Student Support Services:
Comprehensive Evaluation

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Comprehensive Evaluation
Report
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VIRGINIA BEACH
CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
CHARTING THE COURSE

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Executive Summary

On September 1, 2015, the School Board approved the Student Support Services (SSS) Evaluation Readiness Report including the program goals and objectives, the evaluation plan, and the recommendation concerning evaluation of the program. The recommended evaluation plan included a comprehensive evaluation of SSS during the 2015-2016 school year. This evaluation report was based on the School Board approved plan. The comprehensive evaluation focused on the implementation of three SSS programs: individual services, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep Academy. It examined how the three programs were implemented during 2015-2016, as well as the characteristics of participating students, progress made toward meeting the goals and objectives developed for each program, stakeholders' perceptions, and the additional cost of SSS in 2015-2016. The evaluation was based on both quantitative and qualitative data that were collected through surveys, provided by SSS program managers, and extracted from the Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) data warehouse.

Key Evaluation Findings

Operational Components

➢ Fourteen full-time student support specialists were employed in 2015-2016 to serve VBCPS middle and high schools as part of SSS.

➢ Among their responsibilities, student support specialists mentor identified students, work to ensure successful and efficient transitioning of students between alternative education programs and comprehensive middle and high schools, and implement appropriate interventions for students identified as being at-risk.

➢ Student support specialists are generally assigned to two or three schools. Therefore, when a specialist is working at one site, he or she is unavailable elsewhere to his or her clientele.

➢ Student support specialist caseloads were found to vary markedly in size. The total number of cumulative contacts that a specialist had with relevant stakeholder groups – students, school staff, and parents – also varied significantly.

➢ The student support specialists received training in the job-related curricula and procedures that are used in VBCPS upon employment; however, the specialists do not receive regularly scheduled professional development opportunities, although they are encouraged to attend relevant in-service sessions in the schools they service.

➢ One-to-one, individualized student support services are provided to middle and high school students who are at risk in an effort to help them resolve behavioral, academic, and/or attendance issues.

➢ For individual services, the Office of Student Leadership (OSL) was the single largest referral source, accounting for more than a third (36%) of all referrals.

➢ The Choices program is intended to be implemented in VBCPS as a five-week, ten-session instructional program for students who consistently demonstrate inappropriate behaviors, excluding truancy, that interfere with learning.

➢ For Choices, building administration was the largest referral source, accounting for 79 percent of referrals.

➢ Choices is intended to be implemented in VBCPS as a well-defined, curriculum-driven intervention consisting of ten 50-minute *Second Step* sessions at middle school or ten 55-minute *Reconnecting Youth* sessions at high school scheduled over a five-week period.

➢ Implementation of the Choices program was found to vary from school to school. Further, the intended VBCPS implementations were found to utilize subsets of lessons and materials available from the publishers.

➢ In collaboration with Norfolk State University, Spartan Prep Academy is a college awareness program for high school students who aspire to enroll in institutions of higher education upon their high school graduation. Spartan Prep includes enrichment workshops, special events, and field trips over the course of the school year and the summer to help students pursue college admission and possible scholarships or financial aid.

➢ Most Spartan Prep participants were recommended by school administrators, counselors, and teachers; however, students may initiate the application process themselves or at the urging of a parent or guardian.

Student Characteristics

➢ During 2015-2016, 1,429 students received individual services, 353 students were referred to the Choices program, and 168 students participated in Spartan Prep Academy. Students could receive services in more than one of the programs during the school year.

➢ More high school students (872) than middle school students (557) received individual services, while more middle school students (294) than high school students (59) participated in the Choices program.

➢ Of the 1,627 individual students who participated in at least one of the three SSS programs evaluated, 66 percent were male, 55 percent were African American, and 58 percent were economically disadvantaged.

➢ Among the Spartan Prep Academy students, the vast majority of students were African American (84%), and another 11 percent were multiracial. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the Spartan Prep Academy students were female, while 45 percent were male.

Progress Toward Meeting Goals

➢ Six goals involving 19 specific, measurable objectives were developed for this evaluation. The first four goals applied to SSS individual services, the fifth goal applied to the Choices program, and the sixth goal applied to Spartan Prep Academy.

Goal 1: Individual Services Student Behavior

➢ During the 2015-2016 school year, 77 percent of the students who received individual services met the program goal of having no more than three referrals during the time of service.

➢ Additional program goals were met as 95 percent of the students who received individual services succeeded in reducing the number of in-school suspensions and 98 percent reduced the number of out-of-school suspensions following individual services.

➢ Approximately 97 percent of middle school student survey respondents and 98 percent of high school student survey respondents reported that they felt their behavior had improved as a result of having received individual services from SSS specialists.

➢ Among the respondents to the staff survey, approximately 68 percent of middle school and 76 percent of the high school administrators and counselors agreed that behavior improved after a student received individual services. In addition, 73 percent of high school teacher respondents but only 42 percent of the middle school teachers agreed that a student's behavior improved after the student received individual services.

Goal 2: Individual Services Student Attendance

➢ Approximately 60 percent of all students receiving individual services met the program goal of having six or fewer unexcused absences after receiving individual services.

➢ Of the 2015-2016 students who received individual services, 97 percent persisted in school by being enrolled in VBCPS during 2016-2017 without dropping out.

➢ Approximately 96 percent of middle school and 94 percent of high school respondents to the student survey reported that they felt their attendance improved following individual services.

➢ Among the respondents to the staff survey, approximately 68 percent of middle school and 74 percent of the high school administrators and counselors agreed that attendance improved after a student received individual services. In addition, 67 percent of high school teacher respondents, but only 59 percent of the middle school teachers agreed that a student's attendance improved after the student received individual services.

Goal 3: Individual Services Academic Performance

➢ The majority of students at the middle and high school levels (58% and 53%, respectively) met the program's academic goal of passing all of their core courses when participating in individual services.

➢ Approximately 94 percent of middle school and 93 percent of high school respondents to the student survey reported that they felt their academic performance improved following individual services.

➢ Among the respondents to the staff survey, approximately 68 percent of middle school and 79 percent of the high school administrators and counselors agreed that academic performance improved after a student received individual services. In addition, 69 percent of high school teacher respondents but only 38 percent of the middle school teachers agreed that a student's attendance improved after the student received individual services.

Goal 4: Individual Services Student Self-Efficacy

➢ Approximately 70 percent of students met the self-efficacy goal by receiving a classification of "successful" on the Rubric for Evaluating Student Success.

➢ Approximately 94 percent or more of middle and high school respondents to the student survey agreed with each of the following statements:
   - "I care more about doing well in school."
   - "I feel better about myself as a person."
   - "I feel better about myself as a student."
   - "I am more likely to accept responsibility for my behavior."

➢ Among the administrators and school counselors who responded to the staff survey, approximately 76 percent at middle school and 71 percent at high school agreed that "the climate in my school has improved . . . because of the individual student services provided to participating students in my school."

➢ While 63 percent of high school teachers agreed that SSS individual services had contributed to improving the climate at their schools, only 43 percent of middle school teachers shared that perception.

Goal 5: Choices

➢ Of the 353 students referred to Choices, 252 students (71%) completed the program successfully by attending all required Choices sessions.

➢ Among those 252 students who completed the Choices program:
  • Discipline referrals declined for 66 percent of the middle school students and 65 percent of the high school students.
  • In-school suspensions declined for 80 percent of the middle school students and 64 percent of the high school students.
  • Out-of-school suspensions declined for 91 percent of the middle school students and 75 percent of the high school students.

➢ From 84 to 100 percent of student survey respondents reported that participation in the Choices program helped them feel more confident in their ability to solve problems, manage their anger, make decisions that keep them out of trouble, and make better choices when faced with conflict.

Agreement Among Choices Students with Survey Statements Related to Problem Solving, Anger Management, and Decision Making
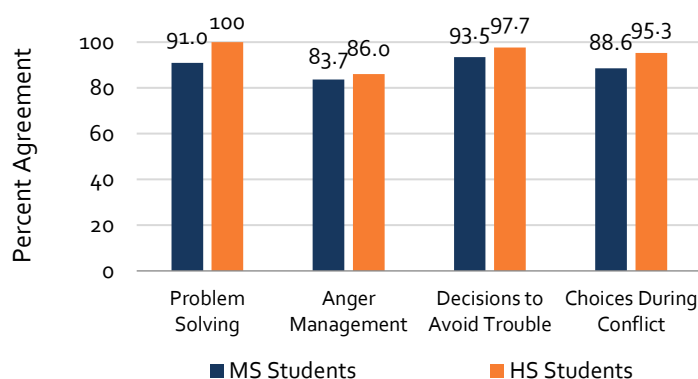
➢ When the staff survey asked if Choices had helped participating students to manage their anger, high school administrators and counselors, as well as teachers, had higher agreement levels compared to their middle school counterparts.

**Agreement Among Students and Staff
That Choices Helped Students to Better Manage Their Anger**
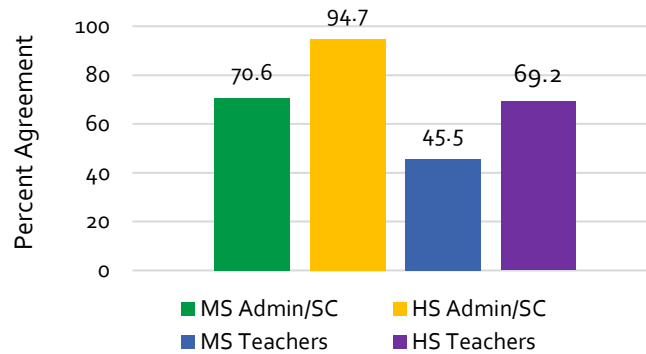
- ➢ Results of another set of survey items showed that nearly all students agreed that the Choices program had increased their awareness of how the choices they make affect their own lives, other people's lives, and their own futures. Agreement levels were lower for staff groups when asked their perceptions of how the Choices program affected students' awareness, with the exception of high school administrators and counselors.

**Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness
of How Their Choices Affect Their Own Life**
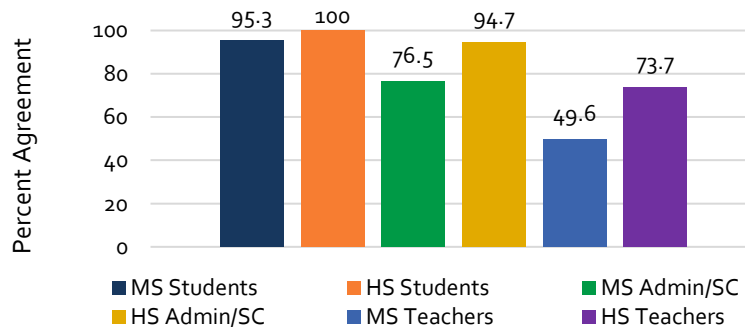
**Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness
of How Their Choices Affect the Lives of Others**
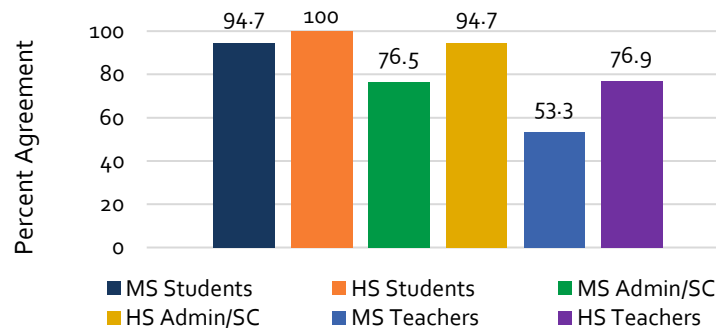
Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness of How Their Choices Today Will Affect Them Later

Percent Agreement

MS Students: 97.9
HS Students: 100
MS Admin/SC: 73.5
HS Admin/SC: 94.7
MS Teachers: 44.6
HS Teachers: 71.1
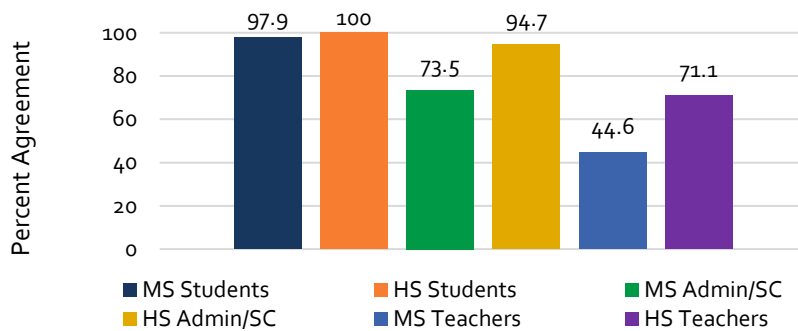
Goal 6: Spartan Prep

➢ During 2015-2016, 45 of the 172 high school students of Spartan Prep Academy were seniors.

➢ All 45 of these students (100%) graduated on time in 2015-2016, with 32 of the students (71%) having taken a course load that enabled them to graduate with an advanced diploma.

➢ Of the 45 seniors, 42 students (93%) completed high school with a cumulative GPA of at least 2.3, with 27 of the students (60%) earning a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher (i.e., an A or B average).

➢ In the fall of 2016, 80 percent of the Spartan Prep graduates enrolled in college.

➢ Approximately 96 percent of the graduates completing Spartan Prep agreed that being part of Spartan Prep strengthened their desire to enroll in an institution of higher learning.

➢ All Spartan Prep graduates who responded to the survey (100%) agreed that participating in the program fostered an understanding of the relationship between doing well in high school and attending college.

➢ Among the building administrators, counselors, and teachers who responded to the staff survey, 100 percent agreed that participating in Spartan Prep had strengthened students' desire to attend college and that it helped students understand the relationship between doing well in high school and attending college.

Stakeholder Perceptions

➢ Overall satisfaction with the three SSS programs was highest among students and lower among staff members.

➢ While staff members' satisfaction with individual services was similar at the middle and high school levels, satisfaction with the Choices program varied by level. High school administrators and counselors, as well as teachers, were more likely to indicate that they were satisfied with the Choices program than their middle school counterparts.

Student and Staff Overall Satisfaction with SSS Components in 2015-2016
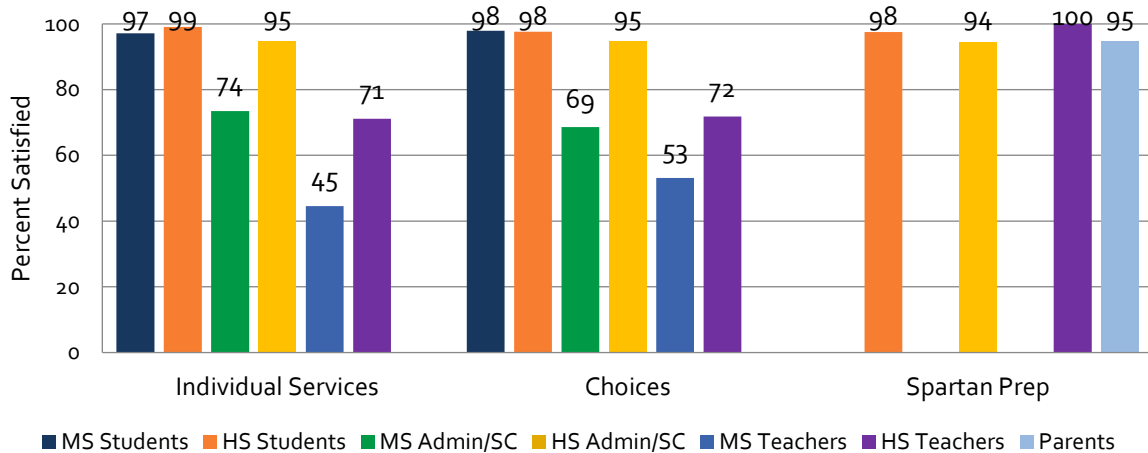
Additional results from the staff survey indicated the following:

➢ Staffing: Among the building administrator and school counselor group, 45 of the 69 survey respondents (65%) answered an open-ended survey question about how to improve SSS by indicating that they need at least one full-time student support specialist assigned exclusively to their school.

➢ Communication: When asked in an open-ended survey question about the role and responsibilities of the student support specialist in their school, approximately 15 percent of the teacher respondents expressed a lack of knowledge about the individual services program, 18 percent expressed a desire for more communication and coordination between the student support specialists and instructional staff, and 25 percent expressed a belief that individual services are understaffed.

➢ Choices Program Length and Frequency: Among all staff members completing surveys, 73 percent indicated in response to Likert-type survey questions that the five-week length of Choices was too brief, and 46 percent suggested that two Choices sessions per week were too few.

➢ Professional Development: Of the seven student support specialists who responded to the specialists' survey, four answered an open-ended question regarding how the effectiveness of specialists might be increased by indicating that their performance would be enhanced by more frequent opportunities for high-quality, job-related professional development. Similar sentiments about the value of high-quality, job-related professional development were expressed during a subsequent focus group attended by 12 specialists.

Additional Costs

➢ The cost of SSS, including individual services, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep Academy, was based on expense records from the Alternative Education budget and estimates of personnel costs based on additional FTEs and average salaries and benefits provided by the Office of Budget Development.

➢ The additional cost of SSS was approximately $852,979 in 2015-2016.

➢ Of those SSS-related costs, 99 percent were due to personnel salaries and benefits.

Recommendations and Rationale

Recommendation #1: Continue the Student Support Services program and develop a plan to add staff as funding permits. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning)*

Rationale: The three SSS programs that were included in this evaluation provide vital services to at-risk students. Most of those students are behaviorally at-risk students who receive individual services or participate in the Choices program. Others are the Spartan Prep Academy students who are at risk of not persisting through high school graduation in order to attend college. These SSS programs not only benefit the recipients but positively affect the climate of the entire school.

The results of the interrupted time series analysis, as well as analysis of other SSS-related outcome data, provide significant and substantive evidence that SSS intervention and support efforts are effective. However, the positive effects diminish over time which may be due to not providing services in a consistent and timely manner or when the services are not sustained.

The evaluation findings suggested that one of the greatest challenges to effective, consistent, and sustained implementation involved SSS staffing. Current staffing levels necessitate assigning a specialist to multiple schools. The vast majority of program improvement suggestions stemmed from student and staff perceptions that SSS programs would be even more effective if each student support specialist were more consistently available to the students and staff at each site. Enabling a specialist to be assigned exclusively to one school rather than to two or more would require hiring additional student support specialists. Nonetheless, it is recommended that at least one student support specialist be assigned to each school, as funding permits.

Recommendation #2: Investigate areas within Student Support Services to refine practices, increase efficiencies and effectiveness, and improve overall communication. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning, and Office of Professional Growth and Innovation)*

Rationale: A review of responses to the Likert-type and open-ended questions on the student, staff, and specialist surveys revealed a variety of operational components that warrant review. Three of the more prominent and pervasive components involved communication, professional development, and documentation of data.

Communication: Substantial percentages of teachers at both the middle and high school levels were unclear about SSS functions and programs. Stronger and more consistent communication between the specialists and other stakeholders, especially instructional staff and parents, could foster greater coordination of effort and, therefore, more positive student outcomes.

Professional Development: In both their open-ended survey responses and during the focus group session, several of the specialists cited the benefits of receiving more frequent opportunities for high-quality, job-related professional development. Program effectiveness and student success depend in part on the specialists' remaining up to date with respect to new strategies and research-based best practices.

<u>Data procedures</u>: Evidence gathered during the evaluation suggested that a review is warranted of the specialists' access to student data repositories such as Synergy and classroom websites. Similarly, a review is warranted of SSS data and documentation designs and procedures, including the central SSS spreadsheet, the rubric for evaluating student success, and the Choices' pretest and posttest instruments and procedures.

Recommendation #3: Review all aspects of the Choices program and recommend adjustments. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning)*

A combination of outcome data and survey responses from all the surveyed stakeholder groups revealed variation in how the Choices program is implemented at different schools. The number of weekly sessions and the duration of those sessions at some schools were reported to fall short of how VBCPS intended the program to be implemented. The evaluation further found that the VBCPS intended implementation departs from the middle school and high school curricula as designed by the publishers of *Second Step* and *Reconnecting Youth*. In addition, levels of overall satisfaction with the Choices program among school staff (with the exception of high school administrators/counselors) were relatively low. Together, these indicators combine with the outcome data and other results to suggest that the Choices program was implemented more effectively at some schools than at others.

Consequently, all aspects of the Choices program's design and implementation merit a review. The review would seek first to identify program adjustments to maximize the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the program's design. It then would seek to develop appropriately flexible implementation procedures to ensure the consistency of outcomes in all VBCPS middle and high schools.

Introduction

Background

Student Support Services (SSS) encompass a variety of interventions for middle and high school students who are deemed to be at risk behaviorally and/or academically, often due to engaging in inappropriate behaviors. Services are provided by student support specialists that serve middle and high schools. This evaluation focuses on three of the interventions: individual services for students, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep Academy.

Organizationally, Student Support Services fall under the aegis of Alternative Education, which is overseen by the Department of School Leadership.[1] Focusing primarily on issues related to student discipline and personal conduct, the work of SSS aligns with all four of the strategic goals set forth in *Compass to 2020*, the school division's strategic framework. Most saliently, SSS aligns with *Compass to 2020* with respect to Strategy 1 of Goal 3: "Provide a safe and welcoming learning environment." By providing services to at-risk students, SSS contributes to ensuring that schools are safe and welcoming places that are conducive to learning for all students.

Although Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) initiated Student Support Services in 2003, no comprehensive evaluation has been completed. Consequently, in accordance with School Board Policy 6-26, the School Board approved the addition of SSS to the Program Evaluation schedule on September 3, 2014, which led to the evaluation readiness process during the 2014-2015 school year and the comprehensive evaluation process during the 2015-2016 school year.

Purpose

This comprehensive evaluation provides key division stakeholders with information about SSS operations and outcomes in middle and high schools. The comprehensive evaluation was designed to accomplish the following:

(1) Examine the implementation and operation of the three aforementioned SSS components;
(2) Describe the characteristics of the participating students;
(3) Determine the extent to which each program is meeting its goals and objectives;
(4) Review stakeholder perceptions of, attitudes toward, and experiences with each program; and
(5) Present the additional cost of SSS to the division.

Program Overviews

Because the three SSS components being evaluated differ in significant ways from one another, they are discussed separately below.

➢ Individual services target middle and high school students who are at risk behaviorally. Students are provided services on a one-to-one, individualized basis in an effort to help them resolve behavioral, academic, and/or attendance issues. Usually the need for support is triggered by a personal crisis or trauma, an acute rule infraction, or a transition from a comprehensive school to an alternative setting such as Renaissance Academy, or vice versa.

➢ The Choices program is intended to be implemented in VBCPS as a five-week, ten-session instructional program for students who consistently demonstrate inappropriate behaviors, excluding truancy, that interfere with learning. Often these students have a history of impulsive, high risk, or aggressive behavior. Offered in lieu of suspension, the Choices curriculum provides students with information and activities that are designed to help the students develop skills necessary to make appropriate choices and to understand the impact of their antisocial behavior on their own lives, on the lives of their families, and on the well-being of their communities.

➤ Spartan Prep Academy is a college-awareness program for high school students who aspire to enroll in institutions of higher education upon their high school graduation. Although intended primarily for minority students, the program accepts students of all races. Offered in conjunction with Norfolk State University (NSU), the program exposes participating students to various aspects of college life, the advantages of continuing their education, and postsecondary programs that are available through NSU. The student support specialists work with Spartan Prep students in their home high schools to help them maintain good attendance, appropriate behavior, and passing grades, as well as to acquire essential postsecondary skills such as goal-setting and teamwork.

Student Support Services are available to all middle and high schools within VBCPS by virtue of the fact a student can refer himself or herself, although roughly 98 percent of the referrals come from other sources. During the 2015-2016 school year, 1,627 individual students in 14 middle schools and 13 high schools participated in one of the three programs on which this comprehensive evaluation focused.[2]

Program Goals and Objectives

As part of the evaluation readiness process for Student Support Services, goals and objectives were developed in 2014-2015 by staff from the Office of Research and Evaluation in collaboration with the SSS Program Evaluation Readiness Committee. As a result of the meeting with the director of alternative education and the student support specialists, as well as subsequent work, 6 goals (see Table 1) and 19 specific measurable objectives were developed.

Table 1: Goals for SSS, Choices, and Spartan Prep

	Goal
1	Students receiving individual services will demonstrate satisfactory behavior during and after the time of services.
2	Students receiving individual services will demonstrate satisfactory attendance during and after the time of services.

Table 1: Goals for SSS, Choices, and Spartan Prep (continued)

	Goal
3	Students receiving individual services will demonstrate satisfactory academic performance during and after the time of services.
4	Students receiving individual services will become successful members of their schools upon release of direct supervision from SSS specialists.
5	Students completing the Choices program will develop the skills necessary to make appropriate choices and understand the impact of antisocial behavior on their lives and the lives of their families and communities.
6	Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy will be adequately prepared to enter a higher education institution upon graduation from high school.

Four of the goals were developed for individual services. One goal each was developed for the Choices program and the Spartan Prep Academy. Ultimately, the SSS Evaluation Readiness Report was presented to the School Board on August 18, 2015 and approved on September 1, 2015.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

Evaluation Design

The comprehensive evaluation of SSS focused on three program components: individual services, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep Academy. Five aspects of each component were assessed: (1) program implementation, (2) participant characteristics, (3) progress toward meeting goals, (4) stakeholder perceptions, and (5) cost. Accordingly, the evaluation utilized a mixed-methods design to collect both quantitative and qualitative information primarily from the 2015-2016 school year.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions that were identified in the SSS Evaluation Readiness Report are listed

below with adjustments to topics and reorganization of topics for efficiency and clarity. The content of these evaluation questions is addressed in this evaluation report with some information presented for SSS as a whole, while other information is presented separately for each of the three programs.

1. **What were the operational components of individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy implementation?**
    a. What were the staff selection processes and staff responsibilities for student support specialists?
    b. What were student support specialists' work assignments and caseloads?
    c. What professional learning opportunities were offered?
    d. What were the reasons for referral or admissions criteria for student participation in individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy?
    e. What were the referral sources for students receiving individual services or participating in Choices or Spartan Prep Academy?
    f. What services were provided as part of individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy?

2. **What were the characteristics of the students participating in individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy during the 2015-2016 school year?**

3. **What progress was made toward meeting the goals and objectives of individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy?**

4. **What were stakeholders' perceptions of individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy (i.e., administrators and school counselorss, teachers, student support specialists, students, and parents)?**

5. **What was the additional cost of individual services, Choices, and Spartan Prep Academy to the school division during 2015-2016?**

Instruments and Data Sources

Several modes of data collection were utilized during the comprehensive evaluation. They are described below.

SSS Documentation and Program Data

Information from SSS documentation was utilized in the evaluation including (a) the VBCPS job description for the student support specialist position; (b) a policy guide for program documentation, *Reporting Data Documents and Criteria*; and (c) an Excel spreadsheet referred to as the *SY15-16 SSS End-of-Year Report*.

The *SY15-16 SSS End-of-Year Report,* as well as the same end-of-year report from the two previous years, was a particularly important source of information needed to conduct this evaluation. It served as the basis for identifying which students received which services, at which schools, for how long, and with what degree of success. Because the data are not part of the VBCPS data warehouse or the Synergy system, the *End-of-Year Report* information was essential for identifying the appropriate recipients for the student and parent surveys. The data in the Excel spreadsheet also played a critical role in providing data that helped the evaluators to develop a global understanding of how the programs were actually implemented, as well as the progress that the programs made toward meeting their respective goals.

VBCPS Data Warehouse

Most of the student-related quantitative data needed for the comprehensive evaluation were extracted from the VBCPS data warehouse. For the students who received individual services or who participated in the Choices program, these data included the number of discipline referrals; in-school suspensions; and out-of-school suspensions for 10, 20, 30, and all 2015-2016 school days before, during, and after the time of service. They also included the total number of absences and the subset of unexcused absences for the same periods. The data also included students' enrollment and grade-level status for the following 2016-2017 school year or an exit code if students graduated or withdrew from the division.

In addition, for the Spartan Prep Academy students, the data warehouse served as the source of data related to academic performance (i.e., cumulative grade-point average) and on-time graduation. Further, information regarding postgraduate activity was obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse.

The data were used for a variety of evaluative purposes. For individual services and the Choices program, they formed the basis for comparing preservice inputs with postservice outcomes in order to describe program effectiveness and to provide empirical support for plausible reasons that explain the findings.

Surveys

Several SSS stakeholder groups were invited to complete an anonymous survey regarding their perceptions of, experiences with, and feelings toward the three components of SSS being evaluated. In total, six different survey forms were developed. These included surveys for the following:

➢ Building staff (administrators, school counselors, and teachers)
➢ Student support specialists
➢ Students who were currently receiving individual services or participating in Choices during the 2015-2016 survey window (i.e., current students) as well as students who had received services earlier in 2015-2016 (i.e., prior students)
➢ Students enrolled in Spartan Prep
➢ The parents/guardians of students who received individual services or participated in Choices during 2015-2016
➢ The parents/guardians of students enrolled in Spartan Prep

The stakeholder surveys consisted mainly of Likert-type items that focused on perceptions of program operations and program effects. The survey for the student support specialists also included items related to the adequacy of resources such as professional learning and administrative support. In almost all cases, these selected-response items were constructed on a four-point scale: (1) Strongly Disagree,

(2) Disagree, (3) Agree, and (4) Strongly Agree. Whenever possible, comparable versions of survey items were included on all or nearly all survey versions. This enabled analysis of variations in the perceptions across different stakeholder groups. Further, all surveys also included open-ended questions regarding SSS program strengths and possible improvements.

The surveys for all school-based stakeholders were conducted online between May 23 and June 17, 2016. Students completed their survey in school either individually or in very small groups while being supervised by their student support specialist. Although this method of survey administration was utilized to minimize disruption to classes and instructional time, it is unclear if the method influenced student responses in ways that would have compromised the validity of the data possibly leading to spuriously high rates of agreement, especially on the Likert-type survey items.

The survey for parents/guardians regarding individual services and Choices were mailed home on June 10 and the Spartan Prep surveys for parents/guardians were mailed home on June 21. Both surveys had a return deadline of July 8. As part of the same mailing, paper surveys were also mailed to the students who previously received services during 2015-2016 (i.e., prior students) so that they would not need to be identified and removed from a class to complete the online version of the student survey. However, due to the lack of surveys returned from this group of students who had previously received services, no data are available. Student survey data are based only on students who were currently receiving services. Table 2 provides the response rates for each survey.

Table 2: Survey Response Rates

Stakeholder Group	Surveys Issued	Surveys Returned	Response Rate (%)	Number of Survey Items
Building Staff (Administrators, School Counselors, Teachers)	2,141	545	25.5%	24
Student Support Specialists	13	7	53.8%	20
Choices/Individual Services Students	1,459	547	37.5%	35
Spartan Prep Students	168	81	48.2%	23
Parents/Guardians of Choices/Individual Services Students	1,375	9	< 1.0%	24
Parents/Guardians of Spartan Prep Students	168	19	11.3%	13

Note: The number of items on each survey counts a multipart question as just one question.

Of the 1,375 parent surveys regarding individual services and Choices, only 9 were returned. Three were partially completed. The other six responses were returned only with hand-written statements that questioned what these programs were. The response rate to these parent surveys was so low and probably unrepresentative of the parent population. Therefore, no results are included in this report. Of the 168 parent surveys regarding Spartan Prep Academy, 19 forms (11%) were returned, which was sufficient to include the results in this report.

Focus Group

To gather more detailed contextual and operational information about SSS, a focus group was convened on June 27, 2016. Facilitated by the two authors of this report, the focus group involved 12 student support specialists, as well as their supervisor, the director of alternative education. The structured protocol, which is included in Appendix A, addressed eight specific questions organized around three general topics: Program Operations, Program Implementation, and Professional Supports. The entire session, which lasted approximately 60 minutes, was recorded with the knowledge and consent of all participants. The recording was later transcribed

and preserved. In addition, 11 of the 12 student support specialists completed a brief background questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The broad range of data sources and collection techniques led to the use of several different data analytic designs and procedures, which are described below. All computations were performed in either Excel 2013 or SPSS-23.

Pre/Post Comparisons for Individual Services and Choices

For the individual services and Choices program components of the SSS evaluation, the design of the SSS evaluation was modeled on interrupted time-series (ITS) analysis.[3] In this quasi-experimental design, multiple observations of a behavior are compared before and after an intervention. For example, the trend in discipline referrals 30, 20, and 10 days before the start of the Choices program may be compared with the trend in referrals 10, 20, and 30 days after completion of the Choices program. The effectiveness of the Choices program would be represented by either a change in the slope of the trend line or a shift in the number of referrals, or both, as displayed in Figure 1 in the theoretical example.

Figure 1: Example of an Interrupted Time Series Trend Line
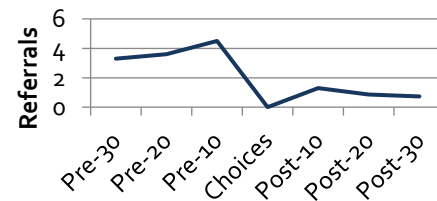
In this example, the vertical Y-axis represents the average number of discipline referrals while the horizontal X-axis displays a timeline that extends from 30 days before each student started the Choices program to 30 days after each student completed the Choices program. Notice both the level of the referrals and the rising trend in the slope of the pre-Choices values. In contrast, notice the sharp decrease in the average number of referrals after the Choices program was

completed. Notice also that the post-Choices trend line has begun to slope downwards. If the actual data are as clear-cut as in this example, the effectiveness of SSS would be obvious.

Descriptive Data for Spartan Prep Academy

For Spartan Prep Academy, the data analyses were driven mainly by the evaluation questions developed during the evaluation readiness process and the goals and objectives associated with Evaluation Question 3. Because those questions, goals, and objectives set forth neither specific targets nor explicit comparisons, the statistical information regarding Spartan Prep is purely descriptive and, therefore, difficult to interpret or generalize to other locations, occasions, or situational contexts.

Survey Data Analysis

To facilitate interpretation of survey results from the Likert-type survey items, agreement rates were computed which combined the percentage of respondents who selected either Agree or Strongly Agree. Survey agreement percentages reported in the evaluation are based on those who answered the survey item (i.e., missing responses were excluded from the percentages). Where practicable, open-ended responses were coded into categories for qualitative analysis, as well as considered for possible verbatim inclusion in this report. When this occurred, all efforts were made to select typical statements that represented all important perspectives and ideas.

Evaluation Results and Discussion

Operational Components for All Three Programs

Student Support Services in VBCPS is designed to facilitate student transitions between alternative education programs/alternative centers and home schools, as well as provide support services for at-risk youth, according to the Alternative Education Programs website. Specifically, services are provided to middle and high school students by student support specialists who work with individuals to address behavioral, academic, and attendance issues; mediate between student and teacher; and provide resources to parents and teachers to help improve student behavior. The specialists also serve to conduct, support, and facilitate the Choices program and the Spartan Prep Academy, among other alternative education programs.

Staff Selection and Staff Responsibilities

Qualified applicants for the student support specialist position possess at least a Bachelor's Degree in counseling, social work, psychology, sociology, or a related field, as well as a background of working with students in alternative or at-risk settings. Comparable amounts of preparation and experience may be substituted for the aforementioned minimum qualifications.

The background questionnaire that was completed during a focus group by 11 of the 12 student support specialists revealed that 9 of the 11 (82%) had earned a Master's degree in a field such as communication, counseling, education, and social work.

Each specialist typically is responsible for all SSS services provided in the schools to which they are assigned. They provide individual services, plan and lead Choices sessions, and support Spartan Prep enrollees. The job description for the student support specialist position sets forth several specific job responsibilities:

➢ Mentor identified students to develop the skills and self-esteem necessary for them to exercise meaningful options in the areas of school, leisure, and inter/intra personal relationships.
➢ Work in a collegial and collaborative manner with peers and school personnel to ensure successful and efficient transitioning of students between alternative education programs/centers and comprehensive middle and high schools.
➢ Guide students as they develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for success in an academic system.

- ➢ Provide assistance to middle and high school Student Response Teams.
- ➢ Identify and implement appropriate interventions for students identified as being at risk.
- ➢ Present professional development for administrators and teachers on substance abuse and anger management topics.
- ➢ Coordinate community resources to support students in crisis.
- ➢ Provide informational workshops to parents.
- ➢ Facilitate small-group instruction when indicated.
- ➢ Conduct Choices after-school intervention program for students who consistently demonstrate inappropriate behaviors (excluding truancy) that interfere with learning.
- ➢ Use appropriate resources and technology to promote the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and prosocial behavior in students.
- ➢ Monitor student behaviors and make appropriate instructional modifications to develop responsible thinking/decision-making skills in students.
- ➢ Manage students effectively who may display impulsive behaviors, low self-esteem, and impaired social skills.
- ➢ Maintain accurate records of student progress and attendance.
- ➢ Participate in meaningful and continuous professional development that promotes student learning.

Specialists' Work Assignments and Caseloads

In 2015-2016, there were 14 student support specialists. Two were funded by grants. The student support specialists are assigned to their schools based on a collaborative agreement between the director of alternative education and the executive director of secondary teaching and learning. A specialist is generally assigned to two or three different schools. Viewed another way, each school must share a specialist with one or two other schools.

A specialist may be assigned to a high school and the middle school(s) that feeds into it – such as when a specialist is assigned, for example, to both Salem Middle School and Salem High School to maintain as much continuity for students as possible. Continuity is also being emphasized when a specialist continues an assignment at the same school for several years at a time. On the background questionnaire, 7 of the 11 specialists (64%) reported serving at the same school for five or more years. One specialist reported serving at the same school for 13 years.

The degree to which specialists interact with their assigned students varies from building to building, inasmuch as each school's administration has the discretion to set its own access and scheduling policy.

A second important factor affecting the frequency and duration of specialist-student interactions involves the specialist's availability. While two specialists are assigned exclusively to Renaissance Academy, the other specialists divide their time between two or even three different schools, including Renaissance Academy. This fact prompted considerable reaction on the staff survey. When asked to suggest how the individual student support services could be improved, 27 of the 163 teacher respondents (17%) specifically mentioned their school needs at least one full-time student support specialist. Meanwhile, the same suggestion was made by 45 of the 69 school administrator and school counselor respondents (65%) despite the open-ended construction of the question that allowed them to comment on any aspect of the program. Typical responses included statements such as:

> *We need a full-time SSS to get the best results. I have no doubt the majority of students who work with [our specialist] could turn around their behavior and academics if she was here to work with them on a full-time or more consistent basis.*
> *- Middle School Administrator or School Counselor*

> *Hire more specialists or reduce the number of at-risk students.*
> *- High School Teacher*

A third factor that affects the frequency with which the specialists meet with students reflects differences in what individual students need. For example, it might be expected that a student currently attending Renaissance Academy would work very closely with a student support specialist for the duration of his or her enrollment, while a student transitioning back to his or her home school would work less and less closely with a specialist as the transition progressed. However, analysis of the *SY15-16 SSS End-of-Year Report* data revealed that during the time that a student was on a specialist's caseload during the 2015-2016 school year, the average number of contacts with a student support specialist at Renaissance Academy was 6.4 but 13.7 across all other schools (see Table 3). Of course, the average number of contacts with students only provides a partial representation of a specialist's workload. Other relevant aspects include the duration and effects of those contacts, as well as the number, duration, and effects of a specialist's contacts with school staff, parents, and other stakeholders.

Table 3: Average Number of Specialist Contacts With Students Across All Three SSS Programs During 2015-2016

School	Average Number of Contacts With Students	Number of Students
Renaissance Academy	6.4	479
Other VBCPS Middle and High Schools	13.7	1,325

Note: The number of students may contain some duplicate cases if the students worked with more than one specialist during 2015-2016.

A more detailed summary of the specialists' workload is presented in Table 4 based on the total number of contacts with students, staff, and parents.

Table 4: Caseloads and Total Contacts by Specialist and School (2015-2016)

Specialist	School	Number of Students Served	Total Caseload	Total Contacts
Specialist A	Renaissance Academy (High School)	341	341	2,894
Specialist B	Landstown Middle School Landstown High School Renaissance Academy (High School)	43 94 15	152	2,338
Specialist C	Green Run Collegiate Green Run High School Ocean Lakes High School	2 61 49	112	2,613
Specialist D	Corporate Landing Middle School Salem Middle School Salem High School	12 44 100	156	7,264
Specialist E	Corporate Landing Middle School Larkspur Middle School Plaza Middle School Tallwood High School	12 48 29 4	93	4,295
Specialist F	Great Neck Middle School Lynnhaven Middle School Cox High School	39 74 67	180	5,096
Specialist G	Virginia Beach Middle School First Colonial High School	31 105	136	1,691
Specialist H	Independence Middle School Princess Anne Middle School Princess Anne High School	20 27 40	87	1,516

Specialist	School	Number of Students Served	Total Caseload	Total Contacts
Specialist I	Bayside 6 Bayside Middle School Bayside High School	29 39 65	133	6,334
Specialist J	Renaissance Academy (Middle School)	123	123	1,927
Specialist K	Brandon Middle School Tallwood High School	47 48	95	1,824
Specialist L	Kempsville Middle School Kellam High School Kempsville High School	45 67 84	196	3,444

Notes: The figures in the Total Caseload column include the cumulative total of students on a specialist's caseload during 2015-2016. The Total Contacts column includes all documented contacts that a specialist had with students, school staff, and parents. The figures in the Number of Students Served or the Total Caseload columns each sum to 1,804. This sum includes students who transferred from one school to another during 2015-2016 and were served by more than one specialist.

One may speculate that the variations among the specialists with respect to caseload and total contacts reflect at least four interrelated factors: the size of the caseload, the culture of the school, the needs of individual students, and the specialists' personal style and preferred method of delivering services.

Nothing in Table 4 mitigates the emerging impression that middle and high schools, including Renaissance Academy, may be understaffed with respect to SSS specialists.

Professional Learning

To prepare them to perform their job responsibilities, student support specialists receive training in the job-related curricula and procedures that are used in VBCPS. These include *The Mandt System® Behavioral Support for Students At Risk*; *Life Space Crisis Intervention*; *Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)*; Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*; and the Search Institute's *Developmental Assets*.

After completing their initial training, however, the specialists do not receive regularly scheduled training or professional learning opportunities, although they are encouraged to attend any relevant in-service sessions in the schools they service.

In response to Likert-type statements, all seven respondents to the specialists' survey agreed that they had received professional learning that

(a) "enables me to do my job effectively" and (b) "enables me to meet my students' needs." However, on open-ended survey questions, three of the seven specialists listed the lack of professional learning and/or a lack of time to plan and collaborate as one of the three greatest challenges to their effectiveness. Meanwhile, four of the seven listed a need for professional learning and/or time to collaborate with each other when asked to offer suggestions as to how the effectiveness of the specialists might be increased.

Typical comments included statements such as:

> *We could benefit more from professional development relevant to issues that students currently face. We need to be administrators and guidance staff when it comes to options for interventions.*

> *The fact that we don't get to attend conferences/trainings as much as we have in the past and there are always informative ones offered nearby.*

> *Being up to date on the latest "best practices" to support the administration, staff and students.*

Operational Components for SSS Individual Services

Referral for Individual Services

Typically, a student is referred for individual support services for one or more of several reasons:

➢ The student has exhibited a pattern of deteriorating behavior over a prolonged period of time;

➢ The student is currently or has recently experienced a significant crisis or trauma;

➢ The student is transitioning back to a home school from Renaissance Academy or other alternative education center, or vice versa;

➢ The student is transitioning back to a home school after incarceration in a juvenile or adult correctional facility;

➢ The student did not respond satisfactorily to a briefer, group intervention or prevention program such as Choices and thus might benefit from a more personalized and protracted intervention;

➢ The student is involved with a staff member, a family member, or another student in a dispute that the SSS specialist is formally asked to mediate.

Cumulatively, during 2015-2016, a total of 1,429 students received individual services for at least a portion of the school year. They represent only about 4 percent of the combined middle and high school population in VBCPS. Yet, one could argue, by serving the 4 percent, the specialists benefit the other 96 percent to the degree that SSS prevents conflicts and crises, or at least minimizes their severity.

Referral Sources

As mentioned previously, only about 2 percent of the students who received individual services during the 2015-2016 school were self-referred. The single largest referral source, accounting for more than a third (36%) of all referrals, is the Office of Student Leadership (OSL). Most other sources were building-based. They included the principal and his or her leadership team, school counselors, and teachers.

Services Provided

The provision of individual services to students is a highly personalized endeavor. It varies from student to student depending on each student's need, situation, and circumstance.

Service Frequency and Duration for Students Receiving Individual Services. Any student who receives individual services is assigned to a student support specialist's caseload. The length of time spent on the caseload can vary from one day to several years. Most students received individual services for at least nine weeks and often longer. On average, a student remained on a specialist's caseload during the 2015-2016 school year for about 19 weeks, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Student Support Services
Average Number of Weeks a Student Remained on a Caseload in 2015-2016

School Level	Average Number of Weeks On a Caseload	Number of Students
Middle	18.5	281
High	19.3	545
Overall	19.0	826

Note: A full school year consists of 36 weeks divided into four 9-week grading periods.

The most common reasons for being released from a caseload involved successful completion of the program, transfer to another school division, suspension or expulsion, and permanent withdrawal from school.

Student Success Rubric. Before being released from a caseload, a student's success is usually documented in terms of a rubric, which is presented below in Table 6.

Table 6: Student Support Services Scoring Rubric for Evaluating Student Success

Criteria	Academics	Behavior	Attendance	Overall Success Rate*
Highly Successful	All core classes passed	0 referrals	Absent 3 or less full days	4.0
Successful	3 core classes passed	1-2 referrals	Absent 4 full days	3.4 – 3.9
Low Success	1-2 core classes passed	3 referrals	Absent 5 full days	2.7 – 3.3
Unsuccessful	0 core classes passed	4 or more referrals or referral to OSL	Absent 6 or more full days	0 – 2.6

* The Overall Success calculation is computed by adding the academic and attendance scores once and the behavior score twice and dividing by four.

The rubric deems a student to be successful if the overall success rate is greater than 2.6 and the student has avoided two "Low Success" classifications in two or more of the three basic categories: Academics, Behavior, and Attendance. For the rubric to be applied, the student must have received individual services for at least nine weeks.

Operational Components For Choices Program

Referral to Choices Program

The referral process for Choices tends to be more formal than for individual services. Students are referred to Choices after interventions from the Student Response Team have proven unsuccessful or prior to suspension. Then, according to the Choices webpage on the VBCPS.com website[4]:

> The principal/assistant principal meets with the parent/guardian and the student to review the requirements of the Choices program to determine whether or not the student and parent/guardian accept the responsibilities of this placement.
> If Choices placement is agreed upon, the principal/assistant principal explains each of the program's contractual components and has the student and parent/guardian initial each area.

This increased formality reflects the fact that Choices often represents the last intervention for students with a history of discipline infractions before the student is referred to the Office of Student Leadership for possible suspension and/or transfer to Renaissance Academy.

However, an open-ended-question on the staff survey made it clear that Choices is implemented somewhat differently at different schools. Typical responses are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Typical Staff Survey Responses: How Is the Choices Program Used at Your School?

Position	Comment
Administrator/ Counselor	It is used primarily in connection with discipline but at times has been given proactively for students struggling with behavior.
Administrator/ Counselor	It is used as an alternative to suspension.
Teacher	It is used for students in lieu of going to an alternative setting.
Administrator/ Counselor	We use Choices when we see patterns of student misbehavior. Typically on the second office referral for disruptive behavior or the first fight offense.
Teacher	Usually as a last resort.
Teacher	From what I understand, as a way for students to avoid suspension.

While Choices is perceived to constitute a last chance before a student is referred to the Office of Student Leadership, it is used at other schools in a more preventative and rehabilitative manner.

Referral Sources

Accordingly, the list of possible Choices-related referral sources is briefer than that related to individual services. Table 8 summarizes the referral sources for the students who participated in Choices during the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 8: Sources of Referrals to Choices in 2015-2016

Source	Number of Students	Percent of Total
Building Administration and/or Guidance	261	82.9%
OSL	4	1.3%
Self	50	15.9%
Total	315	100.0%

Note: No data regarding the source of referral to Choices were available for 38 cases, reducing the total number of students in the middle column from 353 to 315.

A relatively large percentage of student self-referrals (16%) is explained by the fact that some schools offer Choices not only as a mandatory intervention but also on a voluntary basis for purposes of enrichment. This occurred mainly at middle school in 2015-2016, inasmuch as 40 of the 41 self-referrals were middle school students.

Services Provided

Offered at a student's home school either during the school day or immediately after school, VBCPS intended Choices to be implemented as a five-week, ten-session behavioral intervention program for middle and high school students with a history of discipline problems. Session lengths were intended to be approximately one-hour long. Choices is intended to reduce impulsive, high-risk, and aggressive behaviors by helping these students to develop strategies and skills for making appropriate behavioral decisions. The program also was designed to educate the students on the impact of their antisocial behavior on their own lives and the lives of others.

Choices Curricula. The *Second Step* curriculum at middle school and the *Reconnecting Youth* curriculum at high school cover topics such as problem solving, anger management, decision making, and effective communication. Included

in both programs are group discussions, situational modeling, coaching, and role-playing to increase each student's ability to make positive decisions and to self-regulate their behavior in order to avoid adolescent pitfalls such as peer pressure, bullying, and substance abuse.

As implemented in VBCPS, both *Second Step* and *Reconnecting Youth* constitute adapted versions of the published curricula. The *Second Step* publisher provides materials for 15 lessons at grade 6 and 13 lessons at grade 7 and grade 8. At all grade levels, a lesson can be delivered during one 50-minute session or split into two 25-minute sessions. Meanwhile, the publisher of the high school curriculum provides 75 lessons to be delivered in 55-minute sessions as a semester-long, full-credit class. Thus, both the middle school and high school versions of the Choices program as VBCPS intended them to be implemented depart from the publishers' intentions.

Further, implementation of Choices in VBCPS varies from site to site. A review of the open-ended survey responses from students and staff suggests that significant variation may exist across VBCPS schools. Some respondents indicated that Choices sessions convene only once per week. Other staff respondents commented that Choices sessions may last for only 15 minutes. For example, comments made in response to the open-ended survey question that asked how Choices could be improved indicated the following:

> *The description I provide to parents (as downloaded from the Intranet) does not match what I believe is being conducted with the students.*
> - *Middle School Administrator or School Counselor*

> *It needs to be held before or after school for a longer duration in order to have any real impact.*
> *…Seeing those students for 15 minutes during their study period is simply not enough.*
> - *Middle School Teacher*

Perceptions of Choices Session Frequency and Length. Despite the adapted implementation of published curricula for Choices, the Choices program is perceived positively by the

participating students in high schools (see Tables 9 through 11 below). At middle schools, students were more likely to indicate that the number of sessions and number of weeks was "too few" and that the length of the sessions was "too brief."

Table 9: Student Survey Responses: The Number of Choices Sessions Each Week Was…

School Level	Too Few	Just Right	Too Many
Middle	28.7%	69.1%	2.1%
High	9.5%	90.5%	0.0%
Total	25.2%	73.0%	1.7%

Table 10: Student Survey Responses: The Number of Weeks That the Choices Sessions Ran Was…

School Level	Too Few	Just Right	Too Many
Middle	24.7%	72.6%	2.6%
High	2.4%	95.1%	2.4%
Total	20.8%	76.6%	2.6%

Table 11: Student Survey Responses: The Length of Each Choices Session Was…

School Level	Too Brief	Just Right	Too Long
Middle	24.3%	71.4%	4.2%
High	4.7%	90.7%	4.7%
Total	20.7%	75.0%	4.3%

An open-ended question asked the specialists to cite the Choices program's greatest strength. Six of the seven specialists identified either the program's flexibility or its small-group structure.

Additionally, when asked in a different open-ended question to suggest ways to improve the Choices program, none of the specialists (0%) mentioned either the length of the program or the frequency or duration of the sessions. Further, in response to a Likert-type item, all seven specialists (100%) expressed satisfaction with the Choices implementation.

In contrast, school administrators, school counselors, and instructional staff perceived the Choices program less enthusiastically: Of the 212 building staff who answered the Likert-type items, 73 percent thought that the five-week length of

Choices was too brief. Among the staff respondents, 46 percent also believed that two sessions per week were too few.

Further, when asked in an open-ended survey question to suggest how the Choices program could be improved, more than a dozen administrators, school counselors, and teachers addressed either the length of the program or the frequency and duration of the sessions. Of such comments, the following are typical:

Table 12: Typical Staff Survey Responses: How Could the Choices Program Be Improved?

Position	Comment
Administrator/ Counselor	Twice a week for 20 minutes per session is too short. The conversation barely gets going.
Administrator/ Counselor	We are only provided one day per week. We need more time for the SSS to be in the building.
Administrator/ Counselor	…I feel that Choices is great for helping students learn about themselves, but often the SSS is not at the school when a situation arises. Without having her here, we lose an opportunity to reflect and process events as they happen. I often feel like we give them (students) information and tools, but when they encounter difficult situations we are not always there to coach them.
Administrator/ Counselor	She meets with students individually for approximately 10 – 15 minutes during their lunchtime.
Teacher	This should be a yearlong elective for students who are in need of the concepts of this program. The students are in need of constant monitoring and feedback. This should also work in conjunction with the classroom teacher.

Moreover, when participating students were asked to suggest how Choices could be improved, 57 of the 220 respondents (26%) mentioned (a) extending the program to a half-year or full-year elective, (b) increasing the number of sessions per week, (c) increasing the length of each session, or (d) some combination of the preceding suggestions.

Completion of Choices and Follow-Up.

Although a pretest and a posttest are administered to students enrolled in Choices, the exact same form of the test is used for both purposes. The tests themselves – one for middle school and one for high school – were developed locally from content in the curricular materials. However, the only criterion used as a barometer of success with Choices is completion of the program.[5]

According to the Choices page on the VBCPS website,[6] "students completing Choices will be referred to a Student Support Specialist for additional support services in their home school." Based on data in the *SY15-16 SSS End-of-Year Report*, 172 of the 252 students (68%) that completed Choices also had Success Rubric scores, which indicate that the students received individual services for at least nine weeks after completing Choices. The other 80 students received individual services for less than nine weeks.

Operational Components for Spartan Prep Academy

Spartan Prep Admission Criteria

Whether recruited or self-referred, prospective Spartan Prep enrollees must submit an application and be accepted into the program. The selection criteria include:

(1) Obtaining a "C" or better in at least five subjects
(2) Being an identified minority
(3) Being a first generation college-bound student
(4) Being recommended by a middle school principal
(5) Exhibiting acceptable behavior
(6) Exhibiting acceptable attendance
(7) Being promoted to 9th grade

Once accepted, each student and his or her parents or guardians meet to sign a four-year contract in which the student pledges to remain in good standing academically and behaviorally. The standards for acceptable behavior are presented below.[7]

Spartan Prep Student Expectations Parent/ Student Agreement Acceptable Behavior Standards

1. Students must abide by all rules and regulations that appear in the Spartan Prep Academy Guide.
2. Students must be in good academic standing with Virginia Beach Public Schools receiving no grade lower than a C.
3. If a student receives a grade lower than a C, the student has nine weeks to achieve a C in the class.
4. If the grade has not improved, the student will be placed on academic probation for an additional grading period with the understanding that he/she will be released from the program if he/she does not attain Cs in all subjects by the end of the grading period.
5. If a student violates the Virginia Beach City Public Schools Code of Conduct, the violation will be reviewed by Spartan Prep Academy personnel from Norfolk State University and Virginia Beach City Public Schools to determine the appropriateness of the student continuing in the academy.
6. Students must attend 80 percent of all required activities, unless there are extenuating circumstances approved by Spartan Prep Academy personnel from NSU or VBCPS. Students will be released from the program if this requirement is not met.

During 2015-2016, 168 students were enrolled in Spartan Prep for at least part of the school year. The characteristics of these students will be described later in this report.

Students' Motivations for Applying.

An open-ended survey question asked Spartan Prep students why they chose to participate in the Spartan Prep Academy. Although their reasons were often quite individualized, they generally fell into the categories shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Summary of Student Motivations for Applying to Spartan Prep Academy

Motivation	Percent
Other	23%
Because other people set a good example	5%
Because other people told me I should	16%
To improve my college admission/scholarship chances	21%
To better prepare for college	35%

■ Percent
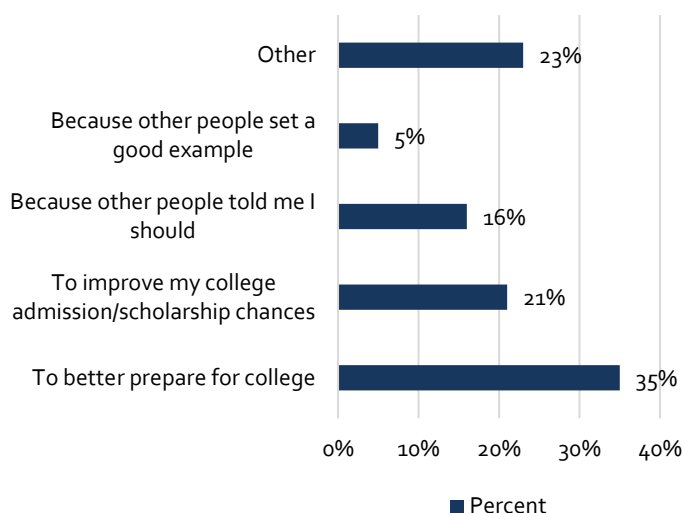
Referral Sources

Students apply for acceptance into the Spartan Prep Academy when they are in the eighth grade. Most have been recruited and recommended by a school administrator, school counselor, or teacher. The remainder have initiated the application process themselves or at the urging of a parent or guardian.

Services Provided

As mentioned previously, Spartan Prep Academy is a college-awareness program for students who aspire after graduation to enroll in institutions of higher learning. Offered in conjunction with Norfolk State University (NSU), the program exposes participating students to various aspects of college life, the advantages of continuing their education, and postsecondary programs that are available through NSU. Spartan Prep Academy does not reside in a physical location that students attend every day.[8] Rather, Spartan Prep is better understood as a series of enrichment workshops, special events, and field trips over the course of the school year and the summer. Spartan Prep is aimed at helping participating students to pursue college admission and possible scholarships or financial aid, as well as to define or clarify their career paths and thus their academic majors. Much of this activity is arranged and managed by

NSU, not VBCPS, and thus is beyond the purview and scope of this evaluation.

The VBCPS student support specialists work with Spartan Prep students in their home high schools to help them maintain good attendance, appropriate behavior, and passing grades, as well as to acquire essential postsecondary skills such as goal-setting and teamwork. In this respect, the student support specialists function in a supportive role – not intervening to get students back on track but rather to keep the Spartan Prep students on track to enable them to meet their postsecondary goals.

Service Frequency and Duration for Spartan Prep Students. In response to an open-ended survey question, 15 of the 81 Spartan Prep respondents (19%) reported that they typically met with their student support specialist more than once per week. Another nine students reported typically meeting with the specialist once per week. The remaining 70 percent reported that the frequency of their meetings ranged from one to three times per month or less.

Nearly 40 percent of the Spartan Prep students (32 of 81) reported that their meetings with the specialist typically lasted 15 minutes or longer. Another ten students reported meetings that typically lasted for 10 minutes or more. Combined, that accounts for more than half the Spartan Prep students who responded to the survey. Another 36 students reported that their meetings typically lasted less than 10 minutes. Three additional Spartan Prep students responded vaguely but relevantly with "As long as needed."

Student Characteristics

During 2015-2016, a total of 1,429 students[9] received individual services for at least part of the school year, 353 students participated in the Choices program, and 168 VBCPS students were enrolled in Spartan Prep Academy. In some cases, the same students who received individual services also participated in the Choices program. Based on available data, the unduplicated count of students showed that 1,627 individual students received services as part of at least one of the SSS programs addressed in this evaluation for at least a portion of the 2015-2016 school year. Of those 1,627 students, 66 percent were male, 55 percent were African American, and 58 percent were economically disadvantaged.

Table 13: Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants in Individual Services, the Choices Program, and Spartan Prep Academy

Characteristic	Individual Services		Choices		Spartan Prep		Division Profile[10]	
	Middle	High	Middle	High	Middle	High	Middle	High
	N=557	N=872	N=294	N=59	n/a	N=168	N=15,682	N=20,993
Gender								
Female	148 26.6%	309 35.4%	76 25.9%	16 27.1%	n/a	93 55.4%	48.9%	48.7%
Male	409 73.4%	563 64.6%	218 74.1%	43 72.9%	n/a	75 44.6%	51.1%	51.3%
Ethnicity								
African American	299 53.7%	435 49.9%	159 54.1%	33 55.9%	n/a	141 83.9	24.4%	24.6%
American Indian	2 0.4%	2 0.2%	1 0.3%	0 0.0%	n/a	0 0.0%	0.2%	0.3%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6 1.1%	16 1.8%	2 0.7%	2 3.4%	n/a	3 1.8%	6.5%	6.7%
Caucasian	140 25.1%	263 30.2%	73 24.8%	10 16.9%	n/a	1 0.6%	50.7%	51.4%
Hispanic	57 10.2%	90 10.3%	30 10.2%	6 10.2%	n/a	5 3.0%	9.6%	9.7%
Multiracial	53 9.5%	66 7.6%	29 9.9%	8 13.6%	n/a	18 10.7%	8.6%	7.3%
Economically Disadvantaged								
Yes (Free/Reduced Lunch)	385 69.1%	453 51.9%	202 68.7%	31 52.5%	n/a	97 57.7%	37.3%	31.9%
Identified Special Education								
Yes	108 19.4%	172 19.7%	52 17.7%	11 18.6%	n/a	6 3.6%	14.4%	13.4%
Identified Limited English Proficiency								
Yes	0 0.0%	3 0.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	n/a	2 1.2%	1.5%	1.3%
Identified Gifted (Intellectually or Artistically)								
Yes	20 3.6%	34 3.9%	14 4.8%	2 3.4%	n/a	24 14.3%	16.4%	15.8%

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Because 323 students participated in more than one component, they are duplicated in the column totals. Thus, summing across the column totals yields a grand total of 1,950 students rather than 1,627.

As shown in Table 13, the largest percentages of students who received individual services or participated in the Choices program were African American. Further, between 65 and 74 percent of students who received individual services or participated in Choices were male, and 52 to 69 percent were economically disadvantaged.

Choices program participants were more likely to be in middle school than high school. Conversely, students who received individual services were more likely to be in high school than middle school. High school students were more likely to receive individual services than to participate in the Choices intervention.

As for the Spartan Prep Academy, the vast majority of enrollees were also African American (84%). Another 11 percent were multiracial. As with the other SSS components, the majority of enrollees were economically disadvantaged (58%). However, there was a more even distribution of females and males in the Spartan Prep Academy compared to the individual services and the Choices program (55% female and 45% male).

Of further interest with respect to Spartan Prep is that one of the entry criteria is that students should be first-generation college enrollees. However, 86 percent of the 81 students who responded to the Spartan Prep survey reported that another family member was currently attending or had previously attended college, while 65 percent reported having a family member who had graduated college.

Also worthy of note with respect to Spartan Prep is that of the 44 senior students in the 2016 graduating cohort, all (100%) met their obligation of maintaining a grade-point average of at least 2.0 (a C). In fact, 59 percent made a B (3.0), 18 percent made at least an A- (3.7), and 31 of the 44 (more than 70%) pursued coursework that enabled them to graduate with an advanced diploma.

Progress Toward Meeting Goals and Objectives

The third evaluation question addressed the progress that each SSS component – individual

services, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep Academy - made in meeting its goals and objectives. Six goals and 19 objectives were developed as part of the evaluation readiness process.

Some of the specific objectives were modified from the Evaluation Readiness Report in accordance with the availability of necessary data. For example, the second objective under Goal 1 originally called for an examination of the reduction in suspensions three months before placement and three months after release from the SSS caseload. However, because noting a reduction requires not only a preintervention score but also a postintervention score, the number of student records with the requisite data was too low to include such a wide span of time. Therefore, the objective was modified to compare the number of suspensions 20 days before placement and 20 days after release from the caseload. Although the abbreviated time span raises some issues as to whether the comparison is long enough to be valid and meaningful, it was not possible to examine data from the longer time frame for most of the students who participated in SSS.

Further, it is important to note that without specific comparison groups, caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from these descriptive results regarding the efficacy of these programs.

Progress Toward Meeting Goals: Individual Services

The individual services provided by the student support specialists focus primarily on behavioral and discipline issues. But, they also include attendance, academics, and long-term outcomes.

Goal 1: Student Behavior

The first goal stated, "Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory behavior during and after the time of services." Data from the VBCPS warehouse regarding student discipline referrals are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Student Discipline Referrals

Period	Total Number	Average Per Student
Before Service	1,183	2.1
During Service	1,493	1.9
After Service	776	1.2

Note: The Before Service figures range from the first day of school until the start of services. Similarly, the After Service figures range from the completion of services until the last day of school.

During the time of service during the 2015-2016 school year, 1,493 referrals occurred, averaging about two per student. However, the distributions of before, during, and after service referrals were skewed.

Figure 3: Skewed Distribution of Student Discipline Referrals
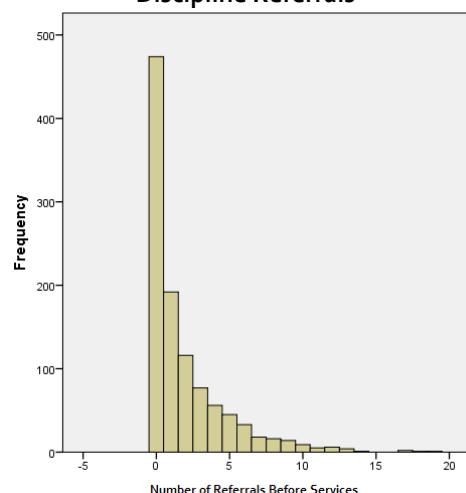
As Figure 3 illustrates, a relatively small proportion of the students accounted for a majority of the referred incidents.

Objective 1: Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory behavior by receiving no more than three discipline referrals during the time of service as measured by a score of 2 or above on the SSS Rubric for Evaluating Student Success.

The 2015-2016 SSS Excel file indicated that 77 percent of the students with Rubric scores (493 of 639) met the criterion. It must be remembered though that a student does not receive a Rubric score without being on a caseload for at least nine weeks.

Objective 2: Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory behavior by reducing the number of ISS or OSS instances as measured by the number of times a student receives in-school or out-of-school suspensions before placement and after release from SSS.

To identify the number and percent of students that reduced their suspension rate, the number of postservice suspensions was subtracted from the number of preservice suspensions. Even looking at only the 20 days preceding the start of services and the 20 days immediately following release from the caseload, only 285 of the students had the necessary data to enable such computations. In addition, after excluding the students who had no in-school suspensions before receiving services, only 56 students remained in the analysis.

Of these 56 students, 53 (95%) did have fewer in-school suspensions during the 20 days following their release from the caseload.

Similarly, of the 47 students included in the out-of-school suspension analysis, 46 (98%) decreased their number of out-of-school suspensions.

Objective 3: Stakeholders (principals, assistant principals, school counselors, teachers, and students) will indicate improvements in student behavior after receiving services from SSS.

Agreement that student behavior improved after individual services varied noticeably across stakeholder groups (i.e., administrators and school counselors, teachers, and students) as well as between middle and high schools. The difference between middle and high school teachers was particularly pronounced (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Agreement That Student Behavior Has Improved
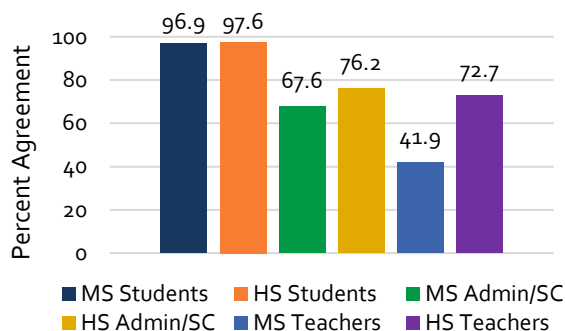
Goal 2: Student Attendance

The second goal stated, "Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory attendance during and after the time of services." Table 15 provides data regarding unexcused absences.

Table 15: Student Unexcused Absences

Period	Total Number	Average Per Student
Before Service	1,632	6.28
During Service	2,358	12.06
After Service	937	8.82

Note: The Before Service figures cover from the first day of school until the start of services. Similarly, the After Service figures cover from the completion of services until the last day of school.

The total number and thus the average number of unexcused absences per student spiked while students were receiving services, rising from 1,632 to 2,358, or from an average of 6.28 to 12.06 per student. However, as is shown in Figure 5, the distribution of absences while receiving services was skewed. That is, the vast majority of students had few if any unexcused absences, as is indicated by the tallest bar in the histogram representing 2 or fewer unexcused absences, the second bar representing between 3 and 5 unexcused absences, and so on. Of the 1,563 students shown in the histogram, 486 students had no more than two absences and 713 students had no more than five unexcused absences.

Figure 5: Skewed Distribution of Student Unexcused Absences
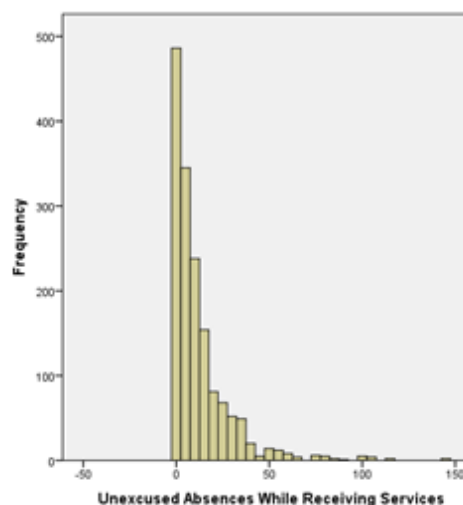
Objective 1: Students receiving SSS individual services will attain satisfactory attendance rates following the time of services as measured by six or fewer absences following their release from the caseload.

As Table 16 shows, the percentage of students with seven or more unexcused absences increased during services but then decreased after services.

Table 16: Student Unexcused Absence Rate

Period	Unexcused Absences	Count	Percent
Before Service	6 or Fewer	798	65.7
	7 or More	417	34.3
	Total	1,215	100.0
During Service	6 or Fewer	768	49.1
	7 or More	795	50.9
	Total	1,563	100.0
After Service	6 or Fewer	401	59.9
	7 or More	268	40.1
	Total	669	100.0

Note: The Before Service figures cover from the first day of school until the start of services. Similarly, the After Service figures cover from the completion of services until the last day of school.

However, the decrease after services did not return to the same lower rate of unexcused absences observed before the students were placed on the caseload. That is, the percentages of students with seven or more unexcused absences started at 34 percent before services,

rose to 51 percent during services, and decreased after services were completed to 40 percent.

Specifically related to the objective which focused on six or fewer absences after receiving services, the percentage of students with six or fewer absences was 66 percent before services, 49 percent during services, and 60 percent after services.
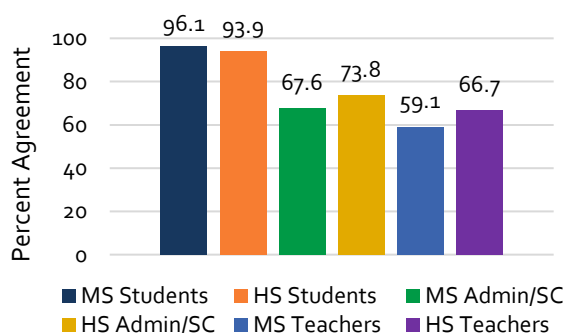
Objective 2: Students receiving SSS individual services will persist in school as measured by the percent of students who demonstrate continued enrollment into the next academic year without dropping out.

After excluding students who graduated and students who withdrew by transferring from the division, analysis revealed that 1,052 of 1,088 of the 2015-2016 students who received individual services (97%) were enrolled during 2016-2017 without dropping out.

Objective 3: Stakeholders (principals, assistant principals, school counselors, teachers, and students) will indicate improvements in student behavior after receiving services from SSS.

As with student behavior, agreement varied noticeably across stakeholder groups (see Figure 6). A majority of each group agreed that student attendance did improve, but agreement levels were lower among middle school administrators/school counselors and teachers compared to the high school level.

Figure 6: Agreement That Student Attendance Has Improved

Compared with the students themselves, lower percentages of staff members noticed a difference in attendance.

Goal 3: Academic Performance

The third goal stated: "Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory academic performance during and after the time of service."

A review of the VBCPS warehouse data revealed that of the 1,318 individual students with valid data regarding promotion status, 1,154 (88%) either graduated or were promoted to the next grade. The remainder included students who were not promoted (i.e., retained) (12%).

Objective 1: Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate satisfactory academic achievement following the time of services as measured by the passing of the requisite number of courses to advance to the next grade.

The Academics domain of the SSS Excel Rubric for Evaluating Student Success file, which is applied only to students who have received at least nine weeks of individual services, revealed that 55 percent of students passed all of their core courses which met the objective. As shown in Table 17, nearly 58 percent of middle school students and 53 percent of high school students passed all core courses based on their rubric score.

Table 17: Student Academic Performance – Percent Passing All Core Classes

Level		Fewer Than All	All	Total
Middle	Count	116	157	273
	Percent	42.5	57.5	100.0
High	Count	173	194	367
	Percent	47.1	52.9	100.0
Combined	Count	289	351	640
	Percent	45.2	54.8	100.0

Objective 2: Stakeholders will indicate improvements in academic performance after receiving individual services from SSS.

As with student behavior and attendance, nearly all the middle and high school students who responded to the student survey felt their grades had improved (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Agreement That Student Academic Performance Has Improved
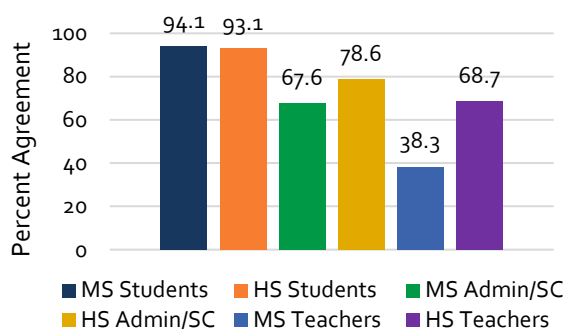
From 68 to 79 percent of responding high school administrators, school counselors, and teachers agreed that academic performance improved. However, lower percentages of middle school administrators and school counselors (68%) and teachers (38%) felt that the academic performance of students had improved after they had received SSS individual services.

Goal 4: Student Self-Efficacy

The fourth goal states: "Students receiving SSS individual services will become successful members of their schools upon release of direct supervision from SSS."

This particular goal can be interpreted in many ways and represented by a wide variety of indicators. For example:

➤ Of the 639 students assigned a success status label in the SSS Excel file, 445 students (70%) were deemed "successful."

➤ Ninety-six percent (96%) of the middle school students and 98 percent of the high school students who responded to a Likert-type survey item agreed that they "care more about doing well in school" after being released from the SSS caseload.

➤ When presented with a statement that "The climate in my school has improved…because of the individualized student services provided to participating students in my school," the agreement rate among staff respondents was as follows:
- Seventy-six percent (76%) among middle school administrators and school counselors
- Seventy-one percent (71%) among high school administrators and school counselors
- Forty-three percent (43%) among middle school teachers
- Sixty-three percent (63%) among high school teachers

Objective 1: Students receiving SSS individual services will demonstrate overall success in school as measured by a cumulative score of "Successful" on the Rubric for Evaluating Student Success.

As explained previously, the SSS Rubric captures student behavior in three domains: attendance, academics, and behavior. The overall success score is computed by multiplying the behavior score times two, summing that value with the academic and attendance scores, and dividing by four. The separate overall score points are grouped into four categories, as excerpted from the SSS *Reporting Data and Criteria Document*:

Table 18: SSS Scoring Rubric for Evaluating Student Success

Category	Overall Success Score	Percent of Students In Each Category
Highly Successful	4.0	23.1%
Successful	3.4 – 3.9	18.0%
Low Success	2.7 – 3.3	24.4%
Unsuccessful	1 – 2.6	34.5%

The score distribution into the various rubric categories is shown in the far right column of Table 18. It indicates that 65 percent of the students were classified into a category above Unsuccessful.[11]

Objective 2: Students' recidivism rate will be below 10 percent as measured by the percent of students who re-enter SSS during the academic year.

To calculate and report a recidivism rate in an accurate and valid manner, there must minimally be an initial contact date, an exit date, and a subsequent re-entry date. Such information was not available in the *SY15-16 SSS End-of-Year Report* because new records are not created in the data file when a student re-enters a student support specialist's caseload. Therefore, this objective could not be assessed based on available data.

Objective 3: Students will report an increased sense of self-awareness and increased levels of self-esteem.

Three survey items, administered to students only, served as indicators of increased senses of self-awareness and self-esteem. The responding students were asked to select their level of agreement to the following statements:

➢ Person: "I feel better about myself as a person."
➢ Student: "I feel better about myself as a student."
➢ Accept Responsibility: "I am more likely to accept responsibility for my behavior."

Figure 8: Rates of Student Agreement Regarding Increased Senses of Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem
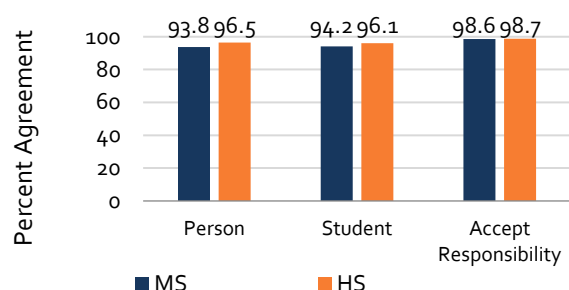
As can be seen in Figure 8, the middle and high school students agreed almost unanimously that their sense of self-esteem and their sense of self-awareness were higher after being released from the Student Support specialists' caseloads.

The agreement rates ranged from a low of 94 percent to a high of 99 percent.

Progress Toward Meeting Goals: Choices Program

The next portion of this section focuses on the goals and objectives related to the Choices program.

Goal 5: Choices Outcomes

The fifth goal states: "Students completing the Choices program will develop the skills necessary to make appropriate choices and understand the impact of antisocial behavior on their lives and the lives of their families and communities." Data from the VBCPS warehouse regarding student discipline referrals are shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Student Discipline Referrals

School Level	Period	Total Number Referrals	Average Per Student
Middle	Before Service	882	3.43
	During Service	715	2.72
	After Service	369	1.94
High	Before Service	192	4.47
	During Service	112	2.38
	After Service	80	1.82

Note: The Before Service figures cover from the first day of school until the start of services. Similarly, the After Service figures cover from the completion of services until the last day of school.

The pattern of results for both middle and high school Choices students was that the number of referrals was highest before services with declines in referrals during and after services.

Objective 1: Students completing Choices will demonstrate an improvement in their ability to make appropriate choices by reducing the number of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS instances received as measured by the number of times a student receives a discipline referral, ISS, or OSS before and after participating in the program.

As was the case with the discipline results associated with the individual services reported

under Goal 1, the data were not available to enable a comparison of three months before with three months after services. A comparison of 20 days before the start of Choices with 20 days after Choices completion was performed instead. Of the 252 students who successfully completed the Choices program, only 176 students had the necessary data to be included in the analysis (70%). After those students with no discipline referrals prior to participating in Choices were excluded, the number of valid cases for the analysis decreased to 136. Accordingly, analysis of the data revealed the following:

➢ At middle school, 76 of 116 students (66%) exhibited a decrease in discipline referrals.

➢ At high school, 13 of 20 students (65%) exhibited a decrease in discipline referrals.

➢ At middle school, 47 of 59 students (80%) exhibited a decrease in in-school suspensions.

➢ At high school, 7 of 11 students (64%) exhibited a decrease in in-school suspensions.

➢ At middle school, 29 of 32 students (91%) exhibited a decrease in out-of-school suspensions.

➢ At high school, 3 of 4 students (75%) exhibited a decrease in out-of-school suspensions.

While caution should be exercised when drawing inferences from indicators based on relatively small numbers of students, the pattern of results showed that the majority of middle and high school Choices completers demonstrated a reduction in discipline referrals, as well as ISS and OSS outcomes.

Objective 2: Students completing Choices will indicate increased self-efficacy in their problem solving, anger management, and decision-making abilities.

➢ Figure 9 displays the agreement rates of the middle school and high school students who participated in Choices in response to the survey items addressing whether the Choices

program helped them feel more confident in my ability to solve problems in my life before they overwhelm me.

➢ Feel more confident in my ability to manage my anger.

➢ Feel more confident in my ability to make decisions that keep me out of trouble.

➢ Make better choices when I am faced with conflict.

Figure 9: Rates of Student Agreement Regarding Choices Outcomes Related to Problem Solving, Anger Management, and Decision Making
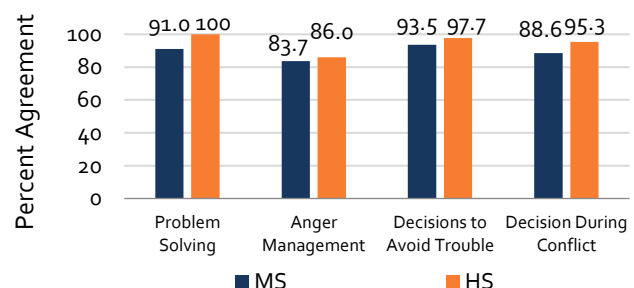
Although the students at both levels felt positively about how Choices had helped them, the high school agreement rates were consistently higher than the middle school rates.

In addition, the administrators, school counselors, and teachers at middle and high schools were asked the degree to which they agreed with the following statement: "Because of the Choices program, the participating students in my school are better able to manage their anger." Figure 10 shows their agreement rates.

Figure 10: Agreement That Choices Helped Students to Better Manage Their Anger
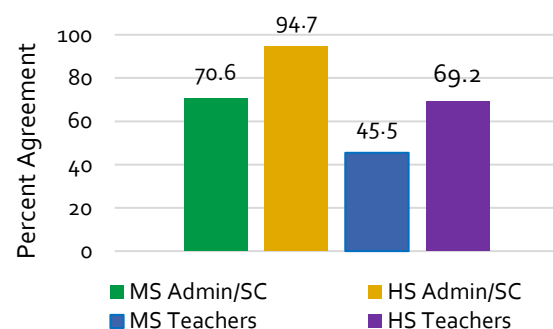
As with their agreement rates on other survey items, high school staff members were more positive than their middle school counterparts, and the administrators and school counselors were more positive than the teachers.

Objective 3: Students completing Choices will indicate making appropriate choices and understanding the impact of their behavior on their lives and the lives of others.

Figures 11 through 13 display the agreement rates to three Likert-type survey items regarding students' awareness of the impact of their choices. Staff groups were asked their perceptions of how the Choices program affected students' awareness. The items included the following:

➢ Because I participated in the Choices program, I am more aware of how my choices affect my own life.
➢ Because I participated in the Choices program, I am more aware of how my choices affect other people.
➢ Because I participated in the Choices program, I am more aware of how the choices I make today will affect me later.
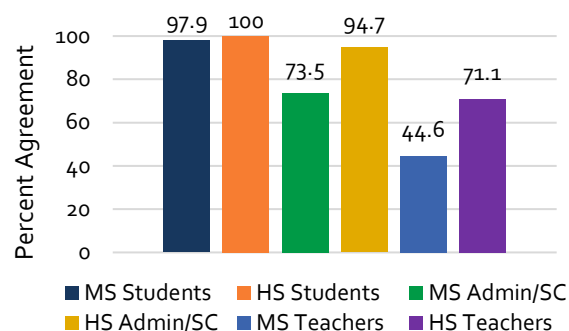
Figure 11: Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness of How Their Choices Affect Their Own Life
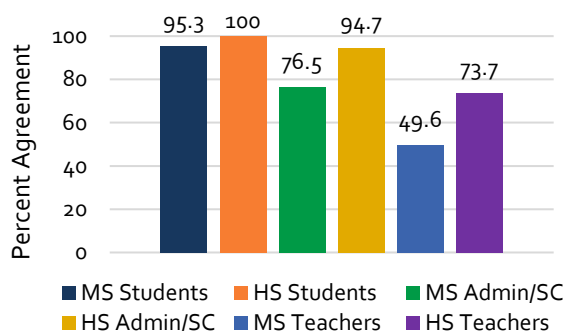
Figure 12: Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness of How Their Choices Affect the Lives of Others
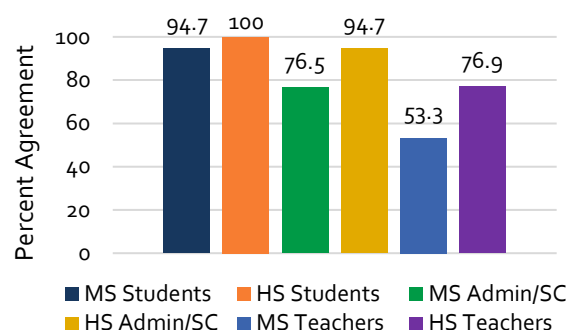
Figure 13: Agreement That Choices Program Increased Students' Awareness of How Choices Today Will Affect Them Later

Across stakeholder groups, students were more positive than administrators and school counselors, who were more positive than teachers. Meanwhile, across school levels, high school respondents were more positive than middle school respondents. The agreement rates associated with all three survey items were particularly low among middle school teachers (45% to 53%).

Progress Toward Meeting Goals: Spartan Prep Academy

Spartan Prep is a college awareness program. As such, the role of the student support specialist in supporting it involves preventing problems in order to keep Spartan Prep students on track as opposed to providing intervention services after problems have already arisen.

Goal 6: Spartan Prep Academy Outcomes

The sixth goal states: "Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy will be adequately prepared to enter a higher education institution upon high school graduation."

Given the role of the student support specialist with respect to Spartan Prep, as well as the characteristics and aspirations of the participating students, the indicators of program effectiveness differ somewhat from those reported in relation to SSS individual services and the Choices program. The objectives are less about behavioral improvement and more about long-term student success.

Objective 1: Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy program will graduate from high school as measured by the percent graduating on time.

All 45 of the grade 12 students (100%) who participated in Spartan Prep graduated on time. Further, 32 of the 45 (71%) graduated with an Advanced Studies Diploma.

Objective 2: Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy program will demonstrate success by obtaining a cumulative GPA of at least 2.3 upon graduation.

Of the 45 Spartan Prep students who graduated from a VBCPS high school in 2016, 42 (93%) met the criterion set forth in Objective 2. In fact, 27 of the 45 (60%) graduated with a GPA greater than 3.0 – that is, with either a B or A.

Objective 3: Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy program will enroll in a postsecondary institution during the fall after high school graduation as indicated by the percent enrolled in college.

National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data contained in the VBCPS data warehouse were used to assess Objective 3. Data for 44 students were available from the NSC, and of those 44 Spartan Prep students who graduated in 2016, 35 (80%) enrolled in college the following fall.

Objective 4: Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy program will indicate that the completion of Spartan Prep Academy led to a stronger desire to enroll in an institution of higher learning.

All but one of the 26 graduating Spartan Prep students who responded to the Spartan Prep student survey item agreed that their participation in Spartan Prep had increased their desire to attend college (96%). Further, when asked the same question on the staff survey, 100 percent of the administrators and school counselors, as well as the teachers, agreed that completing Spartan Prep had increased students' desire to attend college.

Objective 5: Students completing the Spartan Prep Academy program will indicate an understanding for the importance of their academic performance in the ability to enroll in a higher education institution.

All of the graduating Spartan Prep survey respondents (100%) agreed that they understood "the relationship between doing well in high school and attending college." All responding administrators and school counselors, as well as all of the responding high school teachers, agreed that the Spartan Prep students understood "the relationship between doing well in high school and attending college."

Program Effects of Individual Services and Choices

In addition to assessing progress made toward meeting the specific program goals and objectives, interrupted time series (ITS) pre/post comparison analyses were conducted to examine the effects that individual services and the Choices program had on discipline referrals.

Figure 14: Interrupted Time Series Trend Lines for Individual Services and Choices
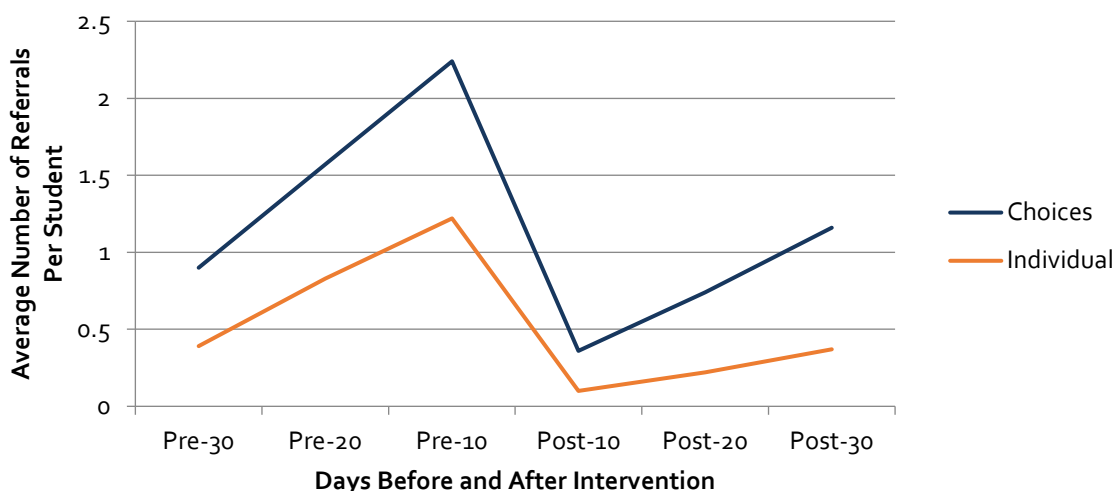
As shown in Figure 14, when student discipline problems tended to increase, school authorities intervened. Either the student participated in the Choices program or began receiving individual services from a student support specialist. As a result of the intervention, students' behavior improved – that is, the number of discipline referrals decreased, at least at first. Gradually though, the average student's behavior began to degrade, and the number of discipline referrals again began to climb. This was more pronounced among Choices participants.

This raised several questions. First, could the decrease in referrals following the intervention have occurred coincidentally? Based on the pre/post differences, the answer is probably not. The pre/post differences were sufficiently large for both the individual services and the Choices program that the chances of the decreases occurring merely by chance were less than 1 in 1,000.

Second, did the interventions produce effects that were large enough to be meaningful in a practical sense? Based on the effect sizes, as represented by the Cohen's D statistic, the answer is yes. The postintervention decreases in the average referral rate for the individual services yielded effect sizes of 1.2 and 1.4 for individual

services and Choices, respectively. These effect size statistics indicate that the means (average) moved 1.2 and 1.4 standard deviations, which is a large decrease. In more familiar terms, such a change in standard deviations is equivalent to moving from the 50th percentile to the 88th percentile and the 92nd percentile, respectively.

As shown in Figure 14, the effects of the interventions, particularly for Choices, appear to be short-lived. A significance test of the average per student referrals between the pre-30 day and post-30 day revealed no difference. Except for random variation, the referral rate 30 days after the end of Choices or individual services had returned to levels similar to those observed 30 days before the start of the interventions.

One can speculate that the temporary nature of the effects may be attributable to a lack of sustained follow-up and follow-through, which in turn may be attributable to the aforementioned understaffing issue. It is possible that if the Choices program were expanded and extended to meet more frequently, for longer sessions, and for a greater number of weeks, its impact may last longer, especially if coupled with individual services. Similarly, one can speculate that providing

individual services more frequently and consistently given adequate resources, those services might also have stronger and more sustained effects on student conduct and academic outcomes.

Stakeholder Perceptions

This section of the report provides a summary of the general survey items that were asked of multiple stakeholder groups about each SSS component, as well as the most common themes from the open-ended survey item asking stakeholders about (a) the general satisfaction with the relevant SSS component, (b) the greatest strengths of each component, and (c) what could be done to improve each component. Other survey results regarding the SSS implementation and progress toward goals were presented previously in the applicable sections of the report.

Because of the varied nature of the programs, it should be noted that different students and staff members often responded to those portions of the survey that addressed their specific experience. Conversely, because the student support specialists were so few in number and because they each handle all three SSS components, their survey was somewhat streamlined to avoid burdensome redundancy.

As noted previously, the parent response rate to the survey involving individual services and Choices was too low to provide data that were representative of the entire parent group. Therefore, the responses reported in this section are from middle and high school students, student support specialists, and staff (i.e., administrators and school counselors, as well as teachers). In addition, results from parents of Spartan Prep students are included in the figure displaying overall satisfaction rates with the Spartan Prep Academy.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Individual Services

The student support specialists were posed one overall satisfaction question covering their experience with all three components of the SSS program. Five of the seven responding specialists selected the *Very Satisfied* option, while the other two selected the *Satisfied* option, yielding an agreement of 100 percent.

Greater variability among the other stakeholder groups was observed. As shown in Figure 15, students were

most likely to be satisfied with individual services (97% to 99%), while 71 to 80 percent of staff members were satisfied, except for middle school teachers only 45 percent were satisfied.

Figure 15: Satisfaction With Individual Services Among Students and School Staff
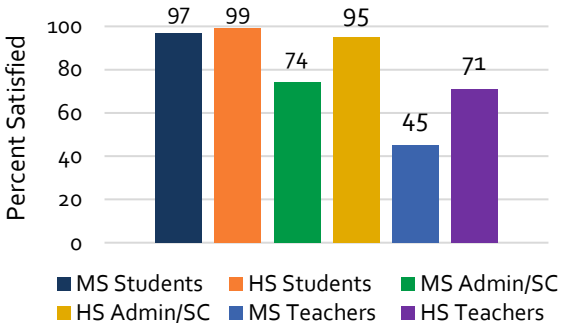
An open-ended question asked students to report the most helpful part of the individual services that they had received. Typical statements from students are included in Table 20.

Table 20: Typical Student Survey Responses: What Was the Most Helpful Part of the Individual Services You Received?

Comment
Being able to concentrate better to get better grades.
Calming me down when I was filled with anger.
Getting the emotional support I felt I needed.
Helping me see things from a different point of view.
He listens to my problems and then helps me solve them.
He helped me with my anger, school work, and situations at home.
How to control and conquer my anger.
How to think before I speak and act.
Talking about everything bothering me.
When we talked about present actions can affect future outcomes.

A similar question asked school staff members to describe the greatest strength of the individual services that students received. Several themes emerged. First, the administrators and school counselors seemed much more familiar with the work of the student support specialists than did the teachers. A typical administrator comment addressed a specialist's attribute or accomplishment, such as:

> *His ability to develop rapid rapport with the students. Plus he follows through with all issues addressed.*

In contrast, a typical teacher comment tended to address the program rather than the specialist and tended to be more generic in nature as indicated below:

> *It provides targeted intervention to high risk students.*

It is important to note that some teachers lacked familiarity with the student support specialists and the services they provided. Of the 165 comments, 15 percent (24 of 165) expressed a lack of knowledge about the SSS individual services with statements such as "I do not know," "Not sure," and "We wouldn't know as there is a complete lack of communication with teachers." Another 16 percent (26 of 165) of the responding teachers mentioned simply that the program's greatest strength is that the individual services are "individualized."

In contrast, as mentioned earlier in a previous section of this report, much greater unanimity emerged among administrators, school counselors, and teachers with respect to an open-ended question regarding how the individual services could be improved. Among all the staff members, two themes emerged. The first was that the student support specialists are spread too thin. Among the 69 responding administrators, 49 (71%) chose to write comments addressing the need for additional support. Typical comments were:

> *Have her more than twice a week.*

> *If funding is available, place at least one student support specialist at each school as a year-round placement.*

> *We need a full time student support specialist to get the best results. I have no doubt the majority of students who work with X could turn around their behavior and academics if she were here to work with them on a full time and more consistent basis.*

Of the 163 teachers who responded to the question, 41 (25%) expressed similar opinions that the SSS individual services are understaffed. However, a second theme emerged, especially among the teachers. Approximately 18 percent (30 of 163) expressed a desire for greater communication and coordination between the student support specialists and instructional staff. Typical comments were:

> *I would like to know how the students are progressing on a semester or quarterly basis, especially if there is anything in particular that I can focus on that would support what their goals are with the student support specialist.*

> *Make sure the staff knows who they are, what they do, and how they can assist us in assisting the children become better students academically and behaviorally.*

> *A weekly email sent to teachers of what students have been seen and for how long. Occasionally, I wonder if some students use student support merely as an excuse to get out of class.*

Most of the remaining staff comments touched upon issues such as providing the student support specialists with more opportunities for professional learning, for access to student grades and test scores, and for collaborating more formally with the school counselors. Further, although some teachers felt that student support should not be a substitute for punitive discipline, no administrators echoed such sentiments.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Choices

Stakeholders' overall perceptions of the Choices program are shown in Figure 16. Student satisfaction levels were very favorable at both middle and high schools (98%). Satisfaction levels among high school administrators and school counselors (95%) and teachers (72%) were higher than their middle school counterparts (69% and 53%, respectively).

Figure 16: Satisfaction With Choices Among Students and School Staff
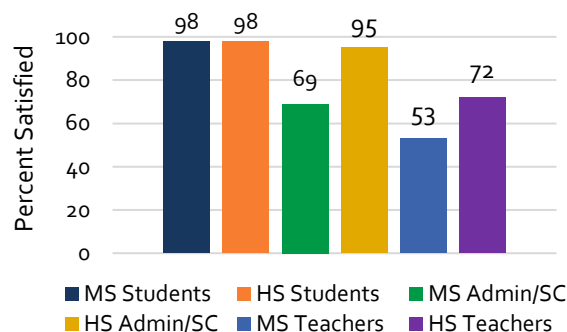
A review of responses to open-ended questions regarding the greatest strengths of Choices and the greatest need for improvement helped to explain the

response pattern. Generally, the students commented on the program's effectiveness in helping them to "make better choices" or "adjust my attitude" when asked about program strengths. The administrators and school counselors tended to address the dedication of the specialists and their ability to establish rapport and trust with these at-risk students. In contrast, as they did when commenting on the individual services, a significant portion of the teachers (between 20% and 35%, depending on how the responses are coded) expressed frustration such as "I do not know enough to comment" or "Don't know; zero communication."

When asked how the Choices program could be improved, the staff responses attributed program weaknesses to understaffing, citing the lack of follow-up and consistency due to a lack of availability. "The program is not consistent enough for our students," wrote one middle school administrator. "Twice a week for 20 minutes is too short, wrote another. "The conversation barely gets going."

Similarly, the teacher comments tended to stress that the redesigned program is less effective: "We are using a shorter length version and should go back to the full program." Many other teachers addressed the (a) shortness of the sessions, (b) the inadequate number of sessions, and (c) the scheduling of the sessions during lunch or study hall rather than after school.

The students offered similar suggestions for ways to improve the Choices program. These included suggestions such as:

> *By making it more than five weeks.*

> *By having Choices every day, not just once or twice a week.*

> *By having there be more than just one or two kids at a time.*

> *I would make the sessions way longer than 15 minutes.*

> *Tell more people to join because it's interesting.*

As with the two parallel questions regarding individual services, the administrators and school counselors seemed to be significantly more familiar with the Choices program – both its strengths and its shortcomings. As a consequence, a significant portion of the teachers (27 of 106, or 25%) referred to a lack of

communication and coordination between the student support specialists and the teachers.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Spartan Prep Academy

Stakeholder perceptions regarding Spartan Prep Academy were uniformly positive as shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Satisfaction With Spartan Prep Academy Among Students, School Staff, and Parents
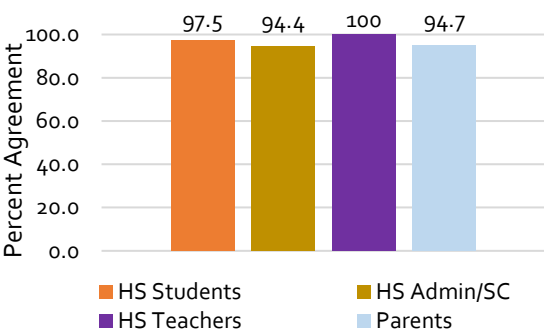
Very few suggestions were offered when stakeholders were asked how the Spartan Prep Academy could be improved. One administrator wrote: "Involve more students." Another suggested: "More recognition within the school." A teacher suggested: "Coordinate with AVID."

Among the students, the suggestions were more numerous and somewhat more varied than their adult counterparts. Four main themes emerged:

1. Spartan Prep should hold more frequent meetings.
2. More college visits and field trips should be conducted.
3. Spartan Prep should be expanded to involve more students
4. No improvement is needed; the program is fine as it is.

Additional Cost

The final evaluation question addressed the additional costs of SSS to the school division during the 2015-2016 school year. The additional costs included expenses that would not have been incurred if SSS, including individual services, the Choices program, and Spartan Prep, had not been implemented. The funding for SSS, including 12 full-time equivalent (FTE) allocations, came from the Alternative Education budget and information about expenses was provided by that office. A student support specialist at Renaissance Academy (middle school) and one at the Juvenile Detention Center were funded through a Title I, Part D, Subpart 2 Grant for Neglected and Delinquent students, but that funding is not included in this section because it was not from local funds.

Table 21 displays the various cost categories for implementing SSS at middle and high schools. As shown, VBCPS expenditures for SSS in 2015-2016 totaled approximately $852,979 which was largely due to staffing costs for 12 FTEs to provide services (99% of total cost). Some expenses for food services were incurred for Spartan Prep for weekend events that were part of the program. Norfolk State University (NSU) also provided supplemental funding and VBCPS and NSU alternate costs. Some costs for instructional and curriculum materials were incurred for Spartan Prep in 2015-2016, but no additional instructional costs were incurred for the Choices program because there were materials from 2014-2015 that were able to be used. Other expenses for office supplies, field trip admissions for Spartan Prep, printing and binding, and local travel were less than $1,000 each. There was no additional cost reported for professional development in 2015-2016 because the student support specialists did not participate in any external conferences during 2015-2016. Student support specialists are encouraged to attend site-based professional learning at the schools where they are assigned as opportunities relate to their responsibilities.[12]

Table 21: Additional Cost for Student Support Services by Intervention - 2015-2016

Cost Category	Individual Services	Choices	Spartan Prep	Total
Personnel (12 FTEs)*	**$845,112**	Included under individual services	Included under individual services	**$845,112**
Bus Transportation (e.g., field trips)			Provided by NSU	**N/A**
Food Services			**$4,313**	**$4,313**
Instructional/Curriculum Materials and Supplies			**$1,653**	**$1,653**
Office Supplies (includes materials used with students)	**$714**			**$714**
Other Purchased Services (e.g., field trip admissions)			**$349**	**$349**
Printing and Binding (e.g., business cards)	**$185**			**$185**
Professional Development				**N/A**
Travel (e.g., local travel among sites)	**$653**			**$653**
Total	**$846,664**	Included under individual services	**$6,315**	**$852,979**

* Based on an average annual salary of $50,174 for 2015-2016 student support specialists including 25.34 percent for fringe benefits and FICA (an additional $12,714 per FTE). The healthcare expense per person for 2015-2016 was $7,538. Therefore, the total compensation package for each of the 12 funded student support specialists was calculated to be $70,426.

Recommendations and Rationale

Recommendation #1: Continue the Student Support Services program and develop a plan to add staff as funding permits. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning)*

Rationale: The three SSS programs that were included in this evaluation provide vital services to at-risk students. Most of those students are behaviorally at-risk students who receive individual services or participate in the Choices program. Others are the Spartan Prep Academy students who are at risk of not persisting through high school graduation in order to attend college. These SSS programs not only benefit the recipients but positively affect the climate of the entire school.

The results of the interrupted time series analysis, as well as analysis of other SSS-related outcome data, provide significant and substantive evidence that SSS intervention and support efforts are effective. However, the positive effects diminish over time which may be due to not providing services in a consistent and timely manner or when the services are not sustained.

The evaluation findings suggested that one of the greatest challenges to effective, consistent, and sustained implementation involved SSS staffing. Current staffing levels necessitate assigning a specialist to multiple schools. The vast majority of program improvement suggestions stemmed from student and staff perceptions that SSS programs would be even more effective if each student support specialist were more consistently available to the students and staff at each site. Enabling a specialist to be assigned exclusively to one school rather than to two or more would require hiring additional student support specialists. Nonetheless, it is recommended that at least one student support specialist be assigned to each school, as funding permits.

Recommendation #2: Investigate areas within Student Support Services to refine practices, increase efficiencies and effectiveness, and improve overall communication. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning, and Office of Professional Growth and Innovation)*

Rationale: A review of responses to the Likert-type and open-ended questions on the student, staff, and specialist surveys revealed a variety of operational components that warrant review. Three of the more prominent and pervasive components involved communication, professional development, and documentation of data.

Communication: Substantial percentages of teachers at both the middle and high school levels were unclear about SSS functions and programs. Stronger and more consistent communication between the specialists and other stakeholders, especially instructional staff and parents, could foster greater coordination of effort and, therefore, more positive student outcomes.

Professional Development: In both their open-ended survey responses and during the focus group session, several of the specialists cited the benefits of receiving more frequent opportunities for high-quality, job-related professional development. Program effectiveness and student success depend in part on the specialists' remaining up to date with respect to new strategies and research-based best practices.

<u>Data procedures</u>: Evidence gathered during the evaluation suggested that a review is warranted of the specialists' access to student data repositories such as Synergy and classroom websites. Similarly, a review is warranted of SSS data and documentation designs and procedures, including the central SSS spreadsheet, the rubric for evaluating student success, and the Choices' pretest and posttest instruments and procedures.

Recommendation #3: Review all aspects of the Choices program and recommend adjustments. *(Responsible Groups: Department of School Leadership, Department of Teaching and Learning)*

A combination of outcome data and survey responses from all the surveyed stakeholder groups revealed variation in how the Choices program is implemented at different schools. The number of weekly sessions and the duration of those sessions at some schools were reported to fall short of how VBCPS intended the program to be implemented. The evaluation further found that the VBCPS intended implementation departs from the middle school and high school curricula as designed by the publishers of *Second Step* and *Reconnecting Youth*. In addition, levels of overall satisfaction with the Choices program among school staff (with the exception of high school administrators/counselors) were relatively low. Together, these indicators combine with the outcome data and other results to suggest that the Choices program was implemented more effectively at some schools than at others.

Consequently, all aspects of the Choices program's design and implementation merit a review. The review would seek first to identify program adjustments to maximize the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the program's design. It then would seek to develop appropriately flexible implementation procedures to ensure the consistency of outcomes in all VBCPS middle and high schools.

Appendix

Appendix A: Student Support Services Protocol for Focus Group With Student Support Specialists

Focus Group Questions (50 minutes)

Program Operations

1. What do you do as a student support specialist – specifically?

2. How well does your day-to-day reality align with your job description?

Program Implementation

3. From responses to the administrator/teacher survey, we are developing a sense that a student support specialist's role and effectiveness can vary significantly from school to school. Based on your experience, is this perception accurate, and what are your thoughts about this?

4. One of the most common comments in both the student and the administrator/teacher surveys is that each school should have at least one full-time student support specialist. How do you feel about that?

Professional Supports

5. What opportunities do you have for professional development and specific training regarding the latest research, techniques, and best practices?

6. In what ways do you use data to help you be effective – for example, attendance, discipline referrals, grades, test scores, success rubric ratings?

7. How do you evaluate your own effectiveness and success?

8. How do school division personnel, policies, and budget tend to help or hinder your effectiveness?

Endnotes

[1] Student Support Services provided by student support specialists within the Office of Alternative Education are distinct from the services provided by the Office of Student Support Services which was renamed in 2016. The Office of Student Support Services, formerly known as the Office of Guidance Services and Student Records, is part of the Department of Teaching and Learning.

[2] Students at Old Donation School did not receive services from a student support specialist.

[3] Campbell D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research on teaching. In N. L. Gage (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

[4] Source: http://www.vbschools.com/curriculum/alt_ed/choices.asp.

[5] Source: G. Larkin, personal communication, November 23, 2016.

[6] Source: http://www.vbschools.com/curriculum/alt_ed/choices.asp

[7] Source: https://www.nsu.edu/provost/vbhec/spartan-prep/parents

[8] Many of the Spartan Prep workshops do convene in the same location at the Virginia Beach Higher Education Center (VBHEC).

[9] This is an unduplicated count of individual students who received individual services. It is possible that students are represented more than once in caseload statistics if they saw more than one student support specialist during the school year.

[10] Source: VBCPS Annual School Report Card data.

[11] In accordance with the SSS *Reporting Guidelines* document, some students were assigned a Success Status Label despite not having received an Overall Success score on the Rubric. This would occur, for example, when a student left Renaissance Academy to return to a home school. Using the more inclusive Success Status Label results yielded a success rate of 70 percent. In contrast, using the Overall Success score results yielded a success rate of 65.5 percent.

[12] Source: G. Larkin, personal communication, December 15, 2016.

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