

The Effects of CMCD[®] on a Reconstituted Ninth Grade Academy

Abstract from:

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Abstract

Need. Across secondary schools in Texas, on average, students repeat eighth grade at a rate of 1.5%, but repeat ninth grade at a rate of 12.3% (Stutz, 2010). Ninth graders in urban schools across the U.S. are also prone to these negative outcomes (Neild & Balfanz, 2006) and those who repeat ninth grade are less likely to graduate (e.g., Swanson, 2006). Although it is commonly thought that requiring students to repeat the ninth grade will result in improved academic performance, data contradicts this assumption. Ninth grade repeaters continue to struggle meeting academic standards (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Due to a low percentage of classes passed, repeater ninth graders in large urban areas often drop out of school because of insufficient credits accrued toward graduation (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Additional findings indicate that ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the highest frequency of failing grades, and more office discipline referrals than any other high school grade level (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). These findings frame the ninth grade as a significant challenge to academic achievement and socially constructive behaviors particularly when one examines data for ninth grade repeaters (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Neild, 2009).

Context. Educational policy makers in an effort to improve ninth grade student achievement and behavior have emphasized creating separate ninth grade buildings, zero tolerance behavior rules and school reconstitution, requiring most teachers and administrators to tender their resignations, usually after several failed attempts to “turnaround” student achievement. The outcomes of the reconstituted schools however are often mixed (Araujo, 2009; Malen, Croninger & Muncey, Redmund-Jones, 2002; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Rice & Croninger, 2005) with some schools being reconstituted again and other closed or merged.

The present study was conducted at a reconstituted school, located in temporary buildings. More than 90% of the teachers and administration were new to the school with 80% of the teachers having less than five years teaching experience and 61% those being first year teachers. Students from the Ninth Grade Academy had an economically disadvantaged rate of 96% and the control group students had a rate of 89%. The students included in the study were majority Hispanic. In the Reconstituted Academy group of students, 90% were Hispanic and 10% were African American. In the control schools group, 60% were Hispanic and 40% were African American. For both the Reconstituted Academy and control group, males and females were equivalent at 50% each.

CMCD Intervention. Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline[®] is a pro-social classroom management intervention, founded on humanistic and person-centered principles (Rogers, 1951, 1969; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Freiberg 1999). CMCD incorporates behavioral, instructional, and organizational management strategies intended to increase student acceptance of personal responsibility for learning and decrease student office disciplinary referrals. CMCD provides teachers, administrators, students, and school staff with the tools needed to build a community within their classrooms and schools. The program improves student achievement by emphasizing positive school and classroom climates, characterized by student engagement, student self-discipline, effective management of instructional time, and school connectedness (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009).

Study. The study examines the academic and behavioral effects of the CMCD intervention as a school-wide reform in a reconstituted ninth grade academy. CMCD was implemented during the 2008-2009 school year with professional development and individualized/team coaching implemented throughout the year. To measure academic effects of CMCD, this study examines two cohorts of students: first-time ninth graders (494 total students) and repeater ninth graders (93 total students) and their matched district control groups. Reading/English language arts and mathematics sections of the ninth grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores were compared for both first-time and repeater students. To measure the effects of CMCD on student behavior, the number of minor and severe office discipline referrals was recorded for two time periods: fall and spring of the same academic year as prior data would be valid given the changes in the teacher and administrative core.

Findings

Academic. First-time ninth graders from the Reconstituted Academy (CMCD) improved their passing rate in mathematics from 57% to 63% between the spring 2008 administration and the spring 2009 administration; comparison group passing rates went down from 63% to 53% (a trend that matched the district decline). There was a net difference of 10% for the CMCD School. In reading, first time ninth graders from the Reconstituted Academy (CMCD) improved their passing rate from 80% to 81% between spring 2008 and spring 2009; comparison groups' passing declined from 90% to 83% (similar to district trends). There was a net difference of 8% for the CMCD School compared to the controls.

Ninth grade repeaters were analyzed separately. Repeaters from the Reconstituted Academy (CMCD) improved their passing rate in mathematics from 13% to 38% between the spring 2008 administration and the spring 2009 administration; comparison group passing rates went from 15% to 24%. In reading, repeating ninth graders from the Reconstituted Academy (CMCD) improved their passing rate from 52% to 81% between spring 2008 and spring 2009; comparison groups' passing rate rose from 58% to 66% (mirroring district trends). Effect size gains were moderate for the first time ninth graders and strong for the repeaters in both mathematics and reading.

Behavioral. The number of office discipline referrals in fall 2008 (September – December) was compared to the number of referrals in spring 2009 (January – April), after the implementation of CMCD in the reconstituted academy. Over the course of the year, Level I (less severe) office discipline referrals decreased 30% (from 777 referrals in fall 2008 to 545 referrals in spring 2009). Level II (severe) office discipline referrals decreased 45% (from 108 in

fall 2008 to 59 in spring 2009), with significantly fewer incidents of fighting, aggressive behavior/threats, illegal behavior/weapons/drugs, and destruction/theft of property.

Conclusions. Implementing a comprehensive management program affects change through many mechanisms including teacher-student relationships, school connectedness, school/classroom climate characterized by trust and respect, student engagement, and student self-discipline (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). The results indicate that both first-time and repeater ninth graders receiving CMCD intervention experienced a statically significantly increase in reading and mathematics TAKS against the control groups. Decreases in office discipline referrals were seen within the intervention group as well. Teachers who need to spend less time with student discipline actions have more teaching time, and students have more learning time during a critical academic period. The decreases recorded in office disciplinary referrals after CMCD intervention, benefit disruptive students and the classroom community climate overall. Students in a person-centered learning environment achieve more, self-monitor, and self-motivate because appropriate social conditions engender an experience of the freedom to learn (Rogers, & Freiberg, 1994).

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