

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter conclusions are drawn from the results reported in Chapter IV. Student achievement; student attendance; and student, teacher, and parent satisfaction are discussed. Following the discussions are limitations of this study and recommendations for practice. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The Extended School Year Program was effective in improving student achievement. Student gains were reported in science, English-social studies six, English-social studies seven, and math. The Extended School Year Program was not effective in improving attendance. Attendance during the Extended School Year Program was lower than attendance during the regular school year for the school and lower than the school division average.

Students, parents, and teachers were moderately satisfied with the program. Students had the highest satisfaction with teachers and the lowest satisfaction with scheduling. Parents had the highest satisfaction with cost and transportation and the lowest satisfaction with communication.

Teachers had the highest satisfaction with the availability of material and the lowest satisfaction with student attendance, working conditions, and communication.

Discussion

Discussions of the findings are reported in this section. This section begins with a discussion of achievement and attendance results. Discussions for student, parent, and teacher satisfaction are divided by domain. For student satisfaction, schedule, instruction, transportation, discipline, teachers, general satisfaction, and technology are discussed. For parent satisfaction, schedule, communication, instruction, transportation, general satisfaction, and cost are discussed. For teacher satisfaction, schedule, training, student attendance, material availability, working conditions, relationships and student assessment are discussed.

Discussion of Achievement Gains

The reported gains in all four content areas were anticipated because of the focus of the program. Program goals were to extend and reinforce student learning, strengthen student achievement in the core subjects, actively engage students in the learning process, and increase student-teacher dialogue. The English-social studies curriculum with its emphasis on historical fiction; vocabulary within context; reading comprehension using maps, charts, and diagrams; test-taking strategies; and writing contributed to the gains reported in English-social studies six and English-social studies seven and eight. In math, activities that involved solving algebraic equations and regularly using math vocabulary contributed to the achievement gains. In science, activities that included experimental design, critical thinking, and laboratory investigations contributed to the achievement gains. Gains in math and science are also attributed to the use of graphs, tables, diagrams, and patterns. Test-taking strategies were another part of the instructional focus of the Extended School Year Program and most likely contributed to the reported gains, particularly in math and science.

Discussion of Attendance Results

Attendance results were lower than anticipated during the program. The low attendance potentially affected student achievement because teachers had no opportunity to address students' academic weaknesses. With better student attendance, achievement gains in all the core areas would likely have been higher. The low student attendance could also be attributed to poor communication and the absence of any incentive to attend or consequence for not attending.

Discussion of Student Satisfaction

An analysis of the student satisfaction survey results revealed student thoughts toward the 1999 Extended School Year Program. Because the survey was divided into seven domains, each domain will be discussed separately.

Schedule

Students were satisfied with the time they spent in their core classes. They were not interested in having more time in English, math, or science nor did they want the program to last longer than six weeks. Students revealed little interest in attending the Extended School Year Program in the evening. Students having time to enjoy their

summer days after the program and to have some summer remaining once the program ended contributed to their satisfaction with the current schedule.

Instruction

Students reported they enjoyed and learned more in subjects that offered student-centered activities. They had more satisfaction with the science and math activities that consisted of problem solving, investigation, and inquiry. Negative experiences with math in the past contributed to students indicating that they had no new interest in math even though they enjoyed activities used in math. Reading and vocabulary development in math and science, along with test-taking strategies, created greater confidence for students in those two areas.

Transportation

Riding the bus was one aspect of the program that was enjoyable. Transportation provided an easy means for attending the program and offered students a chance to talk with friends normally not seen during the summer. Lower marks were received on the location of the stops that were much farther away than the stops used during the school year. Because of this students had to leave their houses earlier to travel a greater distance to get to their bus stop.

Discipline

Students indicated that most students generally behaved in class. They indicated that student behavior during the summer program was better than student behavior during the previous school year. They felt safe during the summer. Small classes, active instruction, and a low tolerance by the administration toward behavioral problems were goals of the administration when creating the program. These contributed to student satisfaction with discipline.

Teachers

Teachers wanted students to have an enjoyable experience while working on basic skills during the summer. Adding faculty training, instructional delivery, and planning contributed to the high level of satisfaction students expressed toward their teachers and their teachers' knowledge of the subject material. Students liked the way teachers taught during the program; however, they did not believe that teachers during the summer program were better than their teachers during the regular school year.

General Satisfaction

Students were generally satisfied with the program. They agreed that the program was more enjoyable than regular school. The design of the Extended School Year Program (half-day, no grades, active learning, small classes, etc.) contributed to students' general satisfaction. Students indicated that they would sign-up again for the program next year.

Technology

Students did not feel they had opportunities to use more technology during the program than during the regular school year. However, students felt that technology was available and they improved their computer skills during the program. Students not being able to use the available technology in the same manner in which it was used during the school year caused lower student satisfaction with technology.

Discussion of Parent Satisfaction

An analysis of the parent satisfaction survey results revealed parent thoughts toward the 1999 Extended School Year Program. The survey was divided into six domains. Each domain will be discussed separately.

Schedule

Parents were satisfied with the existing Extended School Year Program daily and weekly schedule. They were in favor of making the program all day instead of half day and were not in favor of lengthening the program from start to finish. Parents suggested that it was important for their kids to feel like they still had a summer break even if they participated in the program.

Communication

Parents stated that they would like more communication on all aspects of the Extended School Year Program. Parents wanted to know more about why the program was offered to their child and how it would improve their child's school performance. They indicated a desire for better communication about what their kids were doing in class. Parents also wanted more information about the weekly schedule. The brochure describing the program and the assessment report at the end of the first three-week session was not enough information about the program or students' progress.

Instruction

One major focus of the Extended School Year Program was to attract good teachers who worked well with students during the school year. The teachers were trained and given material on curriculum, test taking skills, and hands-on learning. The training included the utilization of reading within every subject and the use of charts, graphs, and tables. Parents were pleased with the level of instruction their son or daughter received during the Extended School Year Program. Parents indicated that their children enjoyed English, science, math and social studies. Parents believed that as a result of the instruction during the Extended School Year Program, their son or daughter has a better understanding of the subject matter. Parents attributed their children's understanding of the subject matter to the instructional techniques used by the teachers.

Transportation

Parents were pleased with some aspects of the transportation provided for the program and unsatisfied with others. Parents were satisfied with the convenience of the transportation that made it easy for their children to attend, and student safety at the bus stops.

Parents were dissatisfied with the time they were required to have their children at the bus stops. Parents indicated that the distance from the bus stops to their homes created safety concerns, especially at the end of the program. Some stated that it was more convenient to take their child to school.

While the availability of bus transportation positively affected parent satisfaction, the distance from a student's home to the bus stop negatively affected parent satisfaction with transportation.

General Satisfaction

Parents stated that they would encourage participation in the following year's program. Most of the parents liked having their children in a supervised program during the summer. Some parents indicated that it was important for their kids to receive additional instruction during the summer.

Cost

Parent satisfaction with the program having no tuition attached was evident by their responses to the survey questions within the cost domain. While parents indicated

that their child attended because the program was free, parents were willing to subsidize costs related to ancillary activities. Parents indicated that they would be willing to pay for reading materials, field trips, science materials, and lunch. Parents indicated that their son or daughter would attend the program even if there were some price attached.

Discussion of Teacher Satisfaction

Teacher satisfaction was solicited utilizing a focused group interview. Teachers were satisfied with different aspects of the Extended School Year Program. Results are reported by domain. The six domains are discussed separately.

Schedule

Teacher satisfaction with the schedule differed based upon the type of scheduling category discussed: daily schedule and length of program. Like parents, teachers preferred the half-day format. This new format allowed the teachers and their students to enjoy their summer break even though they were still working and attending school. Unlike the daily schedule, teachers were not as satisfied with the length of the program. They thought six weeks was too long. Teachers referenced the drop-off in student attendance after the first four weeks of the program. Perhaps if the program were shorter in length, a larger percentage of students would have attended and worked to the very end of the program. This would have provided a more accurate measure of student success, as more students who took the pretest would have also taken the posttest.

Training

Training for the program was conducted by subject-area specialists and was required for all teachers working in the summer program. Because of this, teacher responses related to training varied by subject matter. However, all teachers felt they should be trained with techniques that have been effective with the type of students they serve.

Math teachers were more dissatisfied with the material and pacing guides received during training than other teachers. Math teachers felt the training did not address the needs of at-risk students and that the training was too advance. They also felt that no training was provided on what to do if their students were not at the anticipated level. Math teachers disliked the prescriptive pacing guide received for math instruction because it limited their ability to provide remediation for students who were several grade

levels behind. Instead, they had to find their own material for children experiencing difficulty. Curriculum inflexibility was a major source of teacher dissatisfaction.

Teachers of English and social studies were satisfied with their training because of the flexibility given in developing their lessons and teaching their students.

The science curriculum contained experimental design and lab research. Because both of these areas were the focus of instruction during the school year, science teachers were satisfied with the level of training and instructional materials. Science teachers were also satisfied with the flexibility they were given to create their lessons.

Student Attendance

Student attendance provided little satisfaction for teachers during the Extended School Year Program. No incentives or cost associated with the program and poor communication before, during, and after the program were reasons students did not to attend. Because of this, teachers felt that there was no commitment of the students.

Teachers mentioned bus transportation as another reason for poor attendance. Teachers felt that parents were inconvenienced by having to drop their kids off at an elementary school early in the morning. Instead of hassling with getting their kids to a bus stop, teachers thought parents would allow their children to stay at home.

Material Availability

Teachers had an abundance of materials to use throughout the program's six weeks. As a result, teachers were satisfied with the types of materials and sample activities they were provided to use within their classes during the Extended School Year Program. Teachers indicated that while computers were located in the classes, students were unable to use them in the same way they used them during the school year.

Working Conditions

Some teachers in the 1999 Extended School Year Program were dissatisfied with the rate-of-pay received. Their dissatisfaction resulted from knowing that they were expected to perform the same duties they performed during the regular school year for less money. New teachers who received comparable pay to their daily rate did not have the same dissatisfaction. All teachers expressed satisfaction with the size of the classes during the Extended School Year Program.

Another area that emerged from the group interview was dissatisfaction with student comfort. Teachers indicated that the building remained too cold throughout the program. They complained that cold temperatures within the classrooms created unnecessary distractions for students.

Relationships

Teachers were happy about relationships formed with students after only three weeks. Teacher-student relationships were a result of smaller classes and a need for each teacher to know as much as possible about their students so that they could facilitate the type of instruction each child needed. Because of this, teachers knew their students well after a short period of time.

Teachers felt better communication could have improved relationships between them and the parents. Parents could have been provided information about who would teach their child or more information about the program with a view toward establishing better relationships. Better relations with the parent could have improved student performance, as parents would have been more aware of the goals, objectives, and expected outcomes of the program.

Student Assessment

Teachers were not satisfied with the manner in which students were assessed. They found the assessment devices inadequate as they dealt primarily with reading and writing. This created confusion with parents about their child's work in math and science classes. In these classes, there was no place to record student progress. Teachers felt that students were not assessed often enough. Being assessed at the end of the three-week session did not communicate the type of information the teachers wanted parents to have. Instead, teachers felt that parents should know (from pretest results) weaknesses and what would be done to correct them. At the end of the three-week period another report could be sent to show progress. Teachers felt that more frequent communication could have given parents a more realistic view of what their children were doing and how well.

Limitations

In conducting this evaluation of the Extended School Year Program, several limitations existed. One limitation was the number of students that took the pretest and posttest in each subject area. Because the Extended School Year Program rules allowed for three absences before a student was dropped from the program, many students took the pretest and were dropped before taking the posttest. Because of this, fewer data were available for the achievement measures. In addition, attendance calculations relied on the number of students enrolled in the program after the first week. Once these students missed three days, they were dropped from the rolls but still counted toward the average daily membership (ADM). As a result, a lower rate of attendance was reported for the Extended School Year Program.

Pretests and posttests were also limitations for this study. Because the tests had to be created, there was no existing reliability and validity data. Reliability testing showed the math and science tests to be reasonably reliable. Neither of the English-Social studies tests were found reliable.

Another limitation was the delay from when the program ended (August 1999) and the distribution of the parent satisfaction surveys (April 2000). This affected the researcher's ability to locate parents of all students who participated in the program and parental response to the survey instrument.

Recommendations for Practice

Although gains in student performance were recorded and student, parent, and teacher satisfaction was high, several revisions could improve the program.

The curriculum should be flexible enough to allow for different student levels. This additional instructional time that is afforded students during the Extended School Year Program should not be so basic that students are bored or so difficult that students are "turned-off." Instead, teachers should develop instruction that appropriately challenges all students. In developing the curriculum, teachers should also consider past performance of the students.

Varying student abilities should also be considered when training teachers for the Extended School Year Program. Training should include the use of different strategies and resources that could be used once a student's ability has been determined. With this

method, teachers would be better able to determine student progress based upon the student's entry-level skills.

Communication was another program component that should receive more attention from program developers prior to implementing an Extended School Year Program. A plan for communicating program goals, expected outcomes, progress, transportation, behavioral expectations, and other pertinent information should be given special attention. Clear, full communication promotes a commitment to the program from parents that in turn increases the commitment of students. Students may attend more regularly and put forth more effort on tests if they have a commitment to the program.

Strengthening student attendance is another key component for improving student benefits from the Extended School Year Program, and it must be given attention by program developers. Any aspect of the Extended School Year Program that could influence student attendance should be studied. For example, transportation was only available to students who could get to the elementary feeder schools. Because of this, students whose parents had no way to get them to a feeder school walked or caught rides with someone else from their neighborhood. Some of the parents indicated that this system defeated one of the purposes for having their children in a summer program: supervision. If there are large numbers of students who could benefit from such a program, then transportation should be made available at as many locations as possible to remove barriers for attending students.

When designing this type of program, emphasis should be placed on hiring teachers who believe they can teach any child and can work applied learning into their daily lessons. Applied learning occurs when students have the opportunity to relate what they learn to real-world situations. Program developers should provide competitive compensation to attract such teachers. With more competitive compensation, program developers would be able to attract teachers who have experienced success with the types of students, attending the Extended School Year Program, during the regular school year. This would eliminate teachers who are inexperienced with regards to working with at-risk students prior to the Extended School Year Program.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several topics for future research emerged from this study. First, this study could be expanded to all middle schools operating an Extended School Year Program. The study could be conducted by the district's research and planning department to remove any bias that might exist by those administering or coordinating the program.

Second, the study could be redesigned to examine how student participation in the Extended School Year Program affects attendance and academic achievement in the core subjects during the most recent year following participation in the program. To have an impact on student achievement and attendance, the Extended School Year Program must be able to improve student performance and improve attendance during the school year when ability and achievement testing usually occurs. Otherwise, the extra instructional time has a minimal affect on academic success.

Third, this study could be the basis for designing a longitudinal study of how participation in the Extended School Year Program affects student performance on the eighth grade Standards of Learning Tests. It is important to measure the long-range affects of the Extended School Year Program on student success by following participating sixth graders to the end of their eighth grade year to evaluate their performance on the eighth grade Standards of Learning tests. Without this type of measurement, program organizers would not know if the program has lasting effects.

Fourth, this study could be the basis for designing a longitudinal study of how participation in the Extended School Year Program affects student performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning End-of-Course Tests. With the increased level of accountability that school divisions, teachers, students, and school administrators face with today's standards, there is a need to research efforts that positively affect student performance. If the program can increase the academic ability of participating students while in middle school, teachers can focus more of their instructional time on teaching and reinforcing skills for upcoming Standards of Learning tests instead of spending time remediating students.

Fifth, all pretest and posttest need more development and further testing so that each test is more reliable over time. The researcher should be able to compare results of

the tests used during the Extended School Year Program to tests used during the school year to measure student growth.

Finally, this study could be revamped to assess whether the program was targeted for and used by the students for whom the program was intended. Such a study could identify stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, program developers, and School Board members to determine if the program accomplished the intended objectives. Such an evaluation could include stakeholder interviews instead of focus group interviews and surveys.

Summary

Conclusions, discussions, limitations, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research were included Chapter V. Following this chapter are references, appendixes, and the researcher's vita.