

**Academic Acceleration 8.5 Program
for Overage Middle School Students**

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Key words: **Academic Acceleration for Overage Middle School Students**

Funding Sources:

Fortunately, due to the size and scope of the program, no additional operating expenses have been incurred.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

N/A

Project Description:

Palm Beach County Schools has a total enrollment of 192,533 students in Pre-K through twelfth grades. The district operates a total of 180 schools: 109 elementary, 34 middle, 23 high and 14 alternative centers. Overage students at the middle school level have been identified as at-risk, and the 8.5 Academic Acceleration Program was created at three of our alternative schools. Approximately 150 overaged eighth grade students were identified and enrolled in a combination of middle and high school courses, enabling these students to enter the ninth grade with five or more high school credits. This head start on earning high school credits has afforded these students the opportunity to complete their high school graduation requirements in an accelerated manner (three-year versus the normal four-year requirement).

Staffing Pattern:

The alternative schools participating in this program normally serve secondary students in grades 6 – 12. The teachers are highly qualified, and no additional staff was required.

Population Served:

The demographics at one of the alternative sites are listed below:

Gender	Grade	Age	Race
F - Female	08	15 years 5 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 9 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 9 months old	B
F - Female	08	15 years 4 months old	B
F - Female	08	15 years 6 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 1 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 6 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 9 months old	B
F - Female	08	15 years 1 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 6 months old	B
M - Male	08	15 years 6 months old	B
M - Male	08	15 years 4 months old	B
M - Male	08	16 years 3 months old	B
M - Male	08	15 years 3 months old	B
M - Male	08	15 years 2 months old	B
M - Male	08	15 years 5 months old	B

M - Male	08	14 years 9 months old	B
M - Male	08	14 years 12 months old	B
M - Male	08	14 years 11 months old	B
M - Male	08	14 years 9 months old	B
F - Female	08	14 years 6 months old	H
F - Female	08	15 years 11 months old	H
F - Female	08	15 years 11 months old	H
F - Female	08	15 years 11 months old	H
M - Male	08	17 years 2 months old	H
M - Male	08	15 years 8 months old	H
M - Male	08	14 years 12 months old	H
F - Female	08	16 years 6 months old	W

Race/Gender	Enrolled
Black Female	10
Black Male	10
Hispanic Female	4
Hispanic Male	3
White Female	1
Average age = 15.2	
Oldest = 17.2	
Youngest = 14.1	

As previously stated, approximately 150 students were enrolled in three different alternative education settings. The students participated in an eight-period block schedule. A typical schedule is shown below:

Period	Course	Academic Level	HS Credits Earned
1	COMPUTER FUNDAMENTAL	HS Credit	1.00
2	INTENS READ 1	HS Credit	1.00
3	ETHNIC DANCE	HS Credit	1.00
4	M/J AVID 8TH	MS Credit	
5	M/J LANG ARTS 3	MS Credit	
6	PHY SCI HON	HS Credit	1.00
7	M/J US HIST&CAR PLAN	MS Credit	
8	LIB ARTS MATH 1	HS Credit	1.00
Support	SLP, SLD, 504	Support	
		Total Credits	5.00

Project Origination:

This program was initiated by Ms. Elaine Hubbard-Williams, Director of Palm Beach County School's Support Services Department. Once approved by the district's Chief Academic Officer (CAO), the following steps were taken to ensure its introduction and implementation during the 2019-2020 school year.

- Middle School Principals were contacted regarding the 8.5 Program option.
- A list of eligible students was created using the district's SIS system.
- Marketing brochures informed administrators, parents and students.
- Parents of eligible students were contacted via letter, email and phone calls.
- Informational meetings were held to answer the parents' questions.
- District transportation routes were created/amended to accommodate the students.
- Instructional resources were ordered to support classroom instruction, as required.
- Students enrolled in the program were provided a thorough orientation.

Issues Addressed:

This program sought to reduce the behavior infractions committed by overaged eighth-grade students in the middle school environment, and to increase the confidence and self-esteem of these students when they promote to high school. Middle school can be a challenging timeframe for both parents and students; the students' growth, development and maturity levels play a significant role in their behavior. Additionally, many of the overaged middle school students display low motivation and low self-esteem which tends to compound their underachievement and contribute to their inappropriate behavior. The 8.5 Program, by design, accelerates these students' completion of Florida's high school graduation requirements. In most cases, the completion of accelerated courses in middle school can and will lead to an early high school graduation, and an increased likelihood of success at the post-secondary level.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The desired outcome of the Accelerated Academic 8.5 Program is to send the overaged eighth grade students to high school with five or more high school credits, hence, accelerating their trajectory towards high school graduation.

The measurable objectives include:

- Completion of the eighth grade with five or more high school credits
- Demonstrated growth in literacy, math, and reduced behavior infractions
- Enrollment in high schools with a clear path to early graduation

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

The eight-period day allows the students to enroll in accelerated core and elective classes with room for daily support in literacy and mathematics, while simultaneously providing the students with CTE, fine arts and practical arts classes that motivate and allow them to explore different areas of interest. With regard to the core classes, the teachers routinely use the following instructional strategies:

- Follow a scope and sequence that covers all of the core academic standards.
- Conduct formative assessments during and following each unit of instruction.
- Provide the students with ongoing feedback on their achievement levels.
- Hold Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to evaluate the students' performance and the efficacy of their instruction.
- During the PLCs, teachers plan and collaborate followed by the scheduling of both remediation and the delivery of upcoming content.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

Since the inception of the 8.5 Program, 99% of the participants entered the ninth grade with high school credits earned, and advanced courses completed. Longitudinal analysis is ongoing to evaluate the continued success of these students.

Project Timeline:

The Accelerated Academic 8.5 Program is designed to run the course of one academic school year. At the end of the year, the students are encouraged to enroll in a comprehensive high school setting and the receiving schools are provided with a blueprint that guides the students' continued growth at the high school level.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:

As the former principal of Riviera Beach Preparatory and Achievement Academy, I implemented a pilot version of the 8.5 Program in 2018. The results of this pilot showed that all 57 initial participants entered the ninth grade with at least five high school credits. Forty-one or 72% of these students have subsequently completed their graduation requirements in four years or less. Florida and the district's overall graduation rate exceeded this number; however, it should be noted that the students enrolled in the initial 8.5 Program were at-risk of dropping out and it can be assumed that this accelerated program prevented that. Data from the pilot program is shown in the following chart:

Program Outcomes	B	H	W	Other	Total
Enrollment	31	18	4	4	57
Graduated	74%	67%	50%	75%	72%
Adult Ed	10%	11%	0%	0%	9%
Whereabouts unknown	3%	11%	50%	25%	11%
Withdrawn to another county	13%	11%	0%	0%	9%

Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:

All of the instructional staff involved with this program were highly qualified, including the school counselor, family counselor, special education teachers and school administrators.

Current Status of Project: The Academic Acceleration 8.5 Program continues to grow as it approaches its third year. Several middle school principals have implemented an in-house

version of the program and the school district is 100% supportive of this effort to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

As a NDPS certificate program participant, and supervisor of four alternative education principals, I spearheaded this program by providing the curriculum support, handled the marketing and recruitment efforts, worked with middle school principals and parents to address their questions and concerns, monitored the progress of the students, and facilitated the students' placement in appropriate high school courses following their matriculation to the ninth grade.

Lessons Learned:

- Parents were concerned about the students attending an alternative school and frequent communications were required to overcome this concern.
- Transportation was unavailable in some remote areas; this made the program inaccessible to students in these areas.
- Due to the voluntary nature of the program, parents were initially reluctant to send their students.
- A limited number of seats created a first come-first served criteria for placement.
- Recruitment and marketing of the program must begin in the spring of each year to ensure that adequate time is available for parents to realize the benefits of the program.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

The Academic Acceleration 8.5 Program was a highly successful way to strengthen the academic success of our overage eighth grade students. After just one year, the first cohort of students enrolled in comprehensive high schools with enough high school credits to enable them to graduate with their kindergarten cohort or earlier.

Any important additional information not addressed previously?

This program has become a staple in the school district's strategy for addressing the graduation rate of at-risk students. Additionally, several of the middle school principals have implemented an in-house version of this program to enhance the education support of their overaged population. Finally, this program can be implemented with little or no additional funding, making it an extremely cost-effective way of addressing dropout prevention.