. As a result, I conducted a formal evaluation of the program. During my evaluation, I discovered three types of CR programming (traditional, blended, and

online) identified in the research. Over the last decade, the focus has shifted to online CR options as more districts embrace the flexibility of online instruction.

I developed four research questions to evaluate the areas of strength and growth within the Spartan Academy. Research questions included: (a) What are stakeholder perceptions of CR at ELANCO? (b) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get back on track? (c) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements? (d) To what degree and in what ways can the district integrate CR into EOL?

Included in this portfolio are nine artifacts that demonstrate my efforts to understand CR and implement best practices in EOL CR. The knowledge gleaned from my literature review informed all other artifacts.

1. Review of Literature: The analysis of literature developed my understanding of the need for CR in high schools and guided my work. I identified the elements of successful transition programs aimed at addressing the challenges at-risk students face as they enter high school. I gave special attention to targeted interventions (e.g., CR programs) with a proven track record of success. This review of literature contrasts the three most commonly implemented forms of CR (traditional, online, and blended) and identified best practices. Finally, challenges CR programs face were also identified and discussed (see Appendix A).
2. Theory of Action: This document allowed me to articulate how changes to the Spartan Academy would be delivered to meet desired outcomes. It was

important for me to outline this in conjunction with the program evaluation so I could visualize the action components needed to address the research questions (see Appendix B).

3. On-Track Indicator: Ultimately, ELANCO's goal is to eliminate the need for CR. The first step in realizing that goal was to create an on-track indicator that identified students in ninth grade who were both on-track and off-track to graduate on time. Early identification is vital. Research suggests that a student's academic performance during the first year in high school is a strong indicator of on-time graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). My on-track indicator identifies students who are off-track, so the district can provide targeted support. Targeted support helps students realize on-time graduation, which can lead to the elimination of CR (see Appendix C).
4. Program Evaluation: The objective of the program evaluation was to identify what elements of the Spartan Academy made it a success. Ten face-to-face interviews with former Spartan Academy students gleaned invaluable qualitative data that was used to inform recommendations for the future of CR programming at ELANCO. Also, an analysis of historical administrative data revealed the extent to which the Spartan Academy enhanced students' ability to recover lost credits and graduate on time. Overall, 90.6% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy were able to increase their average number of credits per semester. In addition, 65.6% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy realized on-time graduation. These data led to several recommendations that included the implementation of incentives, customized

learning opportunities, on-track indicators, and ongoing program evaluations (see Appendix D).

5. CR Policy: This document defines how ELANCO implements CR, and it recognizes CR as an important component of on-time graduation. I reviewed similar policies from districts across the country and structured this document to meet the needs of ELANCO students. Guidelines within the policy provide a formal protocol to ensure students are appropriately referred to participate in the CR program as they qualify (see Appendix E).
6. Position Profile: This artifact defines the role of the CR monitor, whose main functions include monitoring and tracking student progress for the district's CR program. I provide essential functions for the position so the monitor can perform the tasks efficiently and effectively. Collaboration with teachers and the Coordinator of Non-Traditional Programs and Student Services are essential functions of the CR monitor. I shared this document with ELANCO's Human Resources department, so a level of consistency and efficiency could be maintained regardless of the individual serving as the CR monitor. This document may prevent future grievances against the district (see Appendix F).
7. Garden Spot Mentor Contracts: These artifacts provided the documentation necessary to begin an adult and peer mentoring program called Garden Spot Mentors. The program intends to pair students at-risk of not graduating on time with a trusted and caring peer or adult in high school. The benefits of mentor-mentee relationships are innumerable and have been shown to enhance high school graduation rates. Also, mentors can help address common areas of

growth for many CR students, including social skills, communication, conflict resolution, and perseverance (see Appendix G).

8. Interview Protocol: I designed this document as an instrument to solicit specific feedback on students' experience in the Spartan Academy. The protocol intended to identify what students liked and did not like about the CR program. One of the main objectives of the program evaluation was to explore student perspectives of the Spartan Academy. I conducted face-to-face interviews during the second semester of the 2018-2019 school year. The participants were ten former Spartan Academy students. Interviews were voice recorded for accuracy, transcribed, and coded. Results of the 8-question interview revealed favorable opinions of the Spartan Academy, the CR monitors, and the incentives-based approach implemented to promote credit recovery. This information informed recommendations for how to best deliver CR at ELANCO in the future (see Appendix H).
9. Administrative Data: With district office approval, I retrieved historical administrative data for all students enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Data were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In general, Spartan Academy students performed better in English-Language Arts (ELA) state assessments in comparison to corresponding math assessments. Overall, 90.6% of Spartan Academy students increased the average number of credits earned per semester, with 65.6% of Spartan Academy students graduating on time. Finally, correlations between Math and Reading Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) projections and on-time graduation indicated a significant relationship ($r = .985^{**}$).

Research (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Rickles et al., 2018) suggests that a student's academic performance in mathematics and ELA is a harbinger of academic success and eventual on-time graduation (see Appendix I).

My goal in the remaining chapters is to reflect on what I learned about CR across the development of this Educational Leadership Portfolio (ELP). I organized this paper into six chapters that describe my personal and professional growth through this ELP. Chapter 1 introduces my project and the artifacts I created to address the problem, which I present in Chapter 2. I incorporated improvement strategies in this project that I discuss in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I analyze the results of those improvement strategies and provide evidence to support my recommendations. In Chapter 5, I discuss the results of the previous chapter. I conclude the paper in Chapter 6 with my reflections on the ELP and how this endeavor has enriched my development as a building leader and aspiring superintendent.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Students fail ninth grade more than any other grade at Garden Spot High School (GSHS) and in high schools across the country. Over time, this creates a phenomenon known as the “ninth-grade bulge,” in which the number of enrolled freshman students far surpasses the number of students promoted to tenth grade (Haney et al., 2004). Freshman failures have been a consistent challenge at Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District. Table 1 shows the ninth-grade bulge at GSHS since the 2014-2015 school year.

Table 1

Ninth-grade bulge

School Year	Number of Students	Percent of Cohort
2014-2015	59	22.0%
2015-2016*	47	18.8%
2016-2017	37	14.9%
2017-2018	31	12.7%

*The Spartan Academy was created.

Again, the number of students who fail ninth grade determines the size of the ninth-grade bulge. Since the 2014-2015 school year, the ninth-grade bulge decreased from 59 students to 31 students. Despite a steady decrease in the number of ninth-grade

failures, the need for credit recovery (CR) at GSHS remains. Research shows that students who are off-track during their first year in high school are at risk of not graduating on time. This issue exposes a far more significant problem across the United States, especially as the national high school graduation rate remains below 85% (Kamenetz & Turner, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2018) reveals that the graduation rate for ethnic minorities is well below the national average (85%) and that of whites (89%). The graduation rate for Hispanics and blacks are 80% and 78%, respectively. Schools must address this problem because a successful transition from middle school to high school is essential to on-time graduation for all students. On-time graduation is of particular importance as demographics reveal greater student diversity throughout ELANCO. Table 2 highlights the change in student diversity at ELANCO over the last decade.

Table 2

Ethnicity at ELANCO over time

Race	2009 (%)	2019 (%)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.0	0.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.5	3.1
Black	2.8	3.1
Hispanic	3.8	10.4
White	89.2	81.0
2 or More Races	1.3	2.1

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2019)

Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018) examined the use of on-track indicators in urban settings (e.g. Chicago, Dallas, New York, and Philadelphia). Urban schools are known to house high minority populations. The studies revealed that students in ninth grade were twice as likely to graduate on-time when compared to those who were off-track (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Pileggi & Strouf, 2018). Therefore, ELANCO must ensure its increasingly diverse student population remains on-track.

I began my administrative career at GSHS in December 2010; I served as an assistant principal working with ninth and tenth-grade students. In this role, I observed the many challenges students faced during the transition from middle school to high school. Students with sociodemographic challenges (e.g., individualized education

programs, economically disadvantaged, males, and minorities), specifically, struggled both academically and socially during this transition. Many of these students failed multiple courses, which led to the high school's ninth-grade bulge. All students enrolled in the Spartan Academy faced at least one sociodemographic challenge.

In April 2012, I attained the principalship at GSHS. In this role, the superintendent directed me to enhance the success of all students. Specifically, he tasked me with addressing the freshman failure rate and high school graduation rate, which stagnated just under 90 percent before my principalship. Both of these components are related to on-time graduation. For example, when students fail ninth grade, they are no longer on track to graduate with their cohort. Interventions, such as CR, are needed to get them back on track. To successfully carry out this endeavor, I relied on my administrative team and Sizer's (2004) *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*. Sizer (2004) identifies the following areas as levers of improved student performance: (a) a personalized high school experience; (b) rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and, (c) collaborative leadership.

To personalize the GSHS experience, we collaborated with the students and staff to develop a core set of values: *The Spartan Way – Doing what is right, doing our best, and doing for others*. Each month we recognized students who embodied the characteristics of the Spartan Way, both administratively and in content area departments. We recognized seniors at school board meetings and provided them Student of the Month medals as a token of our appreciation. By recognizing students,

we cultivated personalization and a sense of ownership for all stakeholders involved in the process.

We promoted successful transitions by offering multiple programs and supports for our ninth-grade students. We introduced transition programs and grade-level teams in 2012, placing students in one of three teams. Each team had four core content area teachers and approximately 100 students. Teachers worked with students to create a team name and a logo that we prominently placed above the doors of all team teachers. Students participated in team-building activities during large group instruction (LGI) to further enhance the personalization of the high school experience.

We provided team leaders an opportunity to meet with their team to promote collaborative leadership. Team meetings occurred twice per month. Team leaders used this time to discuss student concerns and to develop team-building activities that would further personalize the GSHS experience for our ninth-grade students. Finally, we developed and implemented a seminar course to help ease the transition for ninth-grade students. In this course, students learned organizational, time management, active listening, communication, and note-taking skills.

To ensure a rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the GSHS administrative team created the *Spartan Creed*. This handbook focused on cultivating relationships, excellent instruction, excellent classroom management, and formative assessments. To cultivate relationships, we first looked at how we treated our colleagues. We provided candid feedback and transparency in our communication

through informal observations and informal walkthroughs. Instructionally, we focused on the importance of active engagement and movement within the classroom. We instilled the notion that the mind can absorb what the seat can endure. We encouraged staff to utilize a variety of instructional strategies that changed every 15 to 20 minutes. We provided professional development that aligned with the work of Wong and Wong (1998) that focused on the importance of classroom procedures and how they can lead to excellent classroom management. We set aside time for peer observations so that teachers could see exemplars among their colleagues. Finally, we discussed the importance of formative assessments for every child in meaningful and applicable ways. Again, we relied on the expertise within our building, sharing examples of creative use of formative assessments.

To address collaborative leadership, we established small learning communities (SLCs), ninth and tenth-grade teams, and an advisory team that included department facilitators and team leaders. Within these teams, we focused on the strategic use of data. As a result, we realized that we had no formal CR program for our off-track students. Without a formal intervention, these students had little hope of getting on-track and realizing on-time graduation. Our focus on data eventually led to the creation of the Spartan Academy, which proved effective at ensuring on-time graduation for 65.6% of GSHS students enrolled in the program.

The Spartan Academy served as ELANCO's CR program from 2015 to 2018. The high school administrative team developed qualifications for the Spartan

Academy (see Chapter 1). We placed qualifying students in a self-contained classroom, with limited access to the traditional high school setting. Students earned greater degrees of freedom by attaining weekly academic and behavioral goals. We utilized an online curriculum provider – GradPoint – that allowed students to accelerate the rate of credit recovery. Unless students enrolled in more than eight classes, the ability to accelerate the number of credits earned in a traditional, 4x4 block, schedule was not plausible.

In addition, our administrative team set goals for the Spartan Academy. The primary goal was to increase the number of credits earned per semester for all students enrolled in CR. Realizing this goal helped address the freshman failure and graduation rates at GSHS. The second goal was to ensure on-time graduation. We did not intend for the Spartan Academy to be a permanent placement. Instead, the intent was to recover lost credits, so our off-track students would be back on the path toward on-time graduation.

We also collaborated with ELANCO’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to shift many resources to CR. First, we hired a Spartan Academy monitor through a third-party substitute teacher service. We also provided a classroom to operate the program. After a successful year of implementation, the district hired an additional monitor and dedicated a second classroom to expand the program and serve additional at-risk students. We also utilized EOL faculty as teachers of record for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy since our monitors did not provide direct instruction.

Before the Spartan Academy, no CR program existed at ELANCO. If students failed a course, they enrolled in a similar course the next semester, over the summer, or during the next school year. Students were previously unable to recover credits and get back on a path to on-time graduation, so the implementation of CR was a welcomed addition to the district's academic programming. Despite the program's success and an investment of significant resources, the district eliminated the Spartan Academy at the end of the 2017-2018 school year due to a union grievance against the district.

This decision, coupled with a recent promotion that led to me being named the principal of the secondary campus (i.e., Grades 7 through 12), greatly influenced the direction of my ELP. It forced me to consider how to integrate successful components of the Spartan Academy into the district's new EOL CR program. This challenge provided a unique opportunity to reshape CR at ELANCO.

As the instructional leader for grades 7 through 12, I continue to collaborate with our guidance department to implement the comprehensive transition program. This program includes freshman tours, orientation meetings, and grade-level teams in grades 7 through 10. According to Tripod Survey results, our efforts to promote a successful transition appear to enhance the social-emotional well-being of our students. For example, 96% of our staff score favorably in the "care" portion of the survey. These survey results are a positive first step toward ensuring on-time graduate because ninth grade appears to be the make-or-break year for many GSHS students.

For students who are not on-track during their ninth-grade year, the likelihood of graduating on time or at all decreases dramatically, especially when sociodemographic moderators are present.

Although my administrative team no longer oversees CR, I am confident that my artifacts and recommendations will enhance EOL CR. Furthermore, completion of this portfolio allows the program to attain the original improvement goals of increasing the rate of CR and ensuring on-time graduation for all ELANCO students. In the following chapter, I educate EOL leadership to ensure ongoing program evaluations of CR. Also, I share my improvement strategies to enhance student achievement by integrating and supporting best-practices for students in need of CR. Finally, I share the resources and processes that enrich EOL CR.

Chapter 3

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Since the creation of the Spartan Academy in 2015, the freshman failure rate dropped from 19% to 12%, and the graduation rate at Garden Spot High School (GSHS) improved from 90% to 95%. Based on these improvements, and my experience working with the Spartan Academy, I decided to focus my efforts on implementing research-based strategies that would strengthen credit recovery (CR) as it transitioned to ELANCO*Online* (EOL). I first reviewed extant literature to identify best practices in CR. Then, I evaluated the Spartan Academy by conducting interviews and identifying common themes within the qualitative data. I then examined historical administrative data and noticed that over 90% of students increased the number of credits earned per semester. In addition, of those eligible to graduate, 65.6% of Spartan Academy students graduated on time. EOL CR must expand upon this success, so I developed three improvement goals for the district as it transitions to the new EOL CR program:

1. Educate EOL leadership on the importance of ongoing program evaluations.
2. Integrate and support best-practices for students in need of CR.
3. Establish resources and processes that enrich CR at ELANCO.

To attain these goals, I focused my efforts on evaluating the Spartan Academy. During my evaluation, I uncovered research-based strategies that aligned with best practices from the Spartan Academy and extant research. Below, I discuss the actions I took or am currently taking to integrate and support EOL CR with research-based resources and processes.

Goal 1

Educate EOL leadership on the importance of ongoing program evaluations

The Spartan Academy excelled at accelerating the number of credits earned and getting students on a path to on-time graduation. When the district eliminated the program, I evaluated the program in order to share its value with our stakeholders. I conducted a program evaluation (see Appendix D) by reviewing historical administrative data, and by interviewing former Spartan Academy students still enrolled at GSHS. I also conducted a literature review that informed and educate EOL leadership as to the importance of ongoing program evaluations.

Through these efforts, I gained a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Spartan Academy and other CR programs from around the country. Scholars noted the importance of targeted interventions, motivation, and robust support systems in CR programs. Some areas of concern found in the research include a lack of oversight and academic rigor, which may lead to cheating and graduation rate inflation at ELANCO. To address these concerns, I recommended that we assign students to EOL teachers, who can serve as mentors, and provide ongoing program evaluations throughout the 2019-2020 school year and beyond.

Goal 2

Integrate and support best-practices for students in need of CR

To integrate and support best-practices, I studied and reviewed extant literature (see Appendix A). I discovered there is no single best approach to CR. However,

many districts incorporate CR as part of a robust system of support that addresses failed transitions to high school that lead to an increased dropout rate. Successful transition programs are comprehensive, addressing academic, developmental, and social challenges through a robust system of support.

My review of literature also revealed a surge in online CR over the last decade. This surge is primarily due to the flexibility of online content delivery (e.g., GradPoint and APEX) that allows more students to get back on track and a path to on-time graduation. I discovered some practitioners question the fidelity of online CR due to increasing reports of cheating and graduation rate inflation. Consequently, there is a growing fear that the value of a high school diploma is decreasing due to lack of oversight and rigor.

Types of Credit Recovery

I discovered that there are three types of CR – face-to-face, online, and blended. Student outcomes between online and face-to-face CR programs are negligible. In one study (Stallings et al., 2016), students who enrolled in online CR programs were less likely to graduate, but those who did were more likely to graduate on-time. What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2015) suggests a blended approach appears most effective because it incorporates elements of face-to-face and online CR. In a blended model, the staff works directly with CR students to set academic goals and monitor progress.

Check & Connect

Components of the dropout prevention program – Check & Connect – show promise when incorporated into CR because staff consistently check-in with at-risk

students. GSHS piloted Check & Connect during the 2018-2019 school year, and it proved beneficial to all students involved. We must continue to connect at-risk students with caring adults through a formal mentoring program (see Appendix G). Since the EOL CR program is online, students can benefit from the frequent adult interactions associated with the Check & Connect program.

Student Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder perceptions, I interviewed ten former Spartan Academy students (see Appendix H). I learned that students enjoyed the structure of the program. Program incentives motivated students to complete assignments, earn credits, and graduate on time. I discovered the most popular motivators involved student choice and the ability to work at their own pace. Also, students who attained weekly academic goals were able to leave school early, which was the most popular incentive. EOL leadership can ensure students earn credits at an acceptable pace by integrating and supporting best practices in the new CR program.

Goal 3

Establish resources and processes that enrich CR at ELANCO

I established multiple resources and processes to enrich EOL CR. First, I established a theory of action (see Appendix B) that I shared with EOL leadership. My theory of action informs strategies that promote on-time graduation. Next, I created a policy that informs CR and allows the district to dedicate needed resources to CR programming. I will share this policy with the ELANCO Board of Directors during the 2019-2020 school year. I also developed a position profile (see Appendix F) that

details the roles and responsibilities of our CR teachers. This document should eliminate the potential for future grievances against the district.

Finally, I created a process to identify at-risk students, via an on-track indicator (see Appendix C), based on the work of Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018). I established criteria to determine whether our ninth-grade students were on-track to graduate on time. Students failing to meet the criteria were considered off-track. The consistent implementation of an on-track indicator can help districts identify off-track ninth-grade students and provide needed support.

The district must address academic, behavioral, and social challenges for students in need of CR. Targeted interventions are a positive first step and can reduce the number of off-track students in a school. Students identified by my on-track indicator can receive targeted support by enrolling in EOL CR. Establishing resources and processes as mentioned above, enrich CR at ELANCO and increases the likelihood that students will graduate with their cohort.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

I established three improvement goals to help the district transition from the Spartan Academy to ELANCO^{Online} (EOL) credit recovery (CR). The transition began during the first semester of the 2018-2019 school year. During this time, I shared the results of my research and improvement strategies with EOL leadership to ensure a successful transition. In this chapter, I share the results of my efforts through program evaluation, review of literature, and stakeholder interviews. I discovered that district leadership remains committed to CR despite the elimination of the Spartan Academy.

Goal 1

Educate EOL leadership on the importance of ongoing program evaluations

Overall, the Spartan Academy excelled at accelerating the number of credits earned and getting students on a path to on-time graduation. Since its inception, 90.6% of the students earned more credits per semester while enrolled in the program than they did before enrolling. However, the district never conducted an evaluation of the program. When the district eliminated the Spartan Academy, I evaluated the program to communicate its value to our district leadership team and our board of directors. I analyzed the Spartan Academy and available literature on successful CR programs across the country. I conducted a program evaluation (see Appendix D) by reviewing historical administrative data, and by interviewing former Spartan Academy students still enrolled at Garden Spot High School (GSHS).

During this evaluation, I gained a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Spartan Academy. Strengths of the program include the implementation of incentives, the role of the school counselor, the pace of CR, and the number of students who graduated after being enrolled in the program. Scholars have noted the importance of early interventions, motivation, and reliable support to strengthen a CR program. Evaluation findings suggest that these are essential variables to consider when working to enhance CR. For example, some early interventions (e.g. Check & Connect) provide supports that prevent high school dropouts. I shared the results with EOL leadership, via email and face-to-face conversations, to provide an opportunity to integrate these strengths into EOL CR. EOL leadership implemented incentives that permitted students to leave school early if they completed assignments early.

Conversely, I discovered two weaknesses of online CR. Despite the presence of the teachers and monitors, the CR program lacked academic rigor in its online courses. For example, several students completed GradPoint courses in as little as three weeks. Similarly, several CR students earned as many as nine credits in one semester. This is more than the number of credits offered (i.e. eight) in an entire school year for a student enrolled at Garden Spot High School (GSHS). This may account for the fact that several CR students requested to remain in the CR program despite getting back on track.

Unfortunately, rigorous evidence espousing the effectiveness of online courses for CR is lacking (Rickles et al., 2018). Levine et al. (2017) noted that while there are benefits to online CR, there remains a need to address the socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges at-risk students face. Heppen et al. (2017) found that students

enrolled in online CR fared worse on Algebra I state assessments than students assigned to the same face-to-face CR course. Interestingly, there is a significant relationship between Spartan Academy students' growth data (i.e. PVAAS) in math and reading and on-time graduation. These results speak to the rigor associated with face-to-face opportunities in a blended CR model such as the Spartan Academy.

However, a lack of rigor in GradPoint may have contributed to graduation rate inflation at Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District. In addition, one Spartan Academy monitor was observed providing answers to students. To ensure program fidelity, EOL leadership must conduct consistent program evaluations, supervise its teachers, and regularly survey its EOL CR graduates.

Goal 2

Integrate and support best practices for students in need of CR

ELANCO^{Online} Credit Recovery

Based on the findings from my literature review (see Appendix A), and the evaluation of the Spartan Academy (see Appendix D), I made the following recommendations. First, ELANCO must offer a blended CR model, similar in structure to the Spartan Academy. We had multiple requests for CR to start the 2018-2019 school year, so I secured time in teachers' schedules to provide face-to-face interaction with students. The face-to-face time between teacher and student is a primary characteristic of a blended CR program.

I further recommended that EOL CR use a more rigorous online content provider. I believed these recommendations would empower and enrich our students'

experience by providing access to a blended CR model. Students waited to enroll until the second semester so that EOL leadership could finalize the new CR program. At that time, EOL leadership chose an online model of CR using GradPoint as its content provider due its flexibility.

This decision did not align with my recommendation. In my literature review, some practitioners (Burke, Chapman, & Monahan, 2013; Capone, 2017; Finn, 2012; Murin et al., 2015; Pondiscio, 2014) called into question the effectiveness of online CR due to reports of widespread cheating and graduation rate inflation. These same practitioners (Burke, Chapman, & Monahan, 2013; Capone, 2017; Finn, 2012; Murin et al., 2015; Pondiscio, 2014) believed the value of a high school diploma was decreasing due to the lack of oversight and academic rigor in online CR programs. EOL leadership adopted an online model despite my concerns. As expected, our teachers were not involved with the students in EOL CR due to the prescriptive nature of the courses in GradPoint. These conclusions call into question the 65.6% on-time graduation rate of our Spartan Academy students and the 40% on-time graduation rate of our EOL CR students.

Despite these concerns, 10 students achieved mixed results in EOL CR during its first year of inception. Table 3 outlines the results in EOL CR during the 2018-2019 school year.

Table 3
 2018-2019 EOL CR Results

Student (Class)	Credits Earned	On-Track (Y/N)	Graduate (Y/N)
Student 1 (12)	5.0	Y	Y
Student 2 (12)	7.0	Y	Y
Student 3 (12)	7.5	N	N
Student 4 (12)	4.5	N	N
Student 5 (12)	3.0	N	N
Student 6 (10)	2.0	N	N
Student 7 (11)	2.0	N	N
Student 8 (11)	1.5	N	N
Student 9 (10)	2.5	N	N
Student 10 (10)	0.0	N	N

Five seniors earned, on average, 5.4 credits (range – 3 to 7.5 credits). Two seniors (40%) got on-track and graduated on time. Two other seniors withdrew from school, and one senior needed a partial credit to graduate, which he failed to earn during the summer. The five other students earned, on average, 1.6 credits during the second

semester of the 2018-2019 school year. These results mirror those found in my literature review (Heppen, et al., 2017; Stallings et al., 2016), where I discovered negligible differences between online and face-to-face CR programs' outcomes in relation to the type of program (e.g. online, blended, or face-to-face) implemented. In some cases, students enrolled in online CR programs were less likely to graduate, but those who did were more likely to graduate on-time (Stallings et al., 2016).

Check & Connect

Rickles et al. (2018) suggest that the path to graduation is steep for many ninth-grade students, and the number of failed credits is a signal for intervention. Therefore, being on-track often predicts success in high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The more credits students earn during their ninth-grade year, the higher their chance of graduating. Conversely, if students fail to earn credits, they often drop out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

In my review of literature, I encountered a dropout prevention program called Check & Connect (What Works Clearinghouse, 2008). Components of the program show promise for at-risk students. To support this best practice, we plan to expand our Check & Connect team to include ten GSHS teachers and five GSMS teachers who participated in training during summer 2019. At ELANCO, Check & Connect teachers serve as mentors for at-risk students. Training requires teachers to serve as advocates and mentors for students on their caseload. Each Check & Connect teacher has four to six students enrolled in homeroom. I used my on-track indicator to identify students in need of this intervention, which serves as a prerequisite for CR. This best practice ensures that our off-track students have an adult mentor working on their behalf.

Garden Spot Mentors

In addition, my review of literature underscored the importance of connecting at-risk students with caring adults (What Works Clearinghouse, 2008; What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). According to the What Works Clearinghouse (2008), there is moderate evidence that suggests students' personal and academic needs can be addressed through meaningful and sustained relationships with an adult advocate. I developed a mentor program (see Appendix G), and I will implement it during the 2019-2020 school year for our off-track students. Until EOL CR is blended, students can benefit from teachers and school counselors serving as mentors. After receiving Check & Connect training, these individuals will provide academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support to students approaching off-track status.

Local Best Practices

I interviewed ten former Spartan Academy students (see Appendix H), and I identified several local best practices to integrate into EOL CR. The theme of motivation emerged, either directly or indirectly, in all student interviews. Illustrative quotes included but were not limited to: "I could go at my own pace. When I finished the class, there was a reward. I could leave"; "I could work independently, do my own thing, and move on"; "I liked that the courses were online, because I could go at my own pace", and "When you met your weekly goals you would have Friday off. It was nice because it allowed you to leave and go home and that made me try harder". In addition, students enjoyed working independently, working at their own pace, and having incentives that permitted them to leave early each day. Additionally, multiple students stated that they enjoyed academic success after exiting the Spartan Academy due to the structured setting of the Spartan Academy. Once they recovered credits,

they were motivated to achieve on-time graduation with their peers. Finally, personalized learning emerged as a common theme during the interviews. Students appreciated the immediate and one-on-one support from Spartan Academy monitors and school counselors.

Since EOL leaders supervise CR, it is challenging for me to ensure that the district integrates and supports best-practices for students in need of CR. During the 2018-2019 school year, I scheduled weekly meetings with EOL leadership to ensure collaboration. For example, I shared the results of my research and the qualitative data from the student interviews with EOL leaders using the illustrative quotes above, and they provided me progress reports for CR students. Also, EOL leaders integrated many of the local best-practices. I scheduled similar meetings for the 2019-2020 school year, and I will continue to advocate for a blended CR model.

Goal 3

Establish resources and processes that enrich CR at ELANCO

Based on my literature review, several dropout prevention programs offered a variety of resources to support at-risk students. Specifically, Check & Connect (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004) underscores the importance of relationships for promoting engagement in school. Resources provided by ELANCO included two Spartan Academy monitors, two classrooms, and financial resources for incentives to get the program operating. The Spartan Academy monitors engaged students in conversation that promoted caring relationships. Together, these resources helped 90.6% of Spartan Academy (n=65) students earn more credits per semester

than before starting the program. As a result, I created a board policy (see Appendix E), and position profile (see Appendix F) for the CR monitors in order to ensure the program's stability in the future. A board policy and position profile ensure consistent expectations are incorporated into the CR program. I will present the policy to the school board during the 2019-2020 school year. Since the GSHS administrative team never clearly defined the role of the Spartan Academy monitor, I developed a position profile that outlined roles and responsibilities. I provided the position profile to the human resources department for consideration.

On-Track Indicator

Based on my literature review, successful CR programs have a mechanism to identify at-risk students (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). On-track indicators can quickly identify on-track and off-track students. I created and used the ELANCO On-Track Indicator to identify ninth-grade students for EOL CR. To ensure accuracy, I analyzed historical administrative data to determine the number of on-track students. At ELANCO, ninth-grade students are on-track if they earn at least one credit in each core content area and seven out of eight total credits by the end of ninth grade. Conversely, students failing to meet these criteria are considered "off-track" and therefore need targeted support (e.g., EOL CR). Since ninth grade is considered the make-or-break year for high school students, I focused on four cohorts of ninth-grade students – the classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

The Class of 2019. The first cohort includes the Class of 2019. During this cohort's ninth-grade year, 252 out of 268 students (94%) were on-track. Conversely, 16 students (6%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of

those 16, 11 enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2015-2016 school year. Historical administrative data for these students were analyzed to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and whether or not they were on-track as a result of the intervention. Of the 11 students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, 10 are currently on-track, and one remains off-track. Interestingly, four out of the five other off-track students (80%) in this cohort and not enrolled in the Spartan Academy are currently on-track.

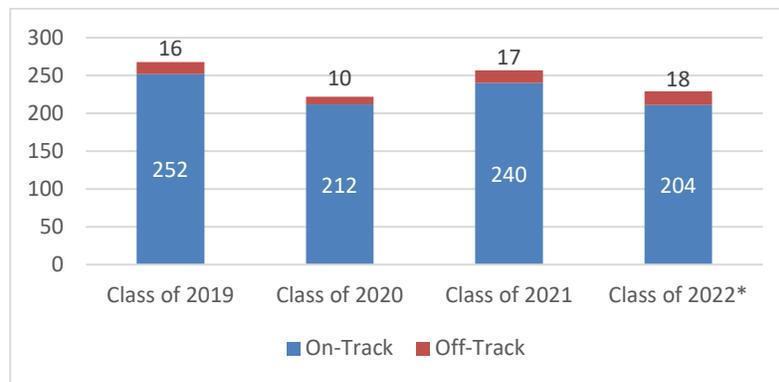
The Class of 2020. The second cohort includes the Class of 2020. During this cohort's ninth-grade year, 212 out of 222 students (95.5%) were on-track. Conversely, ten students (4.5%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of those 10, four enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2016-2017 school year. I analyzed historical administrative data for these students to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and whether or not they were on-track as a result of the intervention. Of the four students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, two are currently on track and two remain off-track. Therefore, two out of four (50%) students in the Class of 2020 were back on track after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Among the other off-track students who did not enroll in the Spartan Academy, two (33.3%) are currently on track and four are off-track.

Class of 2021. The third cohort includes the Class of 2021. During this cohort's ninth-grade year, 240 out of 257 students (93.3%) were on-track. Conversely, 17 students (6.7%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of those 17, two enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2017-2018 school year. Historical administrative data for these students were analyzed to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and whether or not they were on-track as a result of the

intervention. Of the two students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, both remained off-track. Among the other off-track students who did not enroll in the Spartan Academy, 3 (20%) are currently on-track and 12 (80%) remain off-track.

The Class of 2022. The final cohort includes the Class of 2022. These students are current ninth graders, so on-track status cannot be fully determined. However, projections can be made based on data from the conclusion of the first semester. As of the end of the first semester, 204 out of 229 students were on-track. Conversely, 18 (7.9%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator, which means that these students failed at least one core content course and failed two or more classes. In the past, some of these students would have qualified for the Spartan Academy during the second semester.

Figure 1 On-Track and Off-Track Ninth Grade Students at GSHS



I developed the ELANCO On-Track Indicator based on the work of Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018). It identifies two dichotomous variables: (a) ninth-grade students who earn at least one credit in each

core content area (English, math, science, and social studies), and (b) ninth-grade students who earn seven out of eight total credits by the end of their first year. In the four cohorts, 58 students were off-track during their ninth-grade year. Seventeen of the 58 off-track students enrolled in the Spartan Academy during their ninth-grade year. This number is low due to the emphasis of meeting the CR needs of our eleventh and twelfth grade students. Of those ninth-grade students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, 71% were on-track compared to just 32% of students who were off-track during their ninth-grade year and not enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Off-track ninth-grade students enrolled in the Spartan Academy were over two times more likely to get back on track and a path toward on-time graduation.

The consistent implementation of ELANCO's On-Track Indicator can help identify off-track ninth-grade students. The district must continue to address the academic, behavioral, and social challenges that students face as they transition to high school. ELANCO can achieve this by providing targeted interventions (e.g., Check & Connect and CR), so off-track ninth-grade students can get back on track toward on-time graduation. The Spartan Academy provided a safe and supportive environment that helped students develop appropriate skills, behaviors, and strategies to deal with challenges faced during the transition to high school. More students got back on a path toward on-time graduation compared to those who received no support or intervention. These results are similar to the findings in Allensworth and Easton

(2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018). Therefore, it is essential to identify and support off-track students, so they are more likely to graduate on-time and with their cohort.

Chapter 5

REFLECTION ON RESULTS

Based on the evidence presented in Chapter 4, I believe my improvement goals were supported by literature and extant research in ensuring on-time graduation for at-risk students at Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District. A considerable challenge arose when the Spartan Academy was eliminated and replaced by ELANCO*Online* (EOL) credit recovery (CR) during this project. Initially, I intended to evaluate the Spartan Academy and expand the program to include additional students. After the program was cancelled, I identified ways to integrate elements of the Spartan Academy into an online CR program that I did not supervise. I was not confident the new direction would result in successful outcomes for students.

I discovered that addressing the challenges associated with transitioning CR from a blended program to an online program became a momentous task. The foremost challenge was that my administrative team no longer supervised CR. Second, the district moved a proven blended CR program to an online CR model that was not supported by extant research. Finally, EOL leadership was not initially supportive of my improvement strategies or my recommendations. Regardless, I developed three improvement goals for this project, and draw conclusions and provide a rationale for each goal below.

Goal 1

Educate EOL leadership on the importance of ongoing program evaluations

Evaluating the Spartan Academy was a rewarding experience. The mixed-methods approach provided a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This information provided me the opportunity to make recommendations for EOL CR. Research suggests that online learning is generating new, innovative personalized learning approaches (Powell, Roberts, & Patrick, 2015). However, the increasing presence of online CR options has called into question the academic rigor of those programs (Burke, Chapman, & Monahan, 2013; Capone, 2017; Finn, 2012; Murin et al., 2015; Pondiscio, 2014). The lack of rigor in online CR options must be addressed by the implementation of more causal studies if districts are going to increase graduation rates.

In 2015, What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reported results from a systematic review of credit recovery programs across the United States. No studies of credit recovery programs met their group design standards. As a result, the WWC was unable to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of CR programs. The WWC concludes, “Research that meets WWC design standards is needed to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this intervention” (p. 1). WWC requires randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs to be considered for systematic review (WWC, 2017). My program evaluation incorporated a quasi-experimental design, so it may provide scholarly and practical significance. However, my n-value (n=65) was limited, which may constrain the generalizability of

my evaluation. Just 15% (n=10) of my sample participated in the qualitative portion of my evaluation.

The simplest way to achieve generalizability is through consistent causal studies that incorporate consistent formal evaluations. Scholars (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Anderson et al., 2004) have noted the importance of early interventions, incentives to motivate students, and strong support for at-risk students. Results of my evaluation suggest that these are important variables to consider when working to promote online credit recovery. Future research can continue to clarify strengths and assets within this important intervention and contribute to the growing body of research about credit recovery as a path to on-time graduation.

Goal 2

Integrate and support best-practices for students in need of CR

In my pursuit to integrate and support best-practices, I wanted to incorporate best-practices identified in research and within the Spartan Academy. As a result, I learned that our students were more successful at accelerating the pace of earning credits in the Spartan Academy (90.6%) than EOL CR (50%). When I interviewed former Spartan Academy students, all participants identified two components as high motivators to complete work and earn credits – face-to-face interaction with adults and program incentives. In the Spartan Academy, monitors connected with students every block, and teachers checked-in with students frequently. In EOL CR, teachers change every block making consistency a challenge for students enrolled in the program.

Also, CR students were at a disadvantage because teachers had both EOL students and CR students on their caseloads, making it challenging to direct attention where it was most needed. Many of the most popular incentives (e.g. early release and cell phone use) in the Spartan Academy were not provided to students in the EOL CR program until the final month of the 2018-2019 school year. Once these incentives are fully operational, I suspect student motivation will increase.

Part of the challenge associated with integrating and supporting best-practices for students in need of CR can be traced back to an unsuccessful transition to high school. Schools that successfully transition students from middle school to high school incorporate interventions into their transition program. Obviously, ELANCO values CR enough to offer it as an intervention to our at-risk students. Providing interventions, such as Check & Connect and CR, aligns with best practices in extant literature.

It is important for ELANCO to get CR operating efficiently. The impact of a failed transition to high school is significant for multiple reasons. Foremost, the economic impact of a high school dropout is substantial. An individual who does not earn a high school diploma will miss over \$130,000 in wages over a lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). In addition, high school dropouts cost the nation billions in social programs, crime, and the legal costs (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

Check & Connect serves the district as a dropout prevention initiative that, when coupled with CR, can prove highly effective. An important aspect of the intervention is its ability to serve students early in their academic career. According to What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2008), the Check & Connect intervention

provides support services that include monitoring attendance, case management, and family outreach. In addition, Check & Connect has positive effects on staying in school (WWC, 2008). ELANCO successfully piloted Check & Connect during the 2018-2019 school year, and it expands to ten GSHS teachers and five GSMS teachers for the 2019-2020 school year. This measure allows the district to serve approximately 75 at-risk students, or approximately 5% of the high school student population.

One of my initial goals with this project was to evaluate the Spartan Academy. My administrative team spoke highly of the program, but we had little data to support our claims. We established the Spartan Academy to address the freshman failure rate and a stagnating graduation rate. The program served students well during its tenure. In contrast, only 50% of the students enrolled in EOL CR earned more credits per semester than before enrolling in the program, and just 40% of students eligible to graduate did so on-time. Students attributed their success to the structure of the program and to the personal attention they received from the Spartan Academy monitors.

The personal attention students received in the Spartan Academy was the foundation of a successful blended CR program. In this approach, schools combine the best features of traditional and online learning environments to deliver personalized and differentiated instruction (Powell et al., 2015). This model provides students with the flexibility of an online program and the added benefits of meeting face-to-face with teachers and in-class monitors (Rickles et al., 2018). ELANCO assigned a teacher to serve as the EOL monitor for the upcoming school year. This measure is another positive step for EOL CR.

According to the U. S. Department of Education (2014), students with access to a combination of face-to-face and online instruction (i.e. blended learning) excel in relation to peers who have exposure to only one method of instruction. Teachers are critical in a blended setting because they establish a mentoring relationship with their students (Powell et al., 2015). This relationship eases the transition to blended learning environments, which may be new to students at risk of not graduating on time. Powell et al. (2015) contend that early identification of academic struggle, coupled with remedial face-to-face support from teachers, counselors, and administrators yields great success in blended programs.

Goal 3

Establish resources and processes that enrich CR at ELANCO

According to Allensworth and Easton (2005, 2007), a student's academic performance during the first year in high school is the strongest predictor of eventual graduation. It is incumbent upon districts to establish resources and processes that enrich CR and prevent students from dropping out. Policies that drive expectations are essential to the enrichment process. I have yet to present the CR policy to the school board. However, I am looking forward to the opportunity, because it provides an avenue to a diploma for our at-risk student population. It is equally important to clearly articulate the expectations for CR staff members. The district's ability to clarify expectations and responsibilities can reduce the protentional for another union grievance against the district.

The goal of ELANCO is to eliminate the need for CR altogether. The first step in realizing this goal is to create an on-track indicator that identifies ninth grade students who are both on-track and off-track to graduate on time. This will allow the district to implement targeted supports and interventions that eliminate the need for CR. The earlier ELANCO can identify students who are off-track, the quicker it can provide targeted supports for students who are not on-track to graduate with their cohort. My recommendations for the EOL CR program are below.

Recommendation 1 – The EOL CR program should offer incentives to encourage an increased pace of credit recovery. Qualitative analysis indicated that students were motivated by incentives within the Spartan Academy. Since that program was eliminated, incentives should play a significant role in the EOL CR program. Students overwhelmingly preferred to leave school early if they were on track and meeting their weekly goals. This incentive should be incorporated into the district's CR program. Moreover, analysis of quantitative data revealed a deeper understanding of the Spartan Academy's impact on student motivation. Foremost, data revealed that 90.6% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy earned more credits per semester while in the Spartan Academy than they did before enrolling in the CR program.

Recommendation 2 – ELANCO should enhance CR program incentives by allowing the customization of learning so that students can work at their own pace. Daniel Pink (2011) contends that individuals are motivated by three elements of intrinsic motivation – autonomy, purpose, and mastery. Moving forward, ELANCO must integrate these elements into the EOL CR program. Many students indicated

during the interviews that they enjoyed the ability to work at their own pace and to finish courses early. Another motivation was to graduate with their peers and on-time. This autonomy and purpose led to content mastery that allowed students to not only earn necessary credits, but to earn them at an accelerated rate.

Furthermore, 19 students (60%) enrolled in the Spartan Academy realized on-time graduation during its three years of implementation. In addition, there were significant correlations between students' reading projections and a student's ability to graduate on time. While these positive outcomes are steps in the right direction, more must be done to identify students who struggled in these content areas before reaching high school.

Recommendation 3 – ELANCO should utilize an on-track indicator to identify students at risk of not graduating on time. Akos et al. (2015) suggests ninth grade is the make-or-break year for high school students. Identification of students who are off-track early in their high school career allows districts to provide interventions, which can lead to on-time graduation. Integrating Pennsylvania's Early Warning System (EWS) with ELANCO's on-track indicator ensures these students are identified early and will be supported as they transition to GSHS.

Recommendation 4 – The EOL CR program must undergo annual evaluations. This project included the first formal evaluation of the Spartan Academy. It also provided a glimpse of perceived strengths and areas of growth within the CR program. Annual evaluations of EOL CR can provide continuous data on the strengths and areas of growth for the program. Specifically, graduate surveys must be leveraged as a source of data for academic programming, including CR. Graduate surveys can inform the district as to the career paths students are selecting upon graduation.

I believe the recommendations included in this chapter address the improvement strategies needed to expand the success of the Spartan Academy without increasing costs to the district. EOL CR teachers are already in place. In addition, the district already pays for a variety of online content to which students can access. Finally, no additional rooms are needed because EOL and EOL CR are housed in the high school's library media center. Therefore, these recommendations are not cost prohibitive.

Recommendation 5 – EOL leadership must ensure rigorous content for its CR program. Rickles et al. (2018) suggests that many high schools are turning to online CR programs to get students on a path to graduation. Unfortunately, many online courses do not provide the same level of teacher support as a similar face-to-face course. In fact, Heppen et al. (2017) concluded that students may benefit more from face-to-face courses because they are more like to succeed and recover credit. However, there is little rigorous evidence favoring one type of program over another. EOL leadership must use rigorous content that promotes rigor via active learning, individualized instruction, and personalized learning opportunities (Rickles et al., 2018).

The recommendations provide a solid foundation for continued success in CR programming at ELANCO. There is much to be gained from the growing body of empirical research pertaining to successful CR programs that set students up for success. Understanding the root cause of the transitional challenges is an ongoing task due to the rapid personal growth and change students face during the transition from middle school to high school (Akos et al., 2015). School districts cannot rely solely on high school transition or CR programs to create a change in students' academic

trajectory. On-track indicators must be utilized to identify students as early as middle school. Early identification of at-risk students allows districts to address transitional challenges that lead to the ninth-grade bulge. Ultimately, there is a need for greater accountability at the middle school level in the areas of attendance, behavior, and course performance. Balfanz (2009) found that middle school students who had 95% or better attendance, B averages or better, and no record of misbehavior graduated in relatively large numbers, even if they attended a low-performing, high-poverty school.

The most successful transition programs incorporate a multifaceted approach that address academic, behavioral, and social challenges (Akos et al., 2015; Uvaas & McKeivitt, 2013). In addition, the most successful transition programs consider sociodemographic moderators such as minority, low-income, males, students from single parent families, and students in special education (Akos et al., 2015). All of these factors contribute to interruptions in the academic growth of students that CR programs can address to ensure on-time graduation.

Chapter 6

REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

I began the University of Delaware's (UD) Educational Leadership program in 2016 as the principal of Garden Spot High School in the Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District (New Holland, PA). Since my enrollment, I have assumed several positions within the district in addition to my role as principal. In 2017, the district expanded my role to include the director of athletics. Then, in 2018, the district changed my role from high school principal and director of athletics to principal of the secondary campus. I am humbled to lead both the middle school and high school at ELANCO.

I attribute my professional dexterity to my time as a scholar at UD. My advisor and instructors challenged me to support my arguments with data and best practices identified in the research. My instructors taught me how to read peer-reviewed articles critically and how to synthesize and apply those studies to my research. I received instruction on data collection, analysis, and interpretation, which I used to create artifacts. I became proficient in using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which I used to evaluate the Spartan Academy. I was encouraged to take risks, but to consider the impact of my decisions on the organization. During my *Internship in Education* courses, I discovered the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework. The PELP Coherence Framework, demands that educational leaders ensure the instructional core (students, teachers, and content) is at the forefront of all decisions. As disappointed as I was that ELANCO eliminated the Spartan Academy, the PELP Coherence Framework grounded me in the instructional core. My ability to focus on the instructional core allowed me to maintain focus on the

students who were impacted by this decision. Since ELANCO leadership found value in the Spartan Academy, it maintained credit recovery (CR), and that decision can positively impact students in the district.

My time at UD also helped enhance my problem-solving skills. When I began the Educational Leadership program, I planned to focus my Educational Leadership Portfolio (ELP) on the middle school to the high school transition program at ELANCO. Based on the ninth-grade bulge at Garden Spot High School (GSHS), it was apparent that our transition program was not achieving expected outcomes. We needed to address this problem with a research-based approach. As I progressed in the Educational Leadership program, I began to gather data on the Spartan Academy. I took courses such as *Collection and Analysis of Data for Decision Making*, and *Organizational Problem Analysis and Planning in Education*, which helped in collecting and analyzing data for organizational decision-making. Also, the ELP required me to engage in inquiry, reflection, learning continuously, and organizational improvement as CR transitioned to ELANCO*Online* (EOL).

Completing this project and the included artifacts allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of our CR program's strengths and weaknesses. I discovered that 90.6% of our students earned more credits per semester while in the program than they had before enrolling. Also, I discovered that 65.6% of our Spartan Academy students, who were eligible to graduate, graduated on time. This level of success among our at-risk population suggests that our at-risk population can grow and learn despite sociodemographic challenges.

Before enrolling at UD, I completed two years of a doctoral program at a university in Pennsylvania. One of the shortcomings of that program was the lack of

diversity among its students and staff. I did not believe that I could serve the growing diversity at ELANCO had I continued in that program. Conversely, UD is known broadly for the diversity of its scholars. Throughout the Educational Leadership program, I interacted with individuals of varying cultures, political perspectives, religions, and economic backgrounds. As a public educator, I have come to appreciate and respect diverse opinions that contrast my own. Divergent thinking helped me to grow into a stronger scholar, educator, and partner.

Conducting the Spartan Academy program evaluation afforded me tremendous growth as a partner. First, the evaluation required me to access qualitative and quantitative data to inform my decisions as a building leader. I interviewed former Spartan Academy students, and I formed strong relationships with these individuals. These conversations allowed me to share specific motivators with EOL leadership. As the building leader at GSHS, I had the power to make many decisions regarding the direction of the Spartan Academy. When the supervision of CR transitioned, my responsibilities and authority reduced significantly. For example, I could no longer make immediate decisions about the program. Instead, I made recommendations to EOL leaders for consideration and implementation. Without directly supervising the CR program, it became difficult to monitor student progress. Thankfully, I was able to obtain data to ensure our seniors were on-track to graduate on-time.

I am also appreciative of the connections I made with the UD instructors and students. My professional network increased dramatically as a result of the Educational Leadership program. For example, I was able to communicate directly with my classmates about similar challenges they were facing in their respective districts. We were able to discuss our challenges and problem-solve by sharing ideas

and best practices. These relationships contributed to my growth as a public educator. I also had the opportunity to work with professors who had district-level experience. I was thoroughly impressed with their practical advice and their willingness to share some of my work with other cohorts. This acknowledgment of my skill enhanced my confidence and allowed me to build a legacy. Without enrolling into UD's Educational Leadership program, these personal experiences would not have occurred. I am a much stronger leader today than I was when I began the program.

When I began this journey, I sought an education that rivaled the one I attained as an undergraduate student at the College of William & Mary (W&M). I am fortunate that my academic experiences at W&M and UD were similar. While I earned excellent grades at UD, I felt like I earned them. Having to work hard for grades was not my experience during my master's level work, so I appreciated the academic rigor UD afforded me as a scholar. Also, the ELP permitted me to showcase my experiences from my first class to my last class at UD. Many educators working toward their doctorate at another college or university cannot say the same. UD's Educational Leadership program is as unique as it is purposeful. Very few, if any of my colleagues in other doctoral programs have been able to apply their research to a local organizational problem. UD's ELP allowed me to apply theory in meaningful ways. I believe this journey will make me both a better building leader and a better district leader.

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Appendix A

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Credit Recovery as a Path to On-Time Graduation

Background

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2015) defines credit recovery (CR) as those programs that allow high school students to earn credit for previously failed courses. Most CR programs take on one of three models – traditional (i.e. after-school), online, or mixed. According to Rickles, Heppen, Allensworth, Sorensen, and Walters (2018), “Many high schools are turning to online credit recovery courses to get students back on the path to graduation” (p. 487). The Eastern Lancaster County School District’s (ELANCO) online CR program, the Spartan Academy, was created prior to the 2015-2016 school year in response to Goal #4 of ELANCO’s comprehensive plan. ELANCO’s comprehensive plan reads, “Establish a district system that fully ensures barriers to student learning are addressed in order to increase student achievement and graduation rates” (ELANCO, 2015). The Spartan Academy was eliminated by district administration following a grievance at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. Since its inception, the Spartan Academy improved the pace of credit accumulation for Spartan Academy students by over 90 percent; unfortunately, no program evaluation was conducted.

As a result, this study addresses the following research questions as the district seeks to integrate CR into its existing online programming – *ELANCO*Online: What are

stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO? To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track? To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements? To what degree and in what ways can credit recovery integrate into the district's existing online programming? This review of literature presents pros and cons of CR programs that will inform ELANCO's CR program moving forward.

The Case for Credit Recovery

Despite high school graduation rates reaching an all-time high of 83 percent in 2014-2015, nearly one in five high school students fail to earn a high school diploma in the United States (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). Part of this challenge can be traced back to a failed transition to high school in which students fail multiple core-content courses during their ninth-grade year (Akos, Rose, & Orthner, 2015). Moreover, when students fail to earn a diploma, the economic impact is substantial. An individual that does not earn a high school diploma will miss over \$130,000 in wages over a lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). In addition, high school dropouts cost the nation billions in social programs, crime, and the legal system (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

Transition programs. Despite the predictability of educational transitions, they often disrupt school-aged children (Benner, 2011). In fact, McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) suggest that ninth grade is the make or break year for completing high school (p. 447). School districts across the country combat the difficulties of

changing buildings and losing familiar routines by providing necessary supports that result in greater academic success (Balfanz, 2009). Nevertheless, school leaders must have open communications between and among buildings within the district to ensure a smooth transition from one building to another (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Therefore, there is much to be gained from the growing body of empirical research pertaining to successful educational transition programs that set students up for success during their ninth-grade year. Considering students face three to five transitions prior to graduation, it is important that school districts have interventions (e.g. CR programs) in place if those supports fail to yield positive student outcomes. Johnston (2010) argues that transitions from one school to another are difficult because they involve changing buildings and losing familiar routines and support systems. However, Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, and Fox (2013) contend that providing the necessary supports to students as they transition to a new building results in greater academic success.

Transitional challenges identified in more recent studies (Akos et al., 2015; Uvaas & McKevitt, 2013) can be categorized into three broad categories: 1) academic; 2) developmental; and 3) social. Therefore, many districts seek to address transitions through a multifaceted approach that address each of these areas. This is particularly important when sociodemographic moderators (e.g. minority, low-income, males, students from single-parent families, and students in special education) are considered.

Students with these characteristics are prone to both interruptions in academic growth and to dropping out of high school (Akos et al., 2015).

Research indicates that, on average, students continue to grow academically during their time in middle school, but there is an interruption in learning trajectories for students in the areas of math and reading (Akos et al., 2015). This negative impact on learning outcomes is difficult for students to overcome as they progress in school. Therefore, to better address the interruption in growth trajectories, district leaders must attend to sociodemographic moderators while simultaneously meeting the academic, developmental, and social needs of students (Akos et al., 2015). This requires a multifaceted approach that provides culturally responsive instruction and interventions (e.g. CR programs) for students at risk of not graduating on time.

Understanding the root cause of the transitional challenges is an ongoing task due to the rapid personal growth and change students face during the transition from middle school to high school (Akos et al., 2015). The most successful transition programs incorporate a multifaceted approach that address academic, developmental, and social challenges (Akos et al., 2015; Uvaas & McKevitt, 2013). The most successful transition programs also take into consideration sociodemographic moderators such as minority, low-income, males, students from single parent families, and students in special education (Akos et al., 2015). All of these factors contribute to interruptions in the academic growth of students. Akos et al. (2015), further contend:

Any disruption in growth supports the recurring call for more attention to developmental (e.g. puberty, the development of abstract thinking, emotional, and self-regulation) and contextual changes across the elementary to middle school transition...Furthermore, interruptions in expected growth should raise concern about the lack of continuity between the elementary and middle school context. (p. 193)

The creation of effective transition programs allows building leaders to effectively address challenges and disruptions to students' academic trajectories (Akos et al., 2015).

Dropout prevention. There is also a growing body of research, pertaining to dropout prevention programs, that is closely related to CR programs. While several dropout prevention programs show promise, only two – Accelerated Middle Schools (AMS) and Check & Connect – appear relevant to this study. WWC (2008) defines dropout prevention programs as "...initiatives that aim to keep students in school and encourage them to complete their high school education" (p. 1). Like transition programs, these interventions provide a range of services, including: counseling, mentoring, curriculum redesign, and community services that serve to alleviate challenges for students at risk of dropping out of school (WWC, 2008).

While the target audience for the Spartan Academy was students in grades nine through 12, the target audience for AMS include those who are behind grade level while in middle school. According to the WWC (2008), this intervention provides

students with small class sizes, tutoring, attendance monitoring, counseling services, and family outreach. Moreover, middle school students at risk of dropping out receive an additional year of curriculum that is covered during students' one to two years in the intervention. The WWC (2008) claims, this intervention has potentially positive effects on staying in school and positive effects on progressing in school.

Unfortunately, the lack of research pertaining to AMS does not make it a viable option to incorporate into CR programs. However, elements of the program (e.g. counseling services, family outreach, etc.) can be incorporated into ELANCO's new CR program.

The target audience for Check & Connect includes both middle and high school students at risk of dropping out. A useful feature of Check & Connect is it can be used as an intervention for students throughout their time in middle or high school. According to the WWC (2008), the Check & Connect intervention supplements general curriculum with tutoring on an as needed basis. In addition, Check & Connect support services include monitoring attendance, case management, and family outreach. The WWC (2008) contends that Check & Connect has positive effects on staying in school and potentially positive effects on progressing in school. However, a more recent study (Heppen et al., 2018) found that the Check & Connect program did not have any statistically significant impact on engagement, academic progress, dropout prevention, or graduation. Again, while this program may not be ideal for ELANCO's CR program, elements of Check & Connect (e.g. case management, family outreach, etc.) can be incorporated into the district's new CR program.

Types of Credit Recovery Programs

Districts that offer CR opportunities invest significant resources to help keep students in school and on-track to graduate (Powell, Roberts, & Patrick, 2015). What Works Clearinghouse (2015) identifies three main types of CR: traditional, online, and mixed. Over the last decade, online CR programs have gained in popularity (Rickles et al., 2018). However, online CR programs are no more effective than traditional face-to-face (f2f) programs. By expanding CR options, however, districts can take advantage of available technology to personalize a student's path toward on-time graduation (Rickles et al., 2018).

Traditional credit recovery. Many traditional CR programs, such as after-school and summer school programs, require students to remain in the regular education setting. To accelerate the number of credits earned, students complete additional courses outside of regular school hours during f2f sessions. As students pass courses, they earn credits toward graduation. One of the primary benefits of traditional CR programs is the ability for students to meet f2f with a certified teacher (WWC, 2015; Rickles et al., 2018). This format mirrors what the students experienced the first time they took the course. Conversely, one of the greatest drawbacks is the slow, synchronous, and arduous pace (WWC, 2015; Rickles et al., 2018).

Online credit recovery. Over the last decade, districts have shifted toward online CR programs (Rickles et al., 2018). Online CR programs offer a variety of benefits. Foremost, online CR programs offer a great deal of flexibility (Archambault

et al., 2010; Rickles et al., 2018). Students can complete course work completely online or receive some f2f support. The presentation of content is digital and individually paced, offering interactive modules that allow students to test out of previously mastered content (Rickles et al., 2018). The cost-savings of online CR programs to districts is also significant (Picciano & Seaman, 2010). Another benefit identified in two separate studies – Atkins, Brown, and Hammond (2007) and Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, and Watson (2015) – is that online CR options allow more students to get back on-track and on a path to on-time graduation.

Mixed credit recovery. The final method of CR identified by WWC (2015) is a mixed approach (i.e. blended or hybrid learning) that incorporates elements of traditional and online CR programs. Of the three models, this approach most closely resembles the model ELANCO strives to attain through *ELANCOonline*. In this approach, schools combine the best features of traditional and online learning environments to deliver personalized and differentiated instruction (Powell et al., 2015). This provides students with the flexibility of an online program and the added benefits of meeting f2f with teachers and in-class monitors (Rickles et al., 2018).

According to the U. S. Department of Education (2014), students with access to a combination of f2f and online instruction (i.e. blended learning) excel in relation to peers who have exposure to only one method of instruction. The teacher's role is critical in a blended setting because they establish a mentoring relationship with their students (Powell et al., 2015). This relationship eases the transition to blended learning

environments, which may be new to students at risk of not graduating on time. Powell et al. (2015) contend that early identification of academic struggle, coupled with remedial f2f support from teachers, counselors, and administrators yields great success in blended programs.

Best Practices in Credit Recovery

Rickles et al. (2018) argue, “The path to graduation can be arduous for many students and failing core academic courses during the first year of high school is a strong signal of trouble to come” (p. 481). Therefore, being on-track often predicts success in high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The more credits students earn during their ninth-grade year, the greater their chance of graduating. Therefore, early identification of academic challenge during the first years of high school proves beneficial. This allows districts utilizing blended learning to provide immediate interventions, such as CR programs, to students who fail courses.

Research suggests that there is no single best approach for CR. For example, Stallings et al. (2016) compared outcomes between CR students enrolled in North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS) (i.e. an online CR program) and non-NCVPS schools (i.e. f2f CR programs). They found little difference in student outcomes when it came to end-of-course exam scores. However, NCVPS students were less likely to graduate, but those who did graduate were more likely to graduate in four years (i.e. on-time graduation). Stallings et al. (2016) also found that the minorities enrolled in online CR were less likely to reach proficiency on state

assessments. At ELANCO, minority students made up nearly 20% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy. All these students were economically disadvantaged and failed to reach proficiency on Pennsylvania's state assessments (i.e. Keystone Exam). Finally, Rickles et al. (2018) found no statistically significant differences in long term outcomes (i.e. math credits earned over four years and on-time graduation) between students in online and f2f courses.

Blended Learning. Powell et al. (2015) suggest a blended learning environment shows the greatest promise for student success because it combines the best of f2f and online learning. There are four blended learning models identified in research: rotation, flex, a la carte, and enriched virtual (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). The rotation model involves students rotating from one station to the next, often experiencing f2f, independent work, and collaborative work throughout a single class (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). According to Christensen, Horn, & Staker (2013), the flex model utilizes the teacher as a facilitator. Online learning is the foundation for student learning in this model. Students can be in the brick-and-mortar setting; yet students complete work at their own pace and utilize the teacher for assistance as needed. In the flex model, students move through the course at their own pace and according to their needs. In the a la carte model, students complete work online either in the brick-and-mortar setting or entirely online. In this model, the teacher of record is an online teacher. Students in the a la carte model may take some courses f2f in the brick-and-mortar setting and others online (Christensen, Horn, &

Staker, 2013). At ELANCO, these students would be considered part-time online students and part-time brick-and-mortar students. In the enriched virtual model, students are required to attend several f2f sessions with their instructor. However, the bulk of the coursework is completed online and independent of the teacher of record.

On-Track Indicators. Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) on-track indicator shows that improvements in credit accumulation are highly predictive of whether students graduate on-time (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Therefore, it is incumbent upon districts, like ELANCO, to utilize data, formative assessments, and performance-based assessments to guide student learning (Powell et al., 2015). In addition, districts must provide academic and behavior supports so students can accumulate as many credits as possible during the first year of high school.

According to Allensworth and Easton (2005, 2007), a student's academic performance during the first year in high school is the strongest predictor of eventual graduation. Therefore, an on-track indicator that allows districts to accurately project student success, coupled with support systems (e.g. transition and dropout prevention programs) that help students get on-track and on a path to on-time graduation, are the most effective practices. The recent focus on more rigorous college and career readiness standards underscores the importance of a successful transition (Ricklees et al., 2018). Until transition programs adequately address freshman failure and dropout rates, schools must continue to provide a variety of CR opportunities that allow students to recover course credit for classes they previously failed.

School Counselor. Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) suggest the role of the school counselor is essential in CR programs. However, the role of school counselors in CR programs is largely passive, often limited to referring students to CR programs. Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) argue that school counselors must take an active role in CR efforts, invoking both protective factors (i.e. social support, monitoring and mentoring, personal and social skill development, etc.) and risk factors (i.e. academic instruction, academic support, etc.) (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). Specifically, school counselors must integrate themselves into instructional leadership teams, which will allow them to “advocate for, and intervene with failing students” (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017, p. 2). Moreover, Bleuer and Walz (2002) assert academic support is one of the school counselor’s primary roles in dealing with underachieving students, which aligns with the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) framework.

Opponents of Credit Recovery

Credit recovery has become a polarizing issue among practitioners and researchers due to a perceived lack of rigor and graduation rate inflation (Capone, 2017). Foremost, opponents of CR programs point to the lack of academic rigor involved in CR courses (Burke, Chapman, & Monahan, 2013; Finn, 2012; Murin et al., 2015; Pondiscio, 2014). Burke, Chapman, and Monahan (2013) claim CR programs are nothing more than "...a wink, a nod, and a diploma." Finn (2012) promotes this notion by suggesting that colleges and employers do not value CR because course completion does not equate to true mastery of content. Considering that many face-to-face (f2f) CR programs have students repeat the same course, this argument would suggest that curriculum is not aligned to rigorous standards (i.e. Common Core). Arguments against online CR options are even more pointed. Murin et al. (2015) argue against online CR providers, specifically, stating that online providers offer quick alternatives that lack academic rigor. Ravitch (2012) suggests online CR programs are fraudulent, "...the student gets credit, the corporation makes money, the school raises its graduation rate...the graduation rate means nothing..." (p. 1).

As ELANCO considers an online CR option, via *ELANCOonline*, these concerns must be acknowledged and investigated through a formal program evaluation of the Spartan Academy. ELANCO's graduation rate increased to 95 percent since the Spartan Academy was implemented. This figure far exceeds the national average (83

percent). How much students actually learned in the Spartan Academy is unclear. According to DePaoli, Balfanz, Atwell, and Bridgeland (2018), "...the challenge is understanding when these courses support a competency-based approach (i.e. learning the part of the courses that led to student failure) and when they represent a short-cut that results in fast-tracked results, but little to no quality learning" (p. 35). These practices have rightfully added to the skepticism over rising graduation rates at ELANCO and across the nation (DePaoli et al., 2018). The results of the Rickles et al. (2018) study suggest that minimal content is acquired by students completing online CR. Still, it is impossible to understand the true impact of CR programs, like the Spartan Academy, without thorough program evaluations and more research to understand the effectiveness of CR courses and programs (DePaoli et al., 2018).

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Appendix B

THEORY OF ACTION

If ELANCO...	Action Component
<p>Communicates its vision effectively and provides guidance and general supervision of CR in a timely and responsive manner.</p>	<p>Leadership</p>
<p>Partners with stakeholders that serve CR students and their families.</p>	<p>Collaboration</p>
<p>Promotes professional learning opportunities to effectively prepare and empower stakeholders to support students in need of CR.</p>	<p>Technical Assistance</p>
<p>Holds CR leadership and building administrators accountable for effectively implementing assessment and evaluation practices to measure CR outcomes</p>	<p>Accountability</p>

<p>Then...</p>	<p>EOL CR and building leadership will have the requisite information, support, and resources needed to align their efforts to the district' s vision.</p> <p>EOL CR and building leadership will have uniformly high expectations for <i>all</i> students.</p>
<p>ELANCO leadership will leverage resources to improve services for students in need of CR.</p> <p>EOL CR and building leadership will develop materials and resources to be shared with student-run and outside organizations (e.g. Student Council, CrossNet Ministries, etc.).</p>	<p>ELANCO administrators will articulate and facilitate shared leadership toward enhanced collaboration and implementation of best practices for online learning.</p>
<p>EOL CR will have systems that promote an accelerated rate of credits for students enrolled in the program and protect the rights of at-risk students and their families.</p>	

<p>Then...</p>	<p><i>The EOL CR in Eastern Lancaster County School District will:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilize a variety of data systems to identify, inform, monitor, and increase the rate of earned credits and on-time graduation for students in enrolled in EOL CR. <i>Early Warning System (EWS) On-Track Indicator; Data Blender; PowerSchool.</i> 2. Implement increasingly intensive evidence-based methodologies toward improved academic outcomes for students enrolled in EOL CR <i>MTSS academic supports; culturally responsive instruction; targeted interventions.</i> 3. Implement increasingly intensive evidence-based methodologies toward improved social-emotional outcomes. <i>MTSS behavioral supports; school climate, assignment of peer and adult mentors; “ Check & Connect” ; district-wide and targeted interventions.</i> 4. Promote the implementation of academic and behavioral supports that will increase the likelihood of on-time graduation. <i>Credit recovery; summer school; Check & Connect; district-wide and targeted interventions.</i> 5. Ensure culturally responsive learning environments and instructional practices. <i>Culturally responsive instructional techniques; district-wide and targeted interventions.</i> 6. Embrace a philosophy of partnership that empowers families and communities to become actively engaged. <i>Family engagement; mentoring; corporate partnerships; apprenticeships; internships; externships; district-wide and targeted interventions.</i> 7. Provide rigorous and relevant online instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills requisite for accelerated credit-recovery; on-time graduation, and positive post-scholastic outcomes. <i>Transition supports; co-op placements; career and technical training; college-prep coursework; life skills training; soft skills / employment skills training; district-wide and targeted interventions.</i>
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Then...
<p>ELANCO will accelerate the number of credits earned of at-risk students.</p> <p>ELANCO will reduce the number of students with risk factors that impact the likelihood of school completion.</p> <p>ELANCO will increase on-time graduation of at-risk students.</p>

Adapted from SSIP Theory of Action

Appendix C
ON-TRACK INDICATOR
Program Overview

The Spartan Academy was a credit recovery (CR) program established at Eastern Lancaster County (ELANCO) School District prior to the start of the 2015-2016 school year. The Spartan Academy was created as part of a comprehensive high school transition program to address Goal #4 of the ELANCO comprehensive plan. Goal #4 reads, “Establish a district system that fully ensures barriers to student learning are addressed in order to increase student achievement and graduation rates” (ELANCO, 2015). Goals of the program included: (a) Increase the number of credits earned for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy; (b) Accelerate the number of credits earned for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy so they are on-track and can return to the traditional setting, and (c) On-time graduation of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy.

The Spartan Academy had initial success at accelerating the average number of credits earned per semester for enrolled students. The program was so successful the first year that a second classroom was added to meet the district’s CR demands. Unfortunately, the program was eliminated prior to the 2018-2019 school year due to an ongoing grievance against the district. As a result, the school district is integrating CR into its existing online programming courtesy *ELANCOonline*, and efforts to integrate successful elements of the Spartan Academy are underway.

The district's ultimate goal is to eliminate the need for CR altogether. The first step in realizing this goal is to create an on-track indicator that identifies ninth grade students who are both on-track and off-track to graduate on time. This will allow the district to implement targeted supports and interventions (i.e. Tier II supports) that eliminate the need for Tier III programs such as CR. The earlier ELANCO can identify students who are off-track, the quicker it can provide targeted supports for students who are off-track and will not graduate on time. This is important because extant research indicates that a student's academic performance during their first year in high school is a strong indicator of on-time graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

The Transition to High School

Allensworth and Easton (2005) contend, "The transition to high school places significant demands on students – academically, socially, and behaviorally" (p. 5). At the ninth-grade level, there is the constant temptation for teachers to socially promote students by awarding passing grades despite the inability to master content.

Allensworth and Easton (2005) argue against this practice suggesting, "such an action may demonstrate to the student that little effort is necessary for passing, thus making the student more likely to fail subsequent courses" (p. 8). A better solution is to identify students who are struggling with the transition to high school, find out why they are struggling, and offer support to ensure success (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

Therefore, a safe and supportive high school environment that addresses academic, social, and behavioral demands is essential to a successful high school transition. Garden Spot High School (GSHS) established a comprehensive transition program in 2012 to address these demands and ease the transition. However, this was not enough to decrease the freshman failure rate. As a result, the Spartan Academy was established three years later as a safety net to capture students who fell through the cracks and eventually did not graduate on time or dropped out. Now that the Spartan Academy has been eliminated, the district needs a way to identify and support students at-risk of not graduating on time.

Pennsylvania's Early Warning System

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides all districts access to the Early Warning System (EWS). This system is based on Johns Hopkins research and the work of Robert Balfanz. It uses attendance, behavior, and course grades (ABCs) to identify students as early as middle school who are at risk of dropping out (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2019). Ultimately, the EWS provides students a rating based on ABCs and categorizes them as “red alert”, “high”, “moderate”, and “some”. Red alert contains those students with a risk index of 4.0 on the EWS rating scale. In general, these students have multiple failing grades, truancy (i.e. attendance), and behavioral problems. While this information is helpful in identifying GSHS students with these concerns, it has a tendency to provide false-positive data, which is challenging to navigate in the district's student information

system – PowerSchool. For example, a student may have many discipline referrals, but have no failing grades. This can place a student in red alert. In addition, the EWS contains students who are enrolled in alternative placements outside of the district, making it challenging for staff to intervene and provide targeted supports. Although the EWS is helpful at identifying “at-risk” students, it is incomplete for the purposes of this study.

ELANCO’s On-Track Indicator

On-track indicators are highly predictive of whether students eventually graduate (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The on-track indicator developed for this study was derived from the work of Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018). Although these studies examined the use of on-track indicators in urban settings such as Chicago, Dallas, New York, and Philadelphia, the results will prove beneficial to ELANCO, which is more of a suburban district. Regardless, these studies indicate that students who were on-track at the end of ninth grade were twice as likely to graduate on-time when compared to those who were not on-track (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Pileggi & Strouf, 2018).

A ninth grade student at Garden Spot High School (GSHS) is considered “on-track” if they meet the following criteria: (a) earn at least one credit in each core content area (English, math, science, and social studies), and (b) earn seven out of eight total credits by the end of ninth grade. Conversely, any student failing to meet these criteria are considered “off-track” and targeted support is needed. Since ninth

grade is considered the make or break year for high school students, this analysis focuses on four cohorts of ninth grade students – the classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

The Class of 2019. The first cohort includes the Class of 2019. During this cohort's ninth grade year, 252 out of 268 students (94%) were on-track. Conversely, 16 students (6%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of those 16 members of the Class of 2019 who were off-track, 11 were enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2015-2016 school year. Historical administrative data for these students was analyzed to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and whether or not they were on-track as a result of the intervention. Of the 11 students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, 10 are currently on-track, one remains off-track. Therefore, 10 out of 11 (91%) students in the Class of 2019 were back on track after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Interestingly, 4 out of the 5 other off-track students (80%) in this cohort that were not enrolled in the Spartan Academy are currently on-track.

The Class of 2020. The second cohort includes the Class of 2020. During this cohort's ninth grade year, 212 out of 222 students (95.5%) were on-track. Conversely, 10 students (4.5%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of those 10 members of the Class of 2020 who were off-track, four were enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2016-2017 school year. Historical administrative data for these students was analyzed to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and

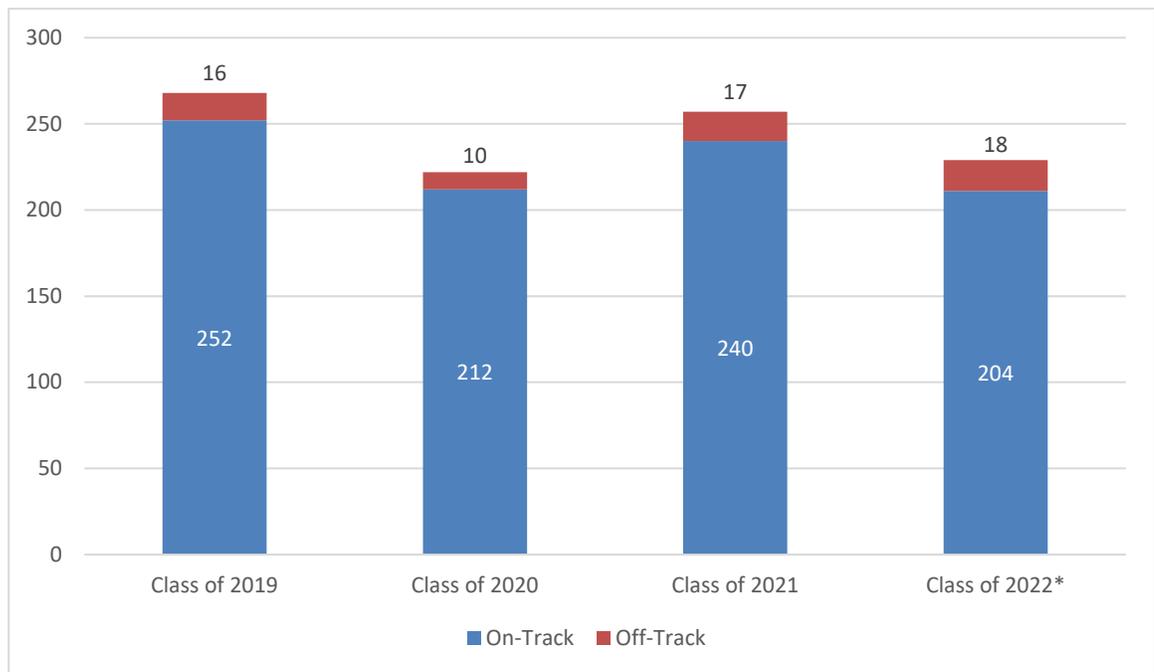
whether or not they were on-track as a result of the intervention. Of the 4 students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, 2 are currently on track, 2 remain off-track. Therefore, 2 out of 4 (50%) students in the Class of 2020 were back on track after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Among the other off-track students who did not enroll in the Spartan Academy, 2 (33.3%) are currently on track and 4 are off-track.

Class of 2021. The third cohort includes the Class of 2021. During this cohort's ninth grade year, 240 out of 257 students (93.3%) were on-track. Conversely, 17 students (6.7%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. Of those 17 members of the Class of 2021 who were off-track, two were enrolled in the Spartan Academy during the 2017-2018 school year. Historical administrative data for these students was analyzed to determine the impact of the Spartan Academy and whether or not they were on-track as a result of the intervention. Of the two students enrolled in the Spartan Academy, both remained off-track. Therefore, zero out of two (0%) students in the Class of 2021 were back on track after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Among the other off-track students who did not enroll in the Spartan Academy, three (20%) are currently on-track and 15 (80%) remain off-track.

The Class of 2022. The final cohort includes the Class of 2022. These students are current ninth graders, so on-track status cannot be fully determined. However, projections can be made based on data from the conclusion of the first semester. As of the end of the first semester, 204 out of 229 students are on-track. Conversely, 18

(7.9%) were off-track according to the ELANCO On-Track Indicator. This means that these students failed at least one core content course and failed two or more classes. In the past, some of these students would have qualified for the Spartan Academy during the second semester.

Figure 2: On-Track & Off-Track Ninth Grade Students at GSHS



Conclusion

ELANCO's On-Track Indicator was derived from the work of Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018). It identifies two dichotomous variables: (a) ninth grade students who earn at least one credit in each core content area (English, math, science, and social studies), and (b) ninth grade students who earn seven out of eight total credits by the end of their first year. In the four cohorts, 58 students were off-track during their ninth-grade year. Seventeen of the 58 off-track students were

enrolled in the Spartan Academy during their ninth-grade year. Of those enrolled in the Spartan Academy, 71% are now on track compared to just 32% of students who were off-track during their ninth-grade year and not enrolled in the Spartan Academy. This suggests that off-track ninth grade students enrolled in the Spartan Academy are over two times more likely to get back on-track and on a path toward on-time graduation.

The consistent implementation of ELANCO's On-Track Indicator can help identify off-track ninth grade students. Since the Spartan Academy was eliminated, it is essential that the district address academic, social, and behavioral demands of students as they transition to high school. This can be realized by providing targeted interventions, similar to the Spartan Academy, so off-track ninth grade students can get back on a track toward on-time graduation. The Spartan Academy provided a safe and supportive environment that has proven to help students develop appropriate skills, behaviors, and strategies to deal with challenges faced during the transition to high school. Similar to the Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Pileggi and Strouf (2018) studies, students identified by ELANCO's On-Track Indicator who received targeted support, via the Spartan Academy, were over twice as likely to get back on a path toward on-time graduation compared to those who received no support or intervention. Therefore, it is incumbent upon ELANCO to identify students who are not on-track and to provide targeted support, similar to the Spartan Academy, so students are more likely to graduate with their cohort.

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Appendix D

THE SPARTAN ACADEMY PROGRAM EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Lancaster County School District (ELANCO) requires students at Garden Spot High School (GSHS) to earn 28 credits to graduate (Appendix A).

Students must earn four credits in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, students must earn two-and-one-half credits in health and physical education, two credits in humanities, and nine and one-half elective credits. Traditionally, when a student failed a course at GSHS, they were required to retake it either during summer school or the next school year. However, these options did little to allow students to get back on the path to on-time graduation.

As a result, GSHS offered an online credit recovery (CR) program – the Spartan Academy. This program was established before the start of the 2015-2016 school year. It was created as part of a comprehensive high school transition program to address Goal #4 of ELANCO’s comprehensive plan, which reads, “Establish a district system that fully ensures barriers to student learning are addressed in order to increase student achievement and graduation rates” (ELANCO, 2015). The CR program served the lowest academically performing students at GSHS. Since a student’s academic performance during the first year in high school is the strongest predictor of eventual graduation, it was essential for district leadership to establish programs and supports to address the challenges students face during the transition to

high school, including course failures (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007). Moreover, the Spartan Academy endeavored to provide a path to on-time graduation by offering credit recovery at an accelerated rate.

To be considered for the Spartan Academy, students had to meet one of the following criteria: (a) A freshman failing three or more classes during the first semester of 9th grade; (b) A freshman who is more than four credits behind at the end of the 9th grade; (c) Students who should be in the sophomore cohort but are more than four credits behind; (d) Students who should be in the junior cohort but are more than six or more credits behind; or, (e) Students who should be in the senior cohort but are six or more credits behind. In addition, students who were disruptive in the classroom and met any of the criteria listed above would be the first selected for the program. To address behavioral challenges, students received ongoing counseling and mentoring from the school counselors and the respective Spartan Academy monitor.

The program was structured so qualifying students were placed in a self-contained classroom, with limited access to the traditional high school setting. Greater degrees of freedom were incentivized by attaining weekly academic and behavioral goals. Curriculum was provided in an online format using GradPoint, which allowed students to accelerate the rate of credit recovery. Traditionally, unless students enrolled in more than eight classes, the ability to accelerate the number of credits in a 4x4 block schedule was impossible. Therefore, the only other CR options were in the summer, either correspondence courses or courses taken during the next school year.

Program Goals

The Spartan Academy had three goals:

- Increase the number of credits earned for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy;
- Accelerate the number of credits earned for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy so they could get back on-track and return to the traditional setting;
- On-time graduation of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy.

Statement of the Problem

Students fail ninth grade more than any other grade (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). As a result, these students are not earning enough credits to graduate on time unless an intervention takes place. Students who met enrollment criteria were enrolled in the district's CR program. This program was designed to keep students on-track and on a path toward on-time graduation. The Spartan Academy served as ELANCO School District's credit recovery program from 2015 to 2018. However, the program was eliminated at the end of the 2017-2018 school year due to a grievance against the district. Now, the district is exploring other credit recovery options that will integrate elements of the Spartan Academy into the district's current online programming – *ELANCOonline*.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO?

2. To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track?
3. To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements?
4. To what degree and in what ways can credit recovery integrate into the district's existing online programming (e.g. EOL)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2015) defines CR as those programs that allow high school students to earn credit for previously failed courses. Most CR programs take on one of three models – traditional (i.e. after-school), online, or mixed. According to Rickles, Heppen, Allensworth, Sorensen, and Walters (2018), “Many high schools are turning to online credit recovery courses to get students back on the path to graduation” (p. 487). Since its inception, the Spartan Academy accelerated the pace of credit accumulation for 80% of the students enrolled in Spartan Academy, but no program evaluation was conducted. This review of literature presents pros and cons of CR programs that will inform ELANCO's CR program moving forward.

The Case for Credit Recovery

Despite high school graduation rates reaching an all-time high of 83% in 2014-2015, nearly one in five high school students fail to earn a high school diploma in the United States (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). Part of this challenge can be traced back to an unsuccessful transition to high school in which

students fail multiple core-content courses during their ninth-grade year (Akos, Rose, & Orthner, 2015). Moreover, when students fail to earn a diploma, the economic impact is substantial. An individual who does not earn a high school diploma will miss over \$130,000 in wages over a lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). In addition, high school dropouts cost the nation billions in social programs, crime, and the legal costs (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

Transition programs. Despite the predictability of educational transitions, they often disrupt school-aged children (Benner, 2011). In fact, McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) suggest that ninth grade is the make or break year for completing high school (p. 447). School districts across the country need to combat the difficulties of changing buildings and losing familiar routines by providing necessary supports that result in greater academic success (Balfanz, 2009). School leaders must have open communications among buildings within the district to ensure a smooth transition from one building to another (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Therefore, there is much to be gained from the growing body of empirical research pertaining to successful educational transition programs that set students up for success during their ninth-grade year. Considering students face three to five transitions prior to graduation, it is important that school districts have interventions (e.g. CR programs) in place if those supports fail to yield positive student outcomes. Johnston (2010) argues that transitions from one school to another are difficult because they involve changing buildings and losing familiar routines and support

systems. However, Balfanz et al. (2013) contend that providing the necessary supports to students as they transition to a new building results in greater academic success.

Transitional challenges identified in recent studies (Akos et al., 2015; Uvaas & McKeivitt, 2013) can be grouped in three broad categories: academic, developmental, and social. Many districts seek to address transitions through a multifaceted approach that address each of these areas. This is particularly important when sociodemographic moderators (e.g. minority, low-income, males, students from single-parent families, and students in special education) are considered. Students with these characteristics are prone to both interruptions in academic growth and to dropping out of high school (Akos et al., 2015).

Research indicates that, on average, students continue to grow academically during their time in middle school, but there is an interruption in learning trajectories for students in the areas of math and reading (Akos et al., 2015). This negative impact on learning outcomes is difficult for students to overcome as they progress in school. Therefore, to better address the interruption in growth trajectories, district leaders must attend to sociodemographic moderators while simultaneously meeting the academic, developmental, and social needs of students (Akos et al., 2015). This requires a multifaceted approach that provides culturally responsive instruction and interventions (e.g. CR programs) for students at risk of not graduating on time.

Understanding the root cause of the transitional challenges is an ongoing task due to the rapid personal growth and change students face during the transition from

middle school to high school (Akos et al., 2015). The most successful transition programs incorporate a multifaceted approach that address academic, developmental, and social challenges (Akos et al., 2015; Uvaas & McKeivitt, 2013). In addition, the most successful transition programs consider sociodemographic moderators such as minority, low-income, males, students from single parent families, and students in special education (Akos et al., 2015). All of these factors contribute to interruptions in the academic growth of students. Akos et al. (2015), further contend:

Any disruption in growth supports the recurring call for more attention to developmental (e.g. puberty, the development of abstract thinking, emotional, and self-regulation) and contextual changes across the elementary to middle school transition...Furthermore, interruptions in expected growth should raise concern about the lack of continuity between the elementary and middle school context. (p. 193)

The creation of effective transition programs allows building leaders to address challenges and disruptions to students' academic trajectories (Akos et al., 2015).

Dropout prevention. There is also a growing body of research, pertaining to dropout prevention programs, that is closely related to CR programs. While several dropout prevention programs show promise, only two – Accelerated Middle Schools (AMS) and Check & Connect – appear relevant to this study. WWC (2008) defines dropout prevention programs as “...initiatives that aim to keep students in school and encourage them to complete their high school education” (p. 1). Like transition

programs, these interventions provide a range of services, including counseling, mentoring, curriculum redesign, and community services that alleviate challenges for students at risk of dropping out of school (WWC, 2008).

While the target audience for the Spartan Academy was students in grades nine through 12, the target audience for AMS include those who are behind grade level while in middle school. According to the WWC (2008), this intervention provides students with small class sizes, tutoring, attendance monitoring, counseling services, and family outreach. Moreover, middle school students at risk of dropping out receive an additional year of curriculum that is covered during students' one to two years in the intervention. The WWC (2008) claims this intervention has potentially positive effects on staying in school and positive effects on progressing in school.

Unfortunately, the lack of research pertaining to AMS does not make it a viable option to incorporate into CR programs. However, elements of the program (e.g. counseling services, family outreach, etc.) can be incorporated into ELANCO's new CR program.

The target audience for Check & Connect includes both middle and high school students at risk of dropping out. Check & Connect can thus help students throughout their time in middle or high school. According to the WWC (2008), the Check & Connect intervention supplements general curriculum with tutoring on an as needed basis. In addition, Check & Connect support services include monitoring attendance, case management, and family outreach. The WWC (2008) contends that Check & Connect has positive effects on staying in school and potentially positive

effects on progressing in school. However, a more recent study (Heppen, Zeiser, Holtzman, O’Cummings, Christenson, & Pohl, 2018) found that the Check & Connect program did not have any statistically significant impact on engagement, academic progress, dropout prevention, or graduation. Again, while this program may not be ideal for ELANCO’s CR program, elements of Check & Connect (e.g. case management, family outreach, etc.) can be incorporated into the district’s new CR program.

Types of Credit Recovery Programs

Districts that offer CR opportunities invest significant resources to help keep students in school and on-track to graduate (Powell, Roberts, & Patrick, 2015). The WWC (2015) identifies three main types of CR: traditional, online, and mixed. Over the last decade, online CR programs have gained in popularity (Rickles et al., 2018). However, online CR programs are no more effective than traditional face-to-face (f2f) programs. By expanding CR options, however, districts can take advantage of available technology to personalize a student’s path toward on-time graduation (Rickles et al., 2018).

Traditional credit recovery. Many traditional CR programs, such as after-school and summer school programs, require students to remain in the regular education setting. To accelerate the number of credits earned, students complete additional courses outside of regular school hours during f2f sessions. As students pass courses, they earn credits toward graduation. One of the primary benefits of

traditional CR programs is the ability for students to meet f2f with a certified teacher (WWC, 2015; Rickles et al., 2018). This format mirrors what the students experienced the first time they took the course. Conversely, one of the greatest drawbacks is the slow, synchronous, and arduous pace (WWC, 2015; Rickles et al., 2018).

Online credit recovery. Over the last decade, districts have shifted toward online CR programs (Rickles et al., 2018). Online CR programs offer a variety of benefits. Foremost, online CR programs offer a great deal of flexibility (Archambault et al., 2010; Rickles et al., 2018). Students can complete course work completely online or receive some f2f support. The presentation of content is digital and individually paced, offering interactive modules that allow students to test out of previously mastered content (Rickles et al., 2018). The cost-savings of online CR programs to districts is also significant (Picciano & Seaman, 2009). Another benefit identified in two separate studies – Atkins, Brown, and Hammond (2007) and Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, and Watson (2015) – is that online CR options allow more students to get back on-track and on a path to on-time graduation.

Mixed credit recovery. The final method of CR identified by WWC (2015) is a mixed approach (i.e. blended or hybrid learning) that incorporates elements of traditional and online CR programs. Of the three models, this approach most closely resembles the model that ELANCO strives to attain through *ELANCO Online*. In this approach, schools combine the best features of traditional and online learning environments to deliver personalized and differentiated instruction (Powell et al.,

2015). This provides students with the flexibility of an online program and the added benefits of meeting f2f with teachers and in-class monitors (Rickles et al., 2018).

According to the U. S. Department of Education (2014), students with access to a combination of f2f and online instruction (i.e. blended learning) excel in relation to peers who have exposure to only one method of instruction. The teacher's role is critical in a blended setting because they establish a mentoring relationship with their students (Powell et al., 2015). This relationship eases the transition to blended learning environments, which may be new to students at risk of not graduating on time. Powell et al. (2015) contend that early identification of academic struggle, coupled with remedial f2f support from teachers, counselors, and administrators yields great success in blended programs.

Best Practices in Credit Recovery

Rickles et al. (2018) argue, "The path to graduation can be arduous for many students and failing core academic courses during the first year of high school is a strong signal of trouble to come" (p. 481). Therefore, being on-track often predicts success in high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The more credits students earn during their ninth-grade year, the greater their chance of graduating. Therefore, early identification of academic challenge during the first years of high school is crucial. This allows districts utilizing blended learning to provide immediate interventions, such as CR programs, to students who fail courses.

Research suggests that there is no single best approach for CR. For example, Stallings et al. (2016) compared outcomes between CR students enrolled in North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS) (i.e. an online CR program) and non-NCVPS schools (i.e. f2f CR programs). They found little difference in student outcomes when it came to end-of-course exam scores. However, NCVPS students were less likely to graduate, but those who did graduate were more likely to graduate in four years (i.e. on-time graduation).

Stallings et al. (2016) also found that the minorities enrolled in online CR were less likely to reach proficiency on state assessments. At ELANCO, minority students made up nearly 20% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy. All these students were economically disadvantaged and failed to reach proficiency on Pennsylvania's state assessment (i.e. Keystone Exam). Similarly, Rickles et al. (2018) found no statistically significant differences in long term outcomes (i.e. math credits earned over four years and on-time graduation) between students in online and f2f courses.

Blended Learning. Powell et al. (2015) suggest a blended learning environment shows the greatest promise for student success because it combines the best of f2f and online learning. There are four blended learning models identified in research: rotation, flex, a la carte, and enriched virtual (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). The rotation model involves students rotating from one station to the next, often experiencing f2f, independent work, and collaborative work throughout a single class (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). According to Christensen, Horn, & Staker

(2013), the flex model utilizes the teacher as a facilitator. Online learning is the foundation for student learning in this model. Students can be in the brick-and-mortar setting, yet students complete work at their own pace and utilize the teacher for assistance as needed. In the flex model, students move through the course at their own pace and according to their needs. In the a la carte model, students complete work online either in the brick-and-mortar setting or entirely online. In this model, the teacher of record is an online teacher. Students in the a la carte model may take some courses f2f in the brick-and-mortar setting and others online (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). At ELANCO, these students would be considered part-time online students and part-time brick-and-mortar students. In the enriched virtual model, students are required to attend several f2f sessions with their instructor. However, the bulk of the coursework is completed online and independent of the teacher of record.

On-Track Indicators. Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) on-track indicator shows that improvements in credit accumulation are highly predictive of whether students graduate on-time (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Therefore, it is incumbent upon districts, like ELANCO, to utilize data, formative assessments, and performance-based assessments to guide student learning (Powell et al., 2015). In addition, districts must provide academic and behavior supports so students can accumulate as many credits as possible during the first year of high school.

According to Allensworth and Easton (2005, 2007), a student's academic performance during the first year in high school is the strongest predictor of eventual

graduation. Therefore, an on-track indicator that allows districts to accurately project student success, coupled with support systems (e.g. transition and dropout prevention programs) that help students get on-track and on a path to on-time graduation, are the most effective practices. The recent focus on more rigorous college and career readiness standards underscores the importance of a successful transition (Rickles et al., 2018). Until transition programs adequately address freshman failure and dropout rates, schools must continue to provide a variety of CR opportunities that allow students to recover course credit for classes they previously failed.

School Counselor. Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) suggest the role of the school counselor is essential in CR programs. However, the role of school counselors in CR programs is largely passive, often limited to referring students to CR programs. Tromski-Klingshirn and Miura (2017) argue that school counselors must take an active role in CR efforts, invoking both protective factors (e.g., social support, monitoring and mentoring, personal and social skill development) and risk factors (e.g., academic instruction, academic support). Specifically, school counselors must integrate themselves into instructional leadership teams, which will allow them to “advocate for, and intervene with failing students” (Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017, p. 2). Moreover, Bleuer and Walz (2002) assert academic support is one of the school counselor’s primary roles in dealing with underachieving students, which aligns with the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) framework.

Opponents of Credit Recovery

Credit recovery has become a polarizing issue among practitioners and researchers due to a perceived lack of rigor and graduation rate inflation (Capone, 2017). Foremost, opponents of CR programs point to the lack of academic rigor in CR courses (Burke, Chapman, & Monahan, 2013; Finn, 2012; Murin et al., 2015; Pondiscio, 2014). Burke, Chapman, and Monahan (2013) claim CR programs are nothing more than "...a wink, a nod, and a diploma." Finn (2012) claims that colleges and employers do not value CR because course completion does not equate to true mastery of content. Considering that many f2f CR programs have students repeat the same course, this argument would suggest that curriculum is not aligned to rigorous standards (i.e. Common Core). Arguments against online CR options are even more pointed. Murin et al. (2015) believe that online providers offer quick alternatives that lack academic rigor. Ravitch (2012) suggests online CR programs are fraudulent, "...the student gets credit, the corporation makes money, the school raises its graduation rate...the graduation rate means nothing..." (p. 1).

As ELANCO considers an online CR option, via *ELANCO Online*, these concerns must be acknowledged and investigated through a formal program evaluation of the Spartan Academy. ELANCO's graduation rate increased to 95 percent since the Spartan Academy was implemented. This figure far exceeds the national average (83 percent). How much students really learned in the Spartan Academy is unclear. According to DePaoli, Balfanz, Atwell, and Bridgeland (2018), "...the challenge is

understanding when these courses support a competency-based approach (i.e. learning the part of the courses that led to student failure) and when they represent a short-cut that results in fast-tracked results, but little to no quality learning” (p. 35). These practices have rightfully added to the skepticism over rising graduation rates at ELANCO and across the nation (DePaoli et al., 2018). The results of the Rickles et al. (2018) study suggest that minimal content is acquired by students completing online CR. Still, it is impossible to understand the true impact of CR programs, like the Spartan Academy, without thorough program evaluations and more research (DePaoli et al., 2018).

METHOD

The purpose of this section is to describe the context, participants, procedure, and instruments of the study.

Context

There are several approaches to CR implemented by high schools – f2f, blended, and online. The Spartan Academy was an online CR program that had initial success at increasing students’ average number of credits per semester. However, the Spartan Academy was never formally evaluated. Therefore, a mixed-methods study was undertaken to evaluate the impact of the Spartan Academy on students at GSHS. This approach was selected because it calls for the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. This provides a deeper understanding of the Spartan Academy by connecting qualitative and quantitative data. According to Hanson,

Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, and Creswell (2005), mixed-methods research is especially useful for gaining a more complex understanding of a particular topic (e.g. credit recovery).

Four research questions were answered as a result of this study. Specifically, this study addressed: 1) What are stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO? 2) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track? 3) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements? 4) To what degree and in what ways can credit recovery integrate into the district's existing online programming (e.g. EOL)? The study's sample included ninth through twelfth grade students enrolled in the Spartan Academy for at least one semester. This also analyzed administrative data for all students (n = 65) enrolled in the district's CR program.

Participants

Participants in this study were 65 former Spartan Academy students from GSHS. I analyzed historical administrative data of all participants. Of this sample, 39 (60%) were male and 26 (40%) were female. In addition, 53 (81.5%) were Caucasian, six (9.2%) were African-American, four (6.2%) were Hispanic, and two (3.1%) were Asian/Pacific Islander. All participants of the quantitative portion of the study were recruited to participate in the qualitative (i.e. student survey) portion of the study. Of this final sample (n=10), seven (70%) were male, three (30%) were female. Seven (70%) were Caucasian, two (20%) were African-American, and one (10%) was

Hispanic. In addition, all final sample participants were current students at GSHS who participated in the Spartan Academy.

Procedure

I obtained an agreement to access data, via the district's student management system (SMS), by ELANCO's Assistant Superintendent. I analyzed data for all students (n=65) enrolled in the Spartan Academy for at least one semester. In addition, I obtained informed consent (Appendix B) from parents or guardians, so their child could participate in an interview. I also obtained student assent from all interview participants (Appendix C). All participants were volunteers. I invited them to complete an interview about the Spartan Academy. Interview participants had an age range of sixteen to nineteen. There were 65 students that received an invitation to participate in an interview; however, just 10 students provided assent. The selection of participants was purposive, and recruitment was ongoing during the spring semester of the 2018-2019 school year. The intent of the interview was to gain a deeper understanding of student perceptions, positive and negative, of the Spartan Academy.

Administrative Data Review. I reviewed historical administrative data upon receiving the agreement to access data from the Assistant Superintendent. I retrieved data from ELANCO's student management system, PowerSchool. Specifically, I accessed student names, grades, demographic data, and academic data – both current and historical. I collected and analyzed data throughout the spring semester of the 2018-2019 school year. Then, I analyzed quantitative data using Statistical Package

for Social Sciences (SPSS). Specifically, this data determined the extent of relationships between variables to quantify the impact of the Spartan Academy. Quantitative data files were anonymized and stored on the University of Delaware's secure server.

Student Interviews. Qualitative data was collected using a purposive sampling of off-track students who were enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Potential participants were solicited in a variety of ways, including personal phone calls, face-to-face conversations, mailed fliers to all families that had a child enrolled in the Spartan Academy, and emails. Parent/Guardian permission, Student Assent, and Parental Consent documents were sent, via the United States Postal Service, to families of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Upon their completion and return, student interviews were conducted in person at GSHS using an audio recording device. The opening protocol was read, outlining the interview process. The voice recording device was initiated, and the interviews were conducted during the school day in the GSHS office. After the interview questions were completed, the closing protocol was shared with the students and they returned to class. Finally, interviewees were entered into a random drawing for one of four \$25 gift cards as a way to incentivize participation. Interviews were then transcribed and coded using elements of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) *Grounded Theory*. Finally, qualitative data files were anonymized and stored on the University of Delaware's secure server.

Instruments

Student Interviews. Student interview questions were generated by the principle investigator (PI) and with the assistance of committee member, Dr. Robert Hampel. In addition, the questions were based on the work of Jacobs and Furgerson (2012). There were eight questions with a varying number of probes for each question. Probes were initiated, as needed, to gain a deeper understanding of student perceptions when responses were limited. The interview questions included:

1. Tell me about your academic experience at Garden Spot High School.
2. Tell me about your experience in the Spartan Academy.
3. Tell me what you liked best about the Spartan Academy.
4. Tell me what you liked least about the Spartan Academy.
5. Tell me about your interactions with the Spartan Academy monitors.
6. How did your participation in the Spartan Academy affect you academically?
7. Tell me how the Spartan Academy could have been improved.
8. What else would you like to share with me about your experience in the Spartan Academy?

The first question established rapport by asking a general question about the student's academic experience at GSHS. Questions two through four sought to gain an understanding of student perceptions of the Spartan Academy, with specific attention to likes and dislikes of the program. Question five pertained to the Spartan Academy monitors and the students' relationship with their respective monitor. Question six

explored the students' perception of the impact the Spartan Academy had on their academic career at GSHS. Finally, questions seven and eight sought to identify improvements to the program as the district integrates CR into its existing EOL programming.

RESULTS

The evaluation of the Spartan Academy was guided by the study's four research questions: 1) What are stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO? 2) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track? 3) To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements? 4) To what degree and in what ways can credit recovery integrate into the district's existing online programming (e.g. EOL)? The results from this mixed-methods study are presented with respect to quantitative and qualitative analyses, which address the research questions.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analyses were conducted with responses from the student interviews. Of the 65 participants, 10 provided qualitative responses. Interviews lasted from three minutes to eight minutes in length. In this study, elements of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) *Grounded Theory* were used to analyze student responses. Prior to this qualitative analysis, I believed the most frequent responses would relate to incentives associated with the Spartan Academy.

To better understand the qualitative data, open coding was used in which student responses were broken down into one-word or short phrases. Open coding was used as audio recordings were reviewed. Open coding identified 95 codes within the responses, which were also analyzed using concept/theme generation (i.e. axial coding) to identify codes that were related from student to student. All related codes were classified among concepts. The final concept list included the following terms: boredom, incentives, content mastery, inconsistent workload, work at your own pace, goal setting, poor attitudes, working independently, fear of failure, online classes, difficult transition, motivation, and teacher support. These interrelated concepts were grouped into broader themes, which were then selected and reviewed. The result was one prominent theme and two less prominent themes. The prominent theme was motivation, while the two less prominent themes were the transition to high school and teacher support.

Motivation. The theme of motivation emerged, either directly or indirectly, in all student interviews. Illustrative quotes included but were not limited to: “I could go at my own pace. When I finished the class, there was a reward. I could leave”; “I could work independently, do my own thing, and move on”; “I liked that the courses were online, because I could go at my own pace”, and “When you met your weekly goals you would have Friday off. It was nice because it allowed you to leave and go home and that made me try harder”.

Students also described motivation in more general terms. For example, students discussed being motivated at the prospect of graduating with their friends and graduating on time. Students also mentioned how online GradPoint classes in the Spartan Academy allowed them to complete courses faster than a traditional classroom setting. In addition, students discussed the daily and weekly incentives where students who were on track and progressing through their courses could leave early on a daily basis and not have to come to school on Friday if their academic goals were met. Still others mentioned that the ability to work at their own pace motivated them to realize success because this allowed them to focus on one class at a time. Multiple students stated that they enjoyed success after exiting the program because they were motivated to achieve on-time graduation.

Two less prominent themes also emerged from the data – the transition to high school and teacher support. The transition to high school revealed participants' fear of failure, which led to poor attitudes among some of their peers. Two students alluded to the fact that they were not prepared for the academic rigors of high school. An illustrative quote was: "Ninth grade was a difficult transition for me. I didn't do any of my work and was failing most of my classes". These students found success by focusing on one course at a time in the Spartan Academy. In regard to the traditional classroom setting, one student stated that she had difficulty in large classes.

The second less prominent theme, teacher support, revealed participants' appreciation of immediate and one-on-one support from Spartan Academy monitors.

Illustrative quotes included but were not limited to: “Any time I needed help, my teacher was right there to help”; “I needed the one-on-one help”; “The teacher was right there”; and, “The teacher was there, so they could help right away”. Collectively, this analysis of qualitative data addressed the first Research Question – What are stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO?

Quantitative Analysis

The results of the quantitative analysis are provided in the tables that follow. Specifically, historical administrative data for 65 students enrolled in the Spartan Academy were analyzed in this study. Descriptive statistics for all variables were analyzed and presented in Tables 1 and 2. The rationale for analyzing descriptive statistics was to characterize specific historical data for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Specifically, measures of central tendency (i.e. mean) characterized data according to points on a distribution. In addition, measures of variation (i.e. standard deviation) were also utilized to show differences among observed scores and the mean of each variable. In general, this allowed the PI to determine commonalities that emerged within state assessment scores and PVAAS data for students who were enrolled in the Spartan Academy.

Table 4*Assessment Results for Students Enrolled in the Spartan Academy*

	<i>n</i>	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	<i>M</i> (SD)
PSSA-Math (6)	33	989	1618	1326.4 (136.9)
PSSA-Math (8)	51	730	1548	1094.9 (239.7)
Keystone Algebra 1	54	1384	1540	1474.7 (37.7)
PVAAS-Math	65	0.01	99.9	18.5 (32)
PSSA-Reading (6)	34	851	1546	1247.3 (167.7)
PSSA-Reading (8)	51	795	1608	1118.9 (206.6)
Keystone Literature	48	1377	1567	1477.7 (44.6)
PVAAS-Reading	65	0.01	99.9	19.9 (34.3)

Table 1 shows the assessment results for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy ($n = 65$). There was a downward trend among state assessment scores between grades six and eight. In Math, the mean score decreased from elementary school to middle school but increased in high school. Similarly, in Reading, the mean score decreased from elementary school to middle school but increased in high school. Participants scored higher, on average, on the Literature Keystone Exam (1477.7) as opposed to the Algebra 1 Keystone Exam (1474.7). This indicates that, generally, Spartan Academy students had stronger reading scores than math scores.

Table 5

Assessment Results for Students Enrolled in the Spartan Academy who were Eligible for Graduation

	<i>n</i>	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	<i>M</i> (SD)
PSSA-Math (6)	14	1159	1618	1346.0 (125.2)
PSSA-Math (8)	23	1074	1548	1311.2 (129.6)
Keystone Algebra 1	28	1384	1540	1479.5 (39.1)
PVAAS-Math	29	0.01	0.01	0.0 (0.0)
PSSA-Reading (6)	13	1088	1416	1265.0 (111.0)
PSSA-Reading (8)	23	989	1608	1276.2 (151.9)
Keystone Literature	26	1401	1559	1486.8 (41.1)
PVAAS-Reading	29	0.01	0.01	0.0 (0.0)

Table 2 shows the assessment results for students enrolled in the Spartan Academy who were eligible for graduation ($n = 29$). In general, Spartan Academy students had stronger reading scores than math scores. There was a converse trend among state assessment scores as students progressed from elementary to middle school. In math, the mean score decreased from 1346 to 1311.2. Conversely, in reading, the mean score increased from 1265 to 1276.2 as students progressed from elementary to middle school. Again, participants scored higher, on average, on the Literature Keystone Exam (1486.8) as opposed to the Algebra 1 Keystone Exam (1479.46).

Table 3 combines data from Tables 1 and 2. Table 3 provides insight to the academic performance of the average Spartan Academy student (Table 1) and those

who realize on-time graduation (Table 2). On average, participants who graduated on-time scored higher than the average Spartan Academy student in all assessment areas. The largest differences were seen in eighth grade PSSA-Math (M8) scores (+216.29) and between PSSA-Reading (R8) scores (+157.27).

Table 6
Average Assessment Results for Students Enrolled in the Spartan Academy

	Mean (n = 65)	Mean (n = 19)	Difference
PSSA-Math (6)	1326.4	1346.0	+19.6
PSSA-Math (8)	1094.9	1311.2	+216.3
Keystone Algebra 1	1474.7	1479.5	+4.8
PVAAS-Math	18.5	0.0	-18.5
PSSA-Reading (6)	1247.3	1265.0	+17.7
PSSA-Reading (8)	1118.9	1276.2	+157.3
Keystone Literature	1477.7	1486.8	+9.1
PVAAS- Reading	19.9	0.0	-19.9

In addition to measures of central tendency, measures of frequency were used in this analysis. Frequencies were examined to show how often students who were enrolled in the Spartan Academy graduated on time. The frequencies for on-time graduation are presented in Table 4. This information addresses the second research question - To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements?

Table 7

Frequency of Outcomes for student eligible to graduate from the Spartan Academy

	Frequency	Percent (%)
On-time Graduation	19	65.6
No Graduation / Enrolled	2	6.9
Graduation not on-time Drop Out / No Graduation	2	6.9
	6	20.7

As observed in Table 4, 19 students (65.6%) eligible for graduation realized on-time graduation after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy. Data for these 19 students, specifically, were identified and reviewed for commonalities. The data of students who realized graduation, but not on-time, after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy ($n = 2$) were identified and reviewed. Then, the data of students who were enrolled in the program and eligible to graduate but did not realize graduation after being enrolled in the Spartan Academy were also identified and reviewed ($n = 10$).

In addition, Table 5 identifies the number of students who increased the average number of credits per semester during each year of implementation. This shows the overall success of students in the Spartan Academy, and their ability to get back on track. Specifically, Table 5 addresses Research Question 2 – To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track? Overall, 90.6% of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy were able to increase their average number of credits per semester, which increased their ability to get back on-track and on a path to on-time graduation.

Table 8

Number of students increasing the average number of credits earned per semester

School Year	<i>n (%)</i>
2015 – 2016	19 (90.5)
2016 – 2017	35 (97.2)
2017 – 2018	23 (82.1)
Total	77 (90.6)

Finally, correlations between Math and Reading PVAAS projections and on-time graduation are presented in Table 6. Research (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Rickles et al., 2018) suggests that a student’s academic performance in mathematics and English-Language Arts is a harbinger of academic success and eventual on-time graduation, so data specific to these content areas were identified and reviewed for all participants. Table 6 indicates a significant relationship between Reading PVAAS projections and on-time graduation ($r = .985^{**}$). In addition, this study suggests a significant relationship between math and reading PVAAS projections ($r = .552^{**}$). While this does not imply causation, it does further support the argument that students’ academic performance in mathematics and English-Language Arts is a harbinger of academic success and eventual on-time graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Rickles et al., 2018).

Table 9*Correlations between Math/Reading PVAAS Projections and On-Time Graduation*

	On-time	PVAAS-M	PVAAS-R
On-time	1	. ^b	.985**
PVAAS-M	. ^b	1	.552**
PVAAS-R	.985**	.552**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

b. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

DISCUSSION

Convergence of Mixed-Methods Findings

This study was the first effort to formally evaluate the Spartan Academy at ELANCO. The study was guided by four research questions, which led to four recommendations for the future of CR at ELANCO. In general, data from this mixed-methods study underscores the importance of CR opportunities for students at ELANCO. For example, the qualitative findings suggest participants in this study prefer incentives to motivate them to succeed and graduate on time. It should be noted that all students who participated in the qualitative portion of this mixed-methods study and were eligible to graduate at the conclusion of the 2018-2019 school year, will graduate on time. Two additional themes emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis that align with extant research. Students need support as they transition into high school. The monitors in the Spartan Academy provided needed support to students in the CR program. Specifically, students valued the level of support via one-on-one attention and the ability to get immediate feedback from Spartan Academy monitors.

In addition, the quantitative analysis revealed significant relationships between on-time graduation and Reading PVAAS projections, and between Math and Reading PVAAS projections. These significant relationships support the research of Allensworth and Easton (2005) and Rickles et al. (2018). Moreover, 90.6 percent of the students enrolled in the Spartan Academy increased their average number of credits per semester. This signifies that the CR program accelerated the students' path to on-time graduation.

Recommendations

Again, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the Spartan Academy by addressing four research questions:

1. What are stakeholder perceptions of online credit recovery at ELANCO?
2. To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students get on-track?
3. To what extent did the Spartan Academy help off-track students meet ELANCO graduation requirements?
4. To what degree and in what ways can credit recovery integrate into the district's existing online programming (e.g. EOL)?

As part of this mixed-methods study, historical administrative data and student perception data were analyzed. The recommendations below seek to address the research questions found in this study. Generally, qualitative data indicated that students enjoyed program incentives and the level of teacher support available to those

enrolled in CR. Several students mentioned program incentives and the amount of adult support in the program.

Recommendation 1 – The ELANCO CR program should incorporate incentives to encourage an increased pace of credit recovery. Qualitative analysis in this study indicated that students were motivated by incentives within the Spartan Academy. Since that program has been eliminated, incentives should play a significant role in the EOL CR program. Students overwhelmingly preferred to leave school early if they were on track and meeting their weekly goals. This incentive should be incorporated into the district’s CR program. Moreover, analysis of quantitative data revealed a deeper understanding of the Spartan Academy’s impact on student motivation. Foremost, Table 5 revealed that 90.6 percent of students enrolled in the Spartan Academy earned more credits per semester while in the Spartan Academy than they did prior to enrolling into the CR program.

Recommendation 2 – ELANCO should enhance CR program incentives by allowing the customization of learning so that students can work at their own pace. Daniel Pink (2011) contends that individuals are motivated by three elements of intrinsic motivation – autonomy, purpose, and mastery. ELANCO must integrate these elements into its new CR program. Many students indicated during the interviews that they enjoyed the ability to work at their own pace and to finish courses early. Students also stated another motivation was to graduate with their peers and on-time. This

autonomy and purpose may have led to content mastery that allowed students to not only earn necessary credits, but to earn them at an accelerated rate.

Furthermore, 19 students who were enrolled in the Spartan Academy realized on-time graduation during its three years of implementation. In addition, there were significant correlations between students' Reading PVAAS projections and a students' ability to graduate on time. While these positive outcomes are strides in the right direction, more must be done to identify students who struggled in these content areas prior to reaching high school.

Recommendation 3: ELANCO should utilize an on-track indicator to identify students at risk of not graduating on time. Akos et al. (2015) suggest ninth grade is the make-or-break year for high school students. Early identification of students who are off-track early in their high school career allows districts to provide interventions, which can lead to on-time graduation. By incorporating ELANCO's Early Warning System with an on-track indicator ensures these students are identified early and will be supported as they transition to GSHS.

Recommendation 4: The ELANCO CR program must undergo annual evaluations. This study was the first formal evaluation of the Spartan Academy. It provided a glimpse of perceived strengths and areas of growth within the CR program. Annual evaluations can provide continuous data on the strengths and areas of growth of the CR program.

Limitations

This evaluation was not without limitations. Foremost, despite recruiting 65 Spartan Academy students to participate, the n value (n=10) was low for the qualitative analysis. In addition, the level of rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis could be called into question because the PI was the only individual to analyze and code the interview responses. No external auditor reviewed themes or reflected on the analysis of the qualitative data. In addition, it was not clear that all interview questions were understood by the participants. The interviews were also limited to current students, as no graduates agreed to be interviewed. Furthermore, interviews were short. For example, one interview was just over three minutes in length. This was due to the child having his wisdom teeth removed. However, it calls into question how much can be learned about in such a short amount of time. Despite these limitations, there are opportunities for future research, especially understanding what causes student success in online CR programs such as the Spartan Academy. Until more causal studies are completed, success in online CR programs will remain in question due to the perceived lack of rigor.

Conclusion

This study was the first formal evaluation of the Spartan Academy. Its purpose was to address the four research questions at the core of the study. The mixed-methods approach provided a deep understanding of the strengths and areas of growth of the online CR program. This information provides ELANCO the opportunity to integrate

areas of strength into the district's current online programming. Research suggests that online learning is generating new, innovative personalized learning approaches (Powell, Roberts, & Patrick, 2015). However, the increasing presence of online CR options has called into question the rigor of those programs. The lack of rigor in online CR options must be addressed by the implementation of more causal studies if districts are going to address the concern of graduation rate inflation. The simplest way to achieve this is through consistent formal evaluations. Scholars have noted the importance of early interventions, incentives to motivate students, and strong support. Findings in this study suggest that these are important variables to consider when working to promote online credit recovery. Future research can continue to clarify strengths and assets within this important intervention and contribute to the growing body of research about credit recovery as a path to on-time graduation.

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Appendix E

CREDIT RECOVERY POLICY

Book	Policy Manual
Section	100 Programs
Title	Credit Recovery
Number	124.1
Status	Pending Board Approval
Adopted	TBD

Purpose

The Board recognizes the value of a credit recovery program as an integral part of the district's educational programming. The board considers online learning programs an acceptable alternative method for students who have failed a course or failed to complete a course that is required to meet the Board's graduation requirements. [6]

Definition

For purposes of this policy, the credit recovery program shall be defined as any coursework that allows high school students to recover course credit for classes needed to meet graduation requirements.

Authority

The Board may grant credit toward high school graduation for course work successfully completed through approved online credit recovery programming and in accordance with this policy. [1][2][3][4][5][6]

Delegation of Responsibility

The building principal shall be responsible for reviewing and approving student applications for earning credit toward graduation through approved alternative instruction and/or credit recovery courses.

The building principal shall determine the number of credits assigned to such a course as part of the approval process before the student begins the course.

Guidelines

Students must be referred, in writing, to participate in the credit recovery program.

The content of courses must be included in the district's curriculum and be relevant to established academic standards.

Students who have failed a course that is required to meet the Board's graduation requirements may retake a comparable course through the credit recovery program or that portion of the class that was failed.

The assigned student grade for successfully completed work shall not be weighted for purposes of computing the student's grade point average, unless prior approval was granted by the building principal before the course work began.

The assigned student grade for successfully completed work in the credit recovery program shall not replace the student's original grade. The original failing grade will remain on the student transcript and will be factored into the student's overall GPA.

Legal [1. 24 P.S. 502](#)
[2. 24 P.S. 1525](#)
[3. 24 P.S. 1901](#)
[4. 24 P.S. 1903](#)
[5. 24 P.S. 1906](#)
6. Pol. 217
[7. 22 PA Code 4.41](#)

Appendix F

POSITION PROFILE

TITLE: Credit Recovery Monitor

DEPARTMENT: Eastern Lancaster County School District

LOCATION: Eastern Lancaster County School District

REPORTS TO: Coordinator of Non-Traditional Programs & Student Services

SUMMARY OF PURPOSE

This position is responsible for monitoring and tracking student progress for the district's credit recovery program. Credit Recovery Monitors provide support to students enrolled in the program by monitoring students' online course progress. The incumbent collaborates with teachers of record to ensure attainment of program goals and objectives in support of the ELANCO mission to provide a social and educational environment for the students.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

1. Maintains proficiency in the use of GradPoint and other online instructional programs used by ELANCO for the purposes of credit recovery.
2. Monitors and supports student use of GradPoint and other online instructional programs used by ELANCO for the purposes of credit recovery.
3. Monitors and tracks student progress and enrollment in ELANCO's credit recovery program.
4. Generates academic calendars for students enrolled in the district's credit recovery program.
5. Generates and monitors student data pertaining to academic and behavioral progress. Shares data reports with school counselors, building-level administrators, students, and parents on a weekly basis.
6. Collaborates with school counselors on tasks associated with GradPoint and credit recovery (e.g. student enrollment, course registration, system maintenance, etc.).
7. Collaborates with teachers of record, school counselors, and building-level administrators regarding student course completion status.
8. Performs a variety of clerical and technical-related tasks as assigned.
9. Advises building-level administrators of attendance or behavioral concerns for students enrolled in ELANCO's credit recovery program.
10. Assists in maintaining a safe, healthy learning environment that aligns with the ELANCO mission and core values.
11. Functions in a manner that serves as a role model to students in one's choices and actions.

12. Demonstrates the ability to use effective problem-solving skills and appropriate social interactions with students and staff.
13. Demonstrates professional ethics consistent with the ELANCO mission and core values.
14. Performs additional duties as requested by the ELANCO Substitute Teacher Service (STS) Coordinator or building-level administrators, which are consistent with the ELANCO mission and core values.

DEPARTMENT/ORGANIZATION

- Maintains proficiency in the use of GradPoint and other online instruction programs used by ELANCO for the purposes of credit recovery.
- Makes decisions consistent with the STS and ELANCO mission and core values, establishes and maintains effective communication and positive relationships within ELANCO.
- Performs other functions as assigned by the Coordinator of Non-Traditional Programs & Student Services.
- Maintains an optimum relationship with other staff members by being courteous and always mindful of the importance of confidentiality.

SCOPE AND IMPACT

This position works independently in the performance of the essential functions. Contacts include students, parents, teachers, administrators, and district staff.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

This position requires those set forth by STS.

SPECIAL SKILLS

Position requires the following skills: demonstrate proficiency with the Microsoft suite of office products, Adobe Reader, GradPoint, APEX, PowerSchool and other software; be highly organized; possess excellent communication skills; be highly confidential at all times; act as a team player; be flexible to work on multiple tasks; pay attention to detail; perform basic math; able to learn new skills; read and interpret periodicals, journals and regulations; maintain composure at all times and deal with constant change.

PHYSICAL/MENTAL/ENVIRONMENTAL

Physical: Sit: 80% walk/stand: 20%; moderate amount of stooping and kneeling

Lifting: Occasional light lifting of up to 25 pounds
Vision: Normal

Mental: Ability to define problems, collect and organize information, establish facts and draw valid conclusions to solve the problem/handle the situation and use clear and good judgment. Must be able to remain calm in what can become a stressful environment.

Environmental: Normal classroom environment with only moderate noise existing, not objectionable.

The above description covers the most significant essential and marginal functions but does not exclude other occasional responsibilities and accountabilities the inclusion of which would be in conformity with the major purpose of this job.

Appendix G

GARDEN SPOT MENTORS



GARDEN
SPOT MENTORS

Peer Mentor/Mentee Contract

(To be completed by Parent/Guardian)

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Relationship to Student: Mother ___ Father ___ Other, specify: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Application Questions:

Please answer all the following questions as completely as possible. If more space is needed use an extra sheet of paper. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your child's peer mentor.

1. What do you hope your child gains from *Garden Spot Mentors*?
2. Please describe any friendships and the peer group with whom your child identifies.
3. Is your child currently having any problems at home, in the community, or at school? If yes, please specify.

4. Has your child experienced any traumatic events that our Mentor Team should know about (i.e. death in the family, divorce, etc.)? If yes, please provide details.

5. Can you provide any additional background information that may be helpful to *Garden Spot Mentors* in matching your child with an appropriate peer mentor?

Voluntary Medical Information:

Completion of this section is not required, however, may be helpful for the Mentor Team to know.

Does your child have any physical problems or limitations?

Is your child currently receiving therapy, counseling, etc. from an outside agency?
Please list agency, therapist, and reason for treatment.

Please read carefully before signing:

Garden Spot Mentors appreciates your interest in mentorship. This application is intended as a means for gaining consent for allowing your child to participate in *Garden Spot Mentors*.

Much of the information you supply in this application will be used to match your child with an appropriate peer mentor. As a result, the Mentor Team may, at times, need to access and share this information with prospective mentors or other parties when it is in the best interest of the match.

After we receive the completed application, we will contact you regarding your child's acceptance into the mentoring program and provide you with contact information for your child's peer mentor.

Please initial the following:

_____ I give my informed consent and permission for my child to participate in *Garden Spot Mentors* and its related activities.

_____ I agree to have my child follow all mentoring guidelines and understand that any violation of my child's part may result in suspension and/or termination of the mentorship relationship.

I authorize Garden Spot Mentors to obtain any needed information regarding my child from his/her school's staff, including academic and behavioral records and conversations with teachers, counselors, and other administrative staff.

Finally, I understand the basic information about my child will be shared with a perspective peer mentor(s) to assist in determining a suitable match.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____



GARDEN MENTORS SPOT

Mentee Agreement

By choosing to participate in *Garden Spot Mentors*, I agree to:

- Follow all rules and guidelines as outlined by the mentor team, mentee training, and this contract.
- Have a positive attitude and be respectful to my peer mentor.
- Make a one-year commitment to being matched with my peer mentor.
- Make at least weekly contact with my peer mentor.
- Be on time for scheduled meetings.
- Discuss monthly meeting times and activities with the Mentor Team, and regularly and openly communicate with them.
- Inform the Mentor Team of any difficulties or areas of concern that may arise in the relationship with my student mentor.
- Participate in a closure process when the mentor/mentee commitment comes to an end.
- Notify the Mentor Team if I have any changes in address or phone number.
- Attend in-service mentee training sessions when scheduled. (This may include recognition banquets, speakers, or other activities and events.)

I agree to follow all the above stipulations of *Garden Spot Mentors* as well any other conditions as instructed by the mentor team at this time and in the future.

_____ (Please initial) I understand that upon match closure, when the mentor/mentee commitment comes to an end, future contact with my peer mentor is beyond the scope of *Garden Spot Mentors* and can happen only by the mutual consensus of the peer mentor, the mentee, and the mentee's parent/guardian.

Mentee Signature

Date



GARDEN *MENTORS* SPOT

Mentee Interest Survey

Name: _____ Grade: _____

By completing this survey, I am interested in connecting with a peer mentor.

Best method to contact me: (Check all that apply)

_____ Cell _____ Text _____ Remind Text _____ School Email

Cell #: _____ School Email: _____

I am available before school on the following mornings: M T W Th
F

I am available after school on the following days: M T W Th
F

Do you speak more than one language at home? Y / N – Language(s): _____

Do you have any siblings (names/ages)?

Do you have any hobbies/interests?

Schools you have attended:

Elementary: _____

MS: _____

HS: _____

What obligations do you have besides school? (Check all that apply)

_____ Work – Where? How many hours per week?

_____ GSHS Activities/Clubs – Please list:

_____ GSHS Athletics – Please list:

_____ Family – Do you take care of siblings, have chores, etc.?

_____ Community / Youth Group Activities – If so, please list:

Appendix H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introductory Protocol:

Hello! My name is Matt Sanger, I am a doctoral student from the University of Delaware. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. This interview should last about 20 minutes. I am here to learn about credit recovery options in Eastern Lancaster County School District. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your experience in the Spartan Academy. We have gained both your consent and that of your parent/guardian. There are no right or wrong answers. I want you to feel comfortable sharing your opinion. With your approval, I will voice record our conversation since it is difficult for me to type everything while simultaneously giving you my attention. Everything you share about the Spartan Academy will remain confidential. If, at any time, you would like to stop this interview, please tell me.

Collect Assent Form

Voice Recording Device

Rapport:

1. Tell me about your academic experience at Garden Spot High School.
 - a. Probe(s):
 - i. What motivates you to do well in school?
 - ii. Tell me how you have used your computer in school.

1. Tell me about your experience taking courses online (if applicable).

Spartan Academy:

2. Tell me about your experience in the Spartan Academy.
 - a. Probe(s):
 - i. What was your reaction to being placed in the Spartan Academy?
 - ii. What was your grade level when you entered the Spartan Academy?
 - iii. Tell me about taking classes online on GradPoint.
 1. Did you find GradPoint classes easier than traditional brick-and-mortar classes?
3. Tell me what you liked best about the Spartan Academy.
 - a. Probe(s): How often were you able to participate in the early release incentive?
4. Tell me what you liked least about the Spartan Academy.
 - a. Probe(s): Talk to me about the level of academic and behavioral support in the Spartan Academy.
5. Tell me about your interactions with the Spartan Academy monitors.
 - a. Probe(s): How did the academic/behavioral rubrics work?
6. How did your participation in the Spartan Academy affect you academically?
 - a. Probe(s): Approximately how many credits did you earn in the Spartan Academy?
7. Tell me how the Spartan Academy could have been improved.

8. What else you would like to share with me about your experience in the Spartan Academy?

Concluding Protocol:

Thanks again for taking time to meet with me. I appreciate your responses and your candor about the Spartan Academy. It may be necessary for me contact you again if I need further clarity when reviewing your responses. May I contact you if necessary? Thank you!

References

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(T&L Art, 6), 1-10. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/jacob.pdf>

Appendix I

SPARTAN ACADEMY ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

ID	Gender	IP/504	Ethnicity	PSSA-M6	PSSA-M8	K-A-1	STAR-M	PVAAS-M	PSSA-R6	PSSA-R8	K-L	STAR-R	PVAAS-R	PSSA-S8	K-B	On-Time	Year
Student 1	0	0	H	0	1500	1536	84	0	0	1266	1530	68	0	1328	1479	1	2018
Student 2	0	0	W	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 3	1	0	W	0	832	1443	39	0	0	1043	1505	33	0	1246	1419	0	0
Student 4	0	1	W	0	841	1433	17	0.1	1160	870	1394	37	19.9	1158	1456	0	0
Student 5	1	0	W	1211	804	1399	30	0.2	1274	928	0	43	39	1021	0	0	0
Student 6	1	0	W	0	730	0	13	0.2	0	801	0	9.6	0	1026	0	0	0
Student 7	1	0	W	1159	1325	1384	56	0	1301	1186	1487	30	0	1186	1453	1	2018
Student 8	0	1	W	1436	1203	1499	46	0	1301	1223	1425	25	0	983	0	4	0
Student 9	0	0	B	0	1389	1467	16	0	0	1205	1441	21	0	1129	1420	1	2017
Student 10	0	0	W	0	853	0	39	3.2	0	990	1481	44	0	1190	1446	0	0
Student 11	0	0	W	0	1407	1484	77	0	0	1391	1485	38	0	1382	0	2	0
Student 12	1	0	W	1240	1266	1509	76	0	1301	1471	1484	62	0	1161	0	1	2017
Student 13	0	0	W	1468	1548	1522	82	0	1367	1372	1524	54	0	0	1463	1	2018
Student 14	0	0	W	1315	915	1438	75	24.1	1235	1036	1455	78	92.2	1259	1450	0	0
Student 15	0	0	W	1383	880	1447	78	15.7	1255	903	1450	53	74.1	1299	1482	0	0
Student 16	0	0	W	0	1364	1472	49	0	0	1498	1519	36	0	1336	0	1	2017
Student 17	1	0	W	1465	950	1504	93	72.5	1421	1024	0	70	92.6	1448	1471	0	0
Student 18	0	0	W	1046	865	1452	57	8.9	851	928	1414	31	1.1	1122	1437	0	0
Student 19	0	0	H	0	0	1412	0	0	0	0	1477	0	0	0	1428	3	2017
Student 20	0	0	W	1348	1317	1506	73	0	1240	1354	1533	56	0	1389	1481	1	2018
Student 21	1	0	W	0	1139	1435	41	0	0	1015	1414	8	0	925	1433	1	2017
Student 22	1	0	W	0	1428	1495	55	0	0	1473	1498	28	0	1190	1453	1	2017
Student 23	0	1	W	1169	797	0	68	1.5	998	795	0	17	3.2	1153	0	0	0
Student 24	0	0	W	0	928	1518	75	96.7	0	1022	1530	65	87.6	1426	1470	0	0
Student 25	1	0	W	1267	1304	1524	55	0	1367	1608	1559	61	0	1358	1492	1	2018
Student 26	0	1	W	1267	1356	1517	82	0	0	1135	1401	50	0	1100	0	4	0
Student 27	1	0	W	0	1292	1468	31	0	0	1227	1528	49	0	1178	1448	1	2017
Student 28	1	0	W	1315	928	1522	81	61.9	1028	989	1491	29	52.7	1060	1510	0	0
Student 29	1	0	W	1452	0	1540	56	0	1088	0	1516	38	0	0	0	2	0
Student 30	1	0	W	0	901	1467	73	68.6	0	946	0	21	15.1	966	0	0	0
Student 31	1	0	W	1250	9115	1438	92	17.5	1315	1015	1511	52	91.1	1286	1464	0	0
Student 32	0	0	W	1240	1074	1460	45	0	1107	1135	0	23	0	1050	1463	1	2018
Student 33	0	0	W	1310	943	0	73	66.4	1039	876	0	49	35.5	1311	0	0	0
Student 34	1	0	W	1289	849	1484	70	74.9	1235	870	1482	32	50.7	980	1441	0	0
Student 35	1	1	W	1342	901	1476	82	58.5	967	958	1377	41	18.5	1146	1416	0	0
Student 36	1	0	W	1565	1090	1540	92	99.9	1514	1135	1567	86	99.9	1486	0	0	0
Student 37	0	0	W	1508	948	1502	92	98.6	1456	940	1473	75	83.9	1085	0	0	0
Student 38	1	0	API	1334	1241	1434	48	0	1107	1245	1437	27	0	1011	1430	1	2018
Student 39	1	0	H	0	1351	1477	55	0	0	1450	1504	57	0	1321	1490	4	0
Student 40	1	0	W	0	0	1416	0	0	0	0	0	1462	0	0	0	0	0
Student 41	1	1	B	0	0	0	38.9	0	0	1430	0	0	0	0	1480	0	0
Student 42	0	0	H	1442	955	1518	66	99.6	1546	983	1469	70	99.4	1509	1477	0	0
Student 43	0	0	W	0	860	0	82	35.8	1136	869	0	63	20.9	1215	0	0	0
Student 44	0	0	W	0	1241	1427	29	0	0	1245	1470	24	0	1037	1470	1	2018
Student 45	0	0	B	0	0	1497	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2018
Student 46	0	0	W	0	0	1494	0	0	0	0	1417	0	0	0	0	4	0
Student 47	0	0	B	0	0	1455	0	0	0	0	1500	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 48	0	1	W	1618	1533	1506	73	0	1367	1332	0	55	0	1273	1535	1	2018
Student 49	1	0	W	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1517	0	0	0	0	1	2017
Student 50	0	0	W	0	1316	1477	59	0	0	989	1465	14	989	984	0	4	0
Student 51	0	0	W	1468	1088	1506	62	0	1416	1179	1490	41	0	1173	1467	1	2018
Student 52	1	0	API	0	0	1429	0	0	0	0	1431	0	0	0	1457	0	0
Student 53	0	0	W	0	0	1487	0	0	0	0	1437	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 54	0	0	W	989	823	0	79	73.8	1064	941	0	69	93.9	1184	0	0	0
Student 55	1	0	W	1354	789	0	58	69.4	1421	939	0	67	77.7	1028	0	0	0
Student 56	0	0	W	1436	1304	1453	64	0	1367	1423	0	63	0	1260	1384	4	0
Student 57	0	0	W	0	1139	1428	30	0	0	1161	1463	28	0	1053	1405	1	2017
Student 58	0	0	W	1267	1383	1468	65	0	1301	1354	1507	50	0	1300	1532	4	0
Student 60	0	0	W	1211	832	1455	38	8.9	1216	952	0	48	47.5	1195	0	0	0
Student 61	1	0	W	1328	841	1510	60	80.4	1465	1057	0	55	94.5	1233	1470	0	0
Student 62	0	1	B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1440	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student 63	0	0	W	0	0	1476	55	0	0	0	1544	46	0	0	1495	3	2017
Student 64	0	0	B	0	0	1465	0	0	0	0	1484	0	0	0	0	4	0
Student 65	0	0	W	0	857	1452	63	24.9	0	1029	1516	0	0	1299	1480	0	0

Appendix J
IRB APPROVAL



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: February 1, 2019

TO: Matthew Sanger
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [1361571-1] Credit Recovery as a Path to On-Time Graduation

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: February 1, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE:
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (5,6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Renee Stewart at (302) 831-2137 or stewartr@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.