

Interim Report: Region 5 Governor’s Youth Development Academy

**Introduction:**

The Region 5 Governor’s Youth Development Academy brings together students and staff from Charlottesville City Schools, Fluvanna County Schools, Greene County Schools, and Staunton City Schools. While each of our divisions has a unique personality, there are also many commonalities. All school divisions are located within adjacent counties in central Virginia; each school is the sole high school in their school division and is fully accredited; and, each school is committed to working collaboratively to address the needs of all students.

School	2012-13 Student Membership	2012-13 Fed Grad Indicator 4 year cohort	Proficiency Gap Dashboard for Federal Accountability						
				Reading			Mathematics		
				AMO Target	AMO Result	Met AMO Target	AMO Target	AMO Result	Met AMO Target
Charlottesville High School (CHS)	1,196	77%	All	66	85	YES	64	63	3YR
			Gap Gr 1	52	74	YES	52	48	3YR
Fluvanna County High School (FCHS)	1,455	90%	All	66	86	YES	64	78	YES
			Gap Gr 1	52	71	YES	52	64	YES
Robert E Lee High School (RELHS)	757	80%	All	66	86	YES	64	72	YES
			Gap Gr 1	52	76	YES	52	57	YES
William Monroe High School (WMHS)	799	92%	All	66	87	YES	64	64	YES
			Gap Gr 1	52	80	YES	52	51	NO

Student selection for our Academy participants combined a variety of factors such as teacher, guidance, and administrator recommendations and, of course, student interest. Each school attempted to assemble student cohorts that represented the overall diversity and characteristics of their home schools’ student bodies, while affording additional consideration for candidates with multiple factors associated with academic risk. Additionally, as a team, we decided to focus our efforts on students in grade nine feeling that in the long run, this would allow us to develop graduation cohorts. Specific demographics are as follows:

	Total Number	% SOLs passed '12-'13	# Office Referrals '12-'13	Econ Disadvant aged	Gender		Ethnicity		
					Male	Female	Black	White	Other
Overall	34	50%	104	19	15	19	16	16	2
CHS	9	60%	17	7	3	6	6	2	1
FCHS	7	60%	38	3	3	4	3	4	-
RELHS	8	20%	29	4	7	1	4	3	1
WMHS	10	58%	20	5	2	8	3	7	-

**Purpose and Theme of Your Academy:**

The Region 5 Youth Development Academy was established to create a program of studies supporting the overarching goal of improved student outcomes. Grounded by the theme *Fearless Leadership*, 34 students from Charlottesville City Schools, Fluvanna County Schools, Greene County Schools, and Staunton City Schools have embarked on a year-long journey designed to prepare each student with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school, at home, and in the workplace; to build personal strengths; and enhance their engagement with school.

Attempting to leverage the potential afforded by new and existing technologies, we are creating opportunities for students to engage in a dynamic learning opportunities that support both the development of strong, positive, relationships with school personnel and improved outcomes in their traditional classrooms. We hope to help our kids advance in their development of the skills that matter most identified by Paul Tough in *How Children Succeed*, namely: perseverance, self-control, conscientiousness, and optimism.

We have organized our academy around the essential questions, "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" and "How do we inspire others to take action?" "How do you want others to define you?" As our students work through carefully designed exploratory activities, inquiries, and service learning projects, they will begin to formulate their own answers to these questions. These reflections and responses will be used to help each student build personal websites. These sites will house artifacts for their own e-Portfolios. In this manner the projects that are started here, will provide students with a solid foundation for creating a positive cyber identity – a factor that is becoming more and more important to institutions of higher education and prospective employers.

**Organization and Planning:**

Initial plans for GYDA5 began with the publication of the Superintendent's Memo # 059-13, posted March 1, 2013. Superintendents, Dr. Rosa Atkins, Charlottesville City Schools, and Gen Keller, Fluvanna County Schools, agreed that the systematic creation, implementation, and documentation of a new, effective, scalable, youth development model was possible.

Over the next several weeks, various representatives from the two divisions begin planning. Albemarle County representatives participated in several of the initial e-mail and phone threads, but ultimately decided they wanted to repeat a program they had previously developed.

On March 22, 2013 representatives from Charlottesville City Schools (Gertrude Ivory, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and Paula Culver-Dickinson, Coordinator Professional Development), met a representative from Fluvanna County Schools (Stacey Holland). School-specific needs and resources were identified; preliminary academy goals were outlined; the academy vision was clarified; tasks were assigned; and additional potential partners were noted. Working through Andrea Whitmarsh, then the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Greene County Schools joined our ranks the following day, and a consortium was born.

Between March 24 and March 29, grant drafts were circulated between the three divisions. Revisions and additions were made in a true spirit of collaboration.

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In the second week of April, we began talking to Staunton City Schools, to determine if we could extend our consortium even further. Grants were exchanged and numerous phone calls and emails occurred between Staunton's Robert E Lee High Schools' Dr. Mark Rowicki, Principal, and Lori Silver, Assistant Principal and our group. We immediately saw the benefits of blending our models and determined we could, and should, proceed forward with the four school divisions.

On May 10, 2013, Margery Farmer (Director of Accountability & Student Achievement, Greene County Public Schools), Stacey Holland (Guidance Counselor, Fluvanna County Public Schools), Lori Wilt Silver (Assistant Principal Robert E. Lee High School, Staunton City Schools), and Paula Culver-Dickinson (Coordinator of Professional Development/Teacher Mentoring), met from 1:00-5:30 pm to map out time lines and duties leading up to the opening of the Academy. Modifications to the curriculum were made to take advantage of the resources each division had to offer. At this meeting, evaluation criteria was established and the decision was made that all divisions would focus on students who would be entering the ninth grade the following fall. Additionally, at this meeting it was also determined that the long-term success of this partnership required certain degrees of freedom and an amount of autonomy for each school. We agree the items we would be tight on (weekly counselor and student contact; open and honest communication between partners; full participation in all whole academy events) and those items we would be loose on (how, when, and where the mentor/student meetings would take place during the school year). We also agreed to assess and make adjustments as we learned more about the needs of our students and each other throughout the year.

We attempted to include a fifth division, Waynesboro City Schools into the mix, and actually thought we had done so. But, changes in their central office, resulted in their withdrawal from the grant two days prior to our first academy meeting.

### **Staff Roles and Responsibilities:**

We have kept true to the roles and responsibilities outlined in our grant application. Each school identified one "counselor" to work with their academy students. Each counselor is a full time employee of the school system and has a high degree of contact with high school students. They are responsible for student selection and are the primary mentors for each site. Specifically, our counseling team is as follows:

Jodie Murphy, CHS, CCS School Social Worker  
Stacey Holland, FCHS, Fluvanna County High School Counselor  
Angelina Santus, WMHS, WMHS, Director of Guidance  
Lori Swartzel, RELHS, RELHS Assistant Principal

In addition, Paula Culver-Dickinson, Academy Director, Coordinator of Professional Development and Teacher Mentoring with Charlottesville City Schools is serving as the Grant Director. She is responsible for coordination between divisions and schools. Working through a Grant Management Team, comprised of one member from each school, the Academy Director will communicate the strategic vision, monitor fidelity of implementation, and handle all logistical and financial aspects of the grant between and within participating school divisions.

Additional staff involved in the actual teaching/delivery of materials to date are:  
Shannon Myers, Assistant Director Triple C Camp and her team lead the Academy participants in a two-hour ice breaker and team building program to start our first academy meeting on September 28, 2013

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Also on September 28, 2013 Christine Esposito, Quest Teacher, Charlottesville City Schools. Christine is helping to create the Academy blog (located at <http://gyda.edublogs.org/>). She presented students with a 3-hour orientation to their ChromeBooks, Digital Citizenship, the Academy Blog, and a brief Google overview. Her presentation is available on the Academy blog.

At the October 12, 2013 Academy meeting, Misty Graves, Program Supervisor-Community Based Services, City of Charlottesville lead our kids through a service learning project. Because of the weather, we had to abandon our original plans to have half of the kids work on clearing the Rivanna Trail and conducting some water quality studies, while the other half of the kids would work with Habitat for Humanity. Instead, we moved the project indoors and created some early literacy books for a local pre-school; made some seasonal door decorations for a local nursing home; and assembled some snack bags Habitat for Humanity will distribute at their next home build. Misty also facilitated a variety of activities focused on developing a greater understanding of service learning and collaboration.

### **Procedure for Selection of Students:**

This year we used a combination of teacher, guidance counselor and administrator recommendations. We had hoped to include a student application component, but found we had very few applicants. Every site ended up using the recommendations as the basis for 'recruitment' rather than selection. Early indications are that this may have been due, at least in part, to the first time nature of this program. Since we have begun, several academy participants have asked if they can bring a friend, or have made recommendations to their counselors as to others that would benefit from participation in the Academy. As a team, the grant director and site counselors, have decided to suspend the addition of any new participants until we feel comfortable that we can meet the needs of our existing cohorts.

One of the benefits of this 'flipped model' is that we are working with the kids throughout the year. We are making sure that students who need tutoring support get it. Communication with classroom teachers is vital and time consuming. Reports from several teachers indicate that they are seeing some positive behavioral changes in some of the academy students (unsolicited). One of the surprising aspects of this academy so far, has been the number of families that are stepping forward requesting help with many related, but not necessarily anticipated, areas. At CHS, for example, we have been contacted to assist families with clothing vouchers, school supplies, and medical referrals. In Greene, we are working with a student to handle a tough transition into foster care.

### **Administration and Logistics**

Meeting sites for the Academy vary. Our first meeting took place on the grounds of Charlottesville High School. Our second meeting utilized a grand meeting room in the Downtown Library. In November we will travel to Staunton. Later we will travel to Fluvanna and Greene County. We are trying to make sure each division hosts at least one event. As host, that counselor takes lead on planning for meals/food and the educational content of the day. Transportation of all students is arranged locally. We had hoped to share some buses, but insurance coverage precludes transporting other students outside of the host's county/school borders.

### **Communication prior, during, and after the academies**

#### **Internal:**

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One formal planning session and multiple informal sessions have occurred since the awarding of this grant. Communication between partner schools has been primarily through email. At each academy event, we make sure to build in time for counselors to discuss what is working and what we need to change.

### **External:**

Executive briefs were shared with participating school boards, but to date, we have not sought media attention, as we feel we are just starting. As we delve deeper into the program and the curriculum we anticipate a more communication with the press, community partners, and with local governments.

### **Curriculum/Content Development and Delivery**

As outlined in our grant application, we are creating our own curriculum that follows the tenets of Understanding by Design. We have framed our institute around the concept of 'fearless learning'. We are weaving together college and career readiness work, digital literacy and citizenship, multiple field experiences (such as service learning, challenge courses, and the culminating three day/two night Wilderness Camp Adventure, and a strong mentoring program throughout the current school year. We are utilizing local talent and resources to enrich these field experiences.

### **Evaluation**

We believe if we do this right, we should be able to see improved student outcomes. To measure this, we are looking at traditional markers such as improved performance on standardized tests, better grades, better attendance in school and at academy functions, a reduced number of discipline referrals, and increased participation in afterschool activities. Baseline data has been established from last year for most markers...surprisingly, attendance has proven to be extremely tricky to define and therefore to capture. For many of our students, attendance varies wildly from class to class. One student had 7 to 54 absences, depending on which class you look at.

We are also collecting more qualitative data, such as student responses to questions, such as "What would you learn about or do if you weren't afraid?"

*"If I weren't afraid I would share my ideas with everybody and anywhere even if they were silly or obvious. Out of that I would learn that everybody has the right to express themselves."*

*"I would go out for more after school activities and I would try harder in class. I'm always so afraid of other people judging me that it limits what I do school. My grades last year would have been better but I didn't want people to think I was a geek. I would have done choir last year but I was too afraid to sing to the choir teacher. I still regret not doing it but if I had another chance I don't think I would change anything because I am still afraid. I am, in a sense afraid of others. Their thoughts, opinions, and judgements. I wish I wasn't afraid...."*

We are also using informal student feedback, questions, and student actions to guide our next steps. I am amazed to see so many teenagers getting up really early on Saturday mornings to arrive at their home high school, make a forty-five minute to one hour bus ride, or to ride their bikes across town, in the rain, and arrive at the Downtown Library in

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Charlottesville by 9:00 a.m. to perform a service learning activity. I was even more surprised when, forty minutes after we started, a parent and student from Fluvanna showed up at the library. As the parent stated, "He was so upset that he overslept and would miss this, I had no choice but to drive him here myself."

### **Follow up and sustaining support for the students throughout this school year:**

Our academy proposes to provide students and faculty, the framework, and the freedom, to develop a mentoring program that leverages site-specific resources and skills. With the expressed purpose of creating a program of studies with supports the overarching goal of improving student outcomes, we are implementing our twist on a flipped classroom model. Whereas most academies focusing on youth development occur in a one or two-week long timeframe during the summer and follow-up with mentoring during the subsequent school year, our academy culminates in a five (5) day face-to-face experience, and is preceded by a year of mentoring. Therefore, I respectfully submit to you, a preamble, not a summation, on the Region 5 Governor's Youth Development Academy.