

Crossing the Road Transitional Program

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The move from middle to high school is one of the most important transitions a student can make. Blackman Middle School developed the *Crossing the Road Transitional Program* to make sure every child could meet this challenge. Our middle school students can see Blackman High School just across the road, but if they are struggling, it can seem like a very long way.

Our immediate goal was to provide academically at-risk students with the skills to become successful in both middle and high school, but we also wanted to give students a vision for the future. *Crossing the Road* won a Tennessee School Board Association Award of Excellent Education Program for our students' academic achievements in the program and that gives us confidence that our students have a better chance for success in life as well.

DESIGNING FOR SUCCESS

We considered keeping children after school for extra work, but decided that a six-week summer program gave us more flexibility in planning activities outside the classroom. We designed *Crossing the Road* in collaboration with teachers from Blackman High. They met with Blackman Middle School teachers for a week before the program began to decide on the courseware for the program. In these sessions, the middle school teachers looked at the students' end of year test scores to identify areas of weakness, while the high school teachers provided information on areas where freshmen students tended to need improvement. The teachers all agreed that reading was the most appropriate fit because improvement would increase confidence and boost performance in other subjects. To staff the program, we recruited both middle and high school teachers, and selected them both for their enthusiasm and commitment to helping every student succeed.

We decided to use literacy intervention software, specifically the Academy of READING and Academy of MATH, to bring rapid results, keep students interested and give teachers the time to work directly with individual students who needed help the most. Using software programs allowed students to focus directly on the areas where they were weak and helped them to become proficient quickly. Working on their own, with guidance from middle and high school teachers, the students could progress at their own rate. The software also

provided constant positive reinforcement and called for teacher intervention as necessary.

The results were immediate and dramatic. After just six weeks, students experienced a 1.4 grade level improvement in their reading ability. In math skills, 8th grade students had an increase of 22.3% on the computation test and 20.3% on the pre-algebra test. The 7th grade students' computation test scores increased 23.2%, while pre-algebra test scores went up 15.8%.

Even better, the results proved to be sustainable. We waited a year, until the students had completed the first year of high school, and then looked at their marks. There was an average increase of more than ten percent from their 8th grade marks.

As well as winning the 2004 Excellent Education Program award, Blackman Middle School was the only one of 48 Blackman County and Murfreesboro City schools to show value-added gains of 100% in all subjects at all grade levels in the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program in 2003-2004.

Awards and high rankings are nice to get, because they validate what we have done and motivate us to do better, but the deepest satisfaction comes from giving middle school students the best possible start in high school and in life.

A SETTING FOR SUCCESS

We went out of our way to create an enjoyable atmosphere. We provided transportation to and from school, and the daily lunch menu always featured food they enjoyed. Every Friday was an activity day, with field trips in the community. Local corporations were generous with their time, welcoming our students and explaining what they could look forward to in the working world.

In the classroom, certificates for improved work proved to be terrific motivation, and the children took them home to share with their families. They were always very proud to share their success with others.