

Follow-up Evaluation of the Secondary School Reform Program

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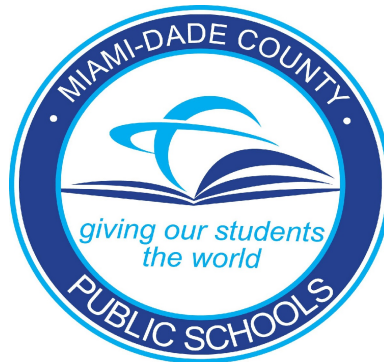
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May of 2006, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' (M-DCPS) Board approved implementation of Secondary School Reform (SSR) in the District. The SSR plan is a multi-phase and multi-year program that includes, in part, an eight period class schedule, common planning among teachers and career theme-based academies for students. In 2006-07, eleven M-DCPS high schools comprised the first cohort of schools implementing SSR. A second cohort of 18 additional senior high schools implemented SSR in 2007-08.

At the request of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, an initial evaluation report was completed and presented to the Board March 2009. The report addressed the extent of SSR program implementation and the students' progress through one (Cohort 2) or two years (Cohort 1) of SSR participation. The results of the initial evaluation report proved the SSR program's effects to be generally positive. The present evaluation consists of a follow-up of the initial report, one year later. At this time, the sample of Cohort 1 students have been exposed to three years of SSR participation and Cohort 2 students to two years.

A total of 6,202 SSR students and 6,967 Comparison Group students were included in the Cohort 1 analyses and 6,790 SSR students and 6,874 Comparison Group students in the Cohort 2 analyses. Additionally, 20 principals 1044 teachers, and 1,572 students completed questionnaires. The evaluation questions proposed and the accompanying results are presented below.

Evaluation Question #1. What is the academic performance of students in the SSR schools? The results show that, when contrasted with non-SSR students, a greater percentage of low performing students attending SSR schools improved their academic performance. Additionally, overall a greater percentage of SSR students enrolled in advance courses. Among students enrolled in advanced courses, those attending SSR schools enrolled in more courses, both honors and AP, than students attending non-SSR schools. No major differences were observed in other school performance measures, such as attendance and outdoor suspensions, among the SSR and non-SSR students. On the other hand, SSR students were more likely to drop out of school than students attending non-SSR schools.

Evaluation Question #2. Was the SSR program fully implemented at the schools? The majority of teachers and administrators reported that SSR was fully or extensively implemented at their schools. The support for SSR among teachers was very high. Principals and teachers were familiar with the goals of SSR and reported receiving adequate support from the district for implementation purposes. As was intended by the program, the implementation of SSR led to teacher collaboration on curriculum and educational planning.

Evaluation Question #3. What is the opinion of students, teachers, and administrators concerning the effectiveness of SSR? The results of the teacher, principal, and student surveys indicate that the overwhelming majority support the SSR program. Teachers and principals believe SSR exerts a positive impact on the students' academic performance. Teachers believe that collaborating on lesson plans enhances the quality of instruction. Principals unanimously believe that SSR helps students establish career goals. Students report that they enjoyed participating in the Career Academy and that they are willing to recommend the program to other students.

Based on the observed results the following recommendations are made:

1. Complete SSR implementation in participating schools.
2. Familiarize all new teachers with SSR.
3. Assess the long term effects of SSR on academic performance, including post graduation.

INTRODUCTION

Recent statistics show that annually, 31 percent of US students, over one million every year, drop out of school (Editorial Projects in Education, 2009). Census data verifies that students who drop out of school make \$9,634 dollars less per year than students who complete high school (US Bureau of the Census, 2006). It has been calculated that if all students who drop out of school graduated from high school their earnings throughout their lifetimes would contribute 335 billion dollars to the US economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). These concerns were recently addressed at the national level when on May 12, 2009, the House Education and Labor Committee held a hearing to examine how policies for dealing with the high school dropout crisis might strengthen America's economic competitiveness. Shortly thereafter, President Obama introduced a 4.35 billion dollar grant program intended to stimulate school reform.

For several years now, The Miami-Dade County Public Schools have been planning and implementing secondary school reform. In May of 2006, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' (M-DCPS) Board approved implementation of a Secondary School Reform (SSR) initiative as delineated in the *Secondary School Reform 5 Year Plan* (M-DCPS, 2006). The SSR plan includes, in part, an eight period class schedule, common planning among teachers, and theme-based career academies for students. A central component of SSR is to restructure high schools into small learning communities to be known as career academies. These personalized learning environments provide high school students with academic opportunities that prepare them for college and for the working world. The SSR Plan was initiated in 11 M-DCPS high schools during the 2006-07 school year. Ten traditional and one alternative M-DCPS high school comprised the SSR's first Cohort. A second cohort of 17 SSR schools joined the initiative the following school year. This Cohort consisted of nine traditional and eight alternative or specialized high schools that began in 2007-08 and one traditional high school that began in 2009-10.

At the request of the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, an initial evaluation report was completed and presented to the Board March 2009 (Abella, 2009). The report addressed the extent of SSR program implementation and the students' progress through one (Cohort 2) or two years (Cohort 1) of SSR participation. The evaluation targeted 9th grade students attending traditional SSR schools in 2006-07 (Cohort 1) and 9th grade students attending traditional SSR schools in 2007-08 (Cohort 2). The results of the initial evaluation report proved the SSR program to be: well implemented, liked by students and school personnel, and exerting a favorable impact on student academic performance.

The present evaluation consists of a follow-up of the initial report, one year later. At this time, the sample of Cohort 1 and 2 students have been exposed to as many as three years of SSR. The current report follows the same format as the initial one and examines the same evaluation questions:

1. Was the SSR program fully implemented at the schools?
2. What is the academic performance of students in the SSR schools?
3. What is the opinion of students, teachers, and administrators concerning the effectiveness SSR program?

EVALUATION DESIGN

The Secondary School Reform (SSR) follow-up evaluation results were generated from archival student data and from survey findings. The details of the sampling and data collection processes are described below.

School Samples

SSR School Selection. According to SSR district staff, 10 traditional senior high schools initiated SSR in 2006-07. All 10 SSR schools that began in 2006-07 were included in the analyses and were designated as Cohort 1 (Appendix A1). An additional 9 traditional senior high schools began SSR in 2007-08 and one began in 2009-10. These 10 SSR schools were designated as Cohort 2 (Appendix A2).

It should be noted that all M-DCPS secondary schools implement, to some extent, the SSR initiatives. For the purposes of the present study, senior high schools that adopted eight-period schedules will be designated as *SSR schools*. Senior high schools that did not adopt an eight period schedule will be referred to as the *Comparison schools*.

Comparison Group School Selection. A total of 17 senior high schools, excluding alternative and specialized schools, did not participate in SSR. From this group a comparison sample for the SSR Cohort 1 schools were selected. These 9 traditional senior high schools are listed in Appendix A1. The same group of 9 schools were selected to act as the comparison sample for Cohort 2 schools (Appendix A2).

To the extent possible, comparison schools were selected on the basis of their similarity to SSR schools in free/reduced lunch status and ethnic breakdowns. The characteristics of the 9th grade student populations of the schools were examined and compared to SSR schools the year the programs were initiated. These figures are shown in Appendices A1 and A2.

Student Samples

Cohort 1 Student Selection. All 9th grade students enrolled in a Cohort 1 SSR (n = 6,202) or comparison school (n = 6,967) at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year were selected to participate in the student sample. This was the sample used for calculating the drop-out rate. The attendance and promotion analyses included only students who were active and attended the same school through 2008-09. For all other analyses only Cohort 1 students who remained active and at the same school through 2008-09 and who graduated each year are included. Therefore, the Cohort 1 student sample used for analyses of FCAT-SSS, advanced course participation, and suspensions data included 3,395 SSR and 4,579 Comparison students.

The 9th grade Cohort 1 SSR group, contrasted with the comparison group, was more likely to be Black (25% vs. 14%) and of low socioeconomic status, as indicated by the percentage of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program (71% vs. 62%). The ethnicity and free/reduced lunch (FRL) figures, for the schools and overall, are shown in Appendix A1.

Cohort 2 Student Selection. All 9th grade students enrolled in a Cohort 2 SSR (n = 6,390) or comparison school (n = 6,874) at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year were selected to participate in the student sample. This was the sample used for calculating the drop-out rate. The attendance and promotion analyses included only students who were active and attended the same school through 2008-09. For all other analyses only Cohort 2 students who remained active and at the same school through 2008-09 and who graduated each year are included. Therefore, the Cohort 2 student sample used for analyses of FCAT-SSS, advanced course participation, absences, and suspensions data included 3,459 SSR students and 4,351 Comparison students.

The 9th grade Cohort 2 SSR group, contrasted with the comparison group, was more likely to be Black (36% vs. 15%) and of low socioeconomic status, as indicated by the percentage of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program (77% vs. 59%). The ethnicity and FRL figures for the Cohort 2 schools, individually and overall, are shown in Appendix A2.

Survey Samples

Principal Survey. All 20 principals of SSR Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools were surveyed. In the fall of 2009 principals were asked to complete the SSR Principal Questionnaire (Appendix B1). The survey was conducted electronically and all 20 principals (100 %) completed the questionnaires.

Teacher Survey. All instructional personnel at the 20 SSR Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools were surveyed in the fall of 2008. Teachers were asked to complete the SSR Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B2). The survey was conducted electronically and 1,044 teachers, representing all the SSR schools, completed questionnaires.

Student Survey. Five classes of students were selected from among home rooms at each of the 20 SSR Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools. Students in grades 11 and 12 (in 2009-10) were targeted. Surveys were mailed in the fall of 2009. Students were asked to complete the SSR Student Questionnaire (Appendix B3). A total of 1,572 students, representing 18 of the 20 (80%) SSR schools, completed questionnaires.

RESULTS

Evaluation Question #1. What is the academic performance of students in the SSR schools?

The following indicators were used to assess the academic performance of SSR students: FCAT-SSS, advanced course participation, attendance, suspensions, promotions, and drop-out rate. The results for each area of academic performance is presented below for students in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools.

FCAT-SSS

The students in Cohort 1 were in the 11th grade during the 2008-09 school year and participated only on the science component of the FCAT-SSS. In 2008-09, Cohort 2 students were in the 10th grade and completed the reading and mathematics components of the FCAT-SSS. The current 2009 FCAT-SSS results were compared to their respective 8th grade (pre high school) FCAT results and are presented below.

FCAT-SSS Reading. The percentage of Cohort 2 students whose scores reached or surpassed Level 3 in the reading section of the FCAT-SSS is presented in Table 1. As shown, the percentage of SSR students in Cohort 2 achieving Level 3 or above, declined approximately 10 percent between the 2007 and 2009 administration of the FCAT. The percentage of Cohort 2 comparison students who achieved Level 3 or above declined by 13 percent, across the two year period .

Table 1**Percentage of Cohort 2 Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above in FCAT-SSS Reading**

Cohort	Group	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Diff.
	SSR	33.0	31.7	22.7	-10.3
Cohort 2	Non-SSR	53.2	50.7	40.2	-13.0

It should be noted that the FCAT-SSS reading results reported in the first SSR evaluation report (Abella, 2009) found similar results for Cohort 1 students when comparing their 2006 (8th grade) and their 2008 (10th grade) FCAT-SSS reading scores. The percentage of SSR students scoring at level 3 or above declined 11 percent and the comparison students declined 13 percent.

FCAT-SSS Mathematics. The percentage of Cohort 2 students whose scores reached or surpassed Level 3 in the mathematics section of the FCAT-SSS is presented in Table 2. As shown, the percentage of SSR students in Cohort 2 achieving Level 3 or above increased by approximately 9 percent between the 2007 and 2009 administration of the FCAT-SSS. The percentage of Cohort 2 comparison students who achieved Level 3 or above increased by 7 percent across the same period. Results reported in the first SSR evaluation report (Abella, 2009) show that the percentage of Cohort 1 students that reached level 3 on the FCAT-SSS mathematics test increased by 11 percent between the 8th and 10th grade (2006 to 2008) while the comparison group increased by 10 percent.

Table 2

Percentage of Cohort 2 Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above in FCAT-SSS Mathematics

Cohort	Group	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Diff.
	SSR	48.1	52.4	56.8	8.7
Cohort 2	Non-SSR	69.1	73.5	75.6	6.5

FCAT-SSS Science. The percentage of Cohort 1 students who achieved Level 3 or higher on the FCAT-SSS science test are displayed in Table 3. As shown, the percentage of Cohort 1 SSR students achieving Level 3 or above increased by approximately 5 percent when comparing the results of the 8th grade (2006) and the 11th grade (2009) administrations of the FCAT-SSS science test. Across the same three year period, the percentage of Cohort 1 comparison students who achieved Level 3 or above increased by 4 percent.

Table 3

Percentage of Cohort 1 Students Scoring at Level 3 or Above in FCAT-SSS Science

Cohort	Group	Grade 8	Grade 11	Diff.
	SSR	28.3	32.8	4.5
Cohort 1	Non-SSR	30.8	34.8	4.0

Summary of FCAT-SSS Results. Relative to the comparison group, a greater percentage of SSR students improved their FCAT-SSS scores beyond Level 3 in reading, mathematics, and science during the periods assessed. When considering the results of both student cohorts, that of the first SSR evaluation, and the present results, it can be said that low performing SSR students have performed favorably, relative to comparison students, in all FCAT-SSS subject areas.

Advanced Courses

A count was made of the number of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses taken by SSR and comparison (Non-SSR) students. The courses were tabulated the year before attending senior high (8th grade) and every year afterwards, through 10th grade (for Cohort 2 students) and 11th grade (for Cohort 1 students).

Honors Courses: As shown in Table 4, approximately the same percentages of Cohort 1 SSR students (38%) and non-SSR students (36%) took honors courses in the eighth grade. They also took, on average, the same number of courses in the eighth grade (SSR= 1.7, Non-SSR = 1.6). Three years later, Cohort 1 SSR and non-SSR students were still participating at similar levels in honors courses (69% vs. 68%). But although the difference was small, 11th graders in SSR schools took more honors courses (2.6) than students attending non-SSR schools (2.4).

Cohort 2 students in SSR schools were less likely to be enrolled in honors courses (30%) than non-SSR students (42%) prior to reaching high school (eighth grade). Two years after reaching high school (10th grade), the level of Cohort 2 students enrolled in honors courses increased more steeply for SSR students (56%) as compared to non-SSR students (61%). The two groups did not differ in the average number of honors classes students took (2.3).

Table 4
Percentage of SSR and Non-SSR Students Taking Honors Courses and the Average Number of Honors Courses Taken per Student

Cohort	Group	Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11	
		% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²
Cohort 1	SSR	38%	1.7	52%	3.2	61%	2.0	69%	2.6
	Non-SSR	36%	1.6	52%	2.7	60%	1.6	68%	2.4
Cohort 2	SSR	30%	2.8	50%	2.8	56%	2.3	--	--
	Non-SSR	42%	2.8	60%	2.8	61%	2.3	--	--

(1). Percentage of students who took honors courses. (2). Average number of courses taken by students taking honors courses.

Advanced Placement Courses: As shown in Table 5, less than one percent of Cohorts 1 and 2 students took Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the eighth grade. Three years later, during the 2008-09 school year, a greater percentage of Cohort 1 SSR students (33%) were participating in Advanced Placement courses, as compared to non-SSR students (29%). In contrast, in 2008-09, while in grade 10, more non-SSR students (17%) took AP courses than SSR students (12%). But on average, among students taking AP courses, both Cohort 1 (2.3) and Cohort 2 (1.5) SSR students took more advanced placement courses in 2008-09 than Cohort 1 (1.8) and Cohort (1.2) students in non-SSR schools.

Table 5

Percentage of SSR and Non-SSR Students Taking Advanced Placement Courses and the Average Number of Advanced Placement Courses Taken per Student

Cohort	Group	Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11	
		% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²	% ¹	No. ²
Cohort 1	SSR	1%	1.0	3%	1.1	13%	1.7	33%	2.3
	Non-SSR	1%	1.0	5%	1.1	12%	1.2	29%	1.8
Cohort 2	SSR	1%	1.0	7%	1.0	12%	1.5	--	--
	Non-SSR	1%	1.0	6%	1.0	17%	1.2	--	--

(1). Percentage of students who took Advanced Placement courses. (2). Average number of courses taken by students taking advanced placement courses.

Summary of Advanced Courses Placement. As a group, Cohort 1 SSR students were more likely to be enrolled in advanced courses, both honors and AP, than non-SSR Cohort 1 students. This was not true for Cohort 2 SSR students. But on a per student basis, SSR students took more advanced courses. That is, Cohorts 1 and 2 students attending SSR schools enrolled in a greater number of advanced courses, both honors and AP, than students attending non-SSR schools.

Attendance

The number of unexcused absences of SSR and Non-SSR students was tracked for a period of three years for Cohort 1 students and two years for Cohort 2 students. The average number of absences per year for Cohort 1 and 2 students are presented in Table 6. As shown, absences increased for SSR

students in Cohort 1 across a two year period from an approximate average of four per year in the 8th grade to seven in the 11th grade. Similarly, Cohort 2 SSR students increased their absences from about four days in the 8th grade to seven days in the 10th grade.

Therefore, there was an increase in the average number of absences of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 SSR students of approximately three days across the respective three and two year periods. By comparison, the average number of absences from school for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Comparison students increased by approximately two days during the same time periods.

The mean number of absences generated by the SSR and Non-SSR groups at the end of the two or three year periods were statistically contrasted using ANCOVA analyses. The analyses statistically controlled for the initial rate of attendance (8th grade) and also used key demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, free/reduced lunch, gifted status, and limited English proficiency as covariates. The number of absences in the 2008-09 school year acted as the dependent variable.

Table 6
Mean Absences for SSR and Non-SSR Students

Cohort	Group	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11
Cohort 1	SSR	3.9	3.7	5.1	6.5
	Non-SSR	2.7	3.6	3.8	5.3
Cohort 2	SSR	3.9	6.0	6.9	--
	Non-SSR	2.8	3.4	4.6	--

The results indicate that after controlling for the initial rate of attendance and other relevant demographic variables, the SSR and Non-SSR groups significantly differed in their 2008-09 attendance rates (absences). This was true both for Cohort 1 students, $F(1, 7,967) = 9.56, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$), and Cohort 2 students, $F(1, 7,805) = 73.23, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$. For both Cohorts, the difference in attendance between the two groups was too small to be of practical significance, with group affiliation accounting for less than one percent of the outcome variance.

Summary of Attendance Results. The average annual number of unexcused absences increased for Cohorts 1 and 2 students during the periods assessed, i.e., the attendance rate for SSR students decreased. Overall, the attendance of the SSR student groups changed at a rate similar to that of the comparison groups.

Suspensions

The number of outdoor suspensions of SSR and Non-SSR students was tracked for a period of three years for Cohort 1 students and two years for Cohort 2 students. The average number of outdoor suspensions per student per year for Cohort 1 and 2 students are presented in Table 7. As shown, suspensions decreased for SSR students in Cohort 1 from an average of .47 per student in the eighth grade to .39 per student in the 11th grade. On the other hand, Cohort 2 SSR students increased their suspension rates from .64 per student in grade eight to .93 per student in grade ten.

The mean number of outdoor suspensions generated by the SSR and Non-SSR groups at the end of the two or three year periods were statistically contrasted using ANCOVA analyses. The analyses statistically controlled for the initial rate of suspensions (8th grade) and also used key demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, free/reduced lunch, gifted status, and limited English proficiency as covariates. The number of suspensions in the 2008-09 school year was the dependent variable.

The results indicate that after controlling for initial suspensions and other relevant demographic variables, the groups in one cohort differed significantly in their 2008-09 suspensions while the other cohort did not. That is, the Cohort 1 groups did not differ significantly in their 2008-09 suspensions, $F(1, 7,965) = .21, p = ns$, while Cohort 2 students did, $F(1, 7,805) = 64.62, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$. In Cohort 2, the difference in outdoor suspensions between the two groups was too small to be of practical significance, with group affiliation accounting for less than one percent of the observed outcome variance.

Table 7
Average Number of Outdoor Suspensions for SSR and Non-SSR Students

Cohort	Group	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11
Cohort 1	SSR	.47	.36	.33	.39
	Non-SSR	.29	.25	.22	.32
Cohort 2	SSR	.64	.76	.93	--
	Non-SSR	.27	.21	.58	--

Summary of Suspension Results. The average annual number of suspensions per student decreased for Cohort 1 SSR students and increased for Cohort 2 SSR students during the periods assessed. The suspensions of the Cohort 1 and 2 SSR groups changed at a pace similar to the comparison groups.

Promotion

The promotion rate, from one grade to the next, was calculated for Cohort 1 and 2 students for the school years spanning from 2007-08 to 2008-09. Included in the analyses were all Cohort 1 students in grade 10 and all Cohort 2 students in grade 9 at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year who were still attending the same senior high school in 2008-09.

As shown in Table 8, 95 percent of Cohort 1 SSR students were promoted to a higher grade in 2008-09 compared to 93 percent of Non-SSR students. This difference in promotion rates was statistically significant, $X^2(1) = 16.58$, $p < .001$. Among the Cohort 2 groups, 96 percent of SSR students were promoted to higher grades while 97 percent of comparison students were promoted. The difference in promotion rates among the two groups was statistically significant, $X^2(1) = 5.37$ $p < .05$.

Table 8
Percentage of SSR and Non-SSR Students Promoted and Retained

Cohort	Group	Promoted	Retained
Cohort 1	SSR	95.0	5.0
	Non-SSR	92.7	7.3
Cohort 2	SSR	95.6	4.4
	Non-SSR	96.6	3.4

Summary of Promotion Results. Cohort 1 SSR students, but not Cohort 2 SSR students, were more likely to be promoted to a higher grade level than students attending Non-SSR schools.

Drop-out

The drop-out formula used by the State of Florida was used to calculate the drop-out rate for all Cohort 1 and 2 students. All students enrolled as 9th graders at the beginning of 2006-07, for Cohort 1 students, and at the start of 2007-08, for Cohort 2 students, were included in the analyses.

As shown in Table 9, the percentage of Cohort 1 students who dropped out of school during the three

year period examined was 5.5 percent for the SSR group and 4.2 percent for the Non-SSR group. This difference was statistically significant, $X^2(1) = 12.25$, $p < .001$. The percentage of Cohort 2 students who dropped out of school during a two year period was 4.8 percent for the SSR group and 2.8 percent for the Non-SSR group. This difference was statistically significant, $X^2(1) = 34.72$, $p < .001$.

Table 9
Percentage of SSR and Non-SSR Students Who Dropped Out of School

Cohort	Group	n	Drop-Out Percent
Cohort 1	SSR	6202	5.5
	Non-SSR	6967	4.2
Cohort 2	SSR	6390	4.8
	Non-SSR	6874	2.8

Summary of Drop-Out Results. Across three (Cohort 1) and two year periods (Cohorts 2) SSR students were more likely to drop out of school than Non-SSR students.

Summary of Results for Evaluation Question #1:

There were some differences observed in academic performance when contrasting SSR students, both Cohorts 1 and 2, to the comparison groups. In particular, the low performing SSR students' FCAT-SSS reading levels declined less, and their mathematics levels increased at a faster rate, than those of comparison students. The FCAT-SSS science scores of low performing Cohort 1 SSR students also improved more than those of the comparison students. Additionally, SSR students took more advanced courses, such as AP and honors. Among Cohort 1, SSR students were more likely to receive grade level promotions than students in the comparison group. On the other hand, Cohort 2 SSR students were less likely to be promoted than comparison students. Also, the drop-out rate in general was greater among SSR students. The present academic performance results are almost identical to those reported in the first SSR evaluation report (Abella, 2009). Then, as now, SSR students exhibited positive changes in academic performance, particularly in FCAT-SSS performance.

Evaluation Question #2. Was the SSR program fully implemented at the schools?

Principals and instructional personnel at SSR schools were surveyed and asked to report the extent of SSR implementation at their schools. In the survey, principals and instructional personnel (teachers) were asked to respond by referring to the status of SSR initiative as of the 2008-09 school year. For Cohort 1 SSR schools this would have been the third year of SSR implementation and for Cohort 2 SSR schools the second year of implementation. A total of 20 school administrators and 1,044 teachers completed questionnaires. All SSR schools participated in the surveys.

The results show that the majority of principals (75%) and teachers (89%) claim SSR as having been either fully or extensively (75% level of implementation) implemented at their schools. When considering only those teachers who reported having been directly involved in planning or implementing SSR (n = 577), most reported full or extensive SSR implementation at their schools (95%). SSR-involved teachers were more likely than principals to report full or extensive SSR implementation at their schools (Table 10).

Table 10
Reports of Full or 3/4 SSR Implementation in 2008-09: Principal and Teacher Survey Responses

SSR Cohorts	Principals	Teachers*
Cohort 1	80%	93%
Cohort 2	70%	97%
Total	75%	95%

*Among teachers who participated in SSR.

Most principals (90%) reported having received sufficient information from district staff to fully understand and implement SSR at their schools. Almost all principals (95%) indicated that they were familiar with the goals of SSR and all (100%) reported familiarity with the six core principles of SSR. Among the six SSR core principles, administrators rated as most important *the academic engagement of students* and an *integrated system of high standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and support*. Most administrators (95%) rated these two principles as *very important*.

Approximately half of the principals (45%) indicated that all their staff supported SSR while most of the others (50%) indicated that three-fourths of their staff supported SSR. Principals reported that some teachers do not support SSR because it *changes the way teachers plan* (95%), and because of issues having to do with: *funding* (85%), *scheduling* (85%), and *having to teach more classes* (60%). The factors that principals believe influenced teachers to support SSR include: *pay for additional teaching duties* (95%), *providing more course options for students* (90%), *opportunity for teachers to collaborate on thematic lesson planning* (60%), *prospective positive impact of SSR on students' academic outcomes* (55%), and *opportunity to share student data with other teachers* (50%). Principals identified as major challenges to SSR the following: *the availability of funds for implementation* (50%), *that some academies are better supported than others* (45%), and *that teachers are challenged to teach at a higher level* (40%).

The majority of teachers support SSR (91%). More than half of the teachers surveyed (55%) were directly involved in implementing SSR in their schools. When considering only teachers directly involved in SSR, the support rate was higher (94%). Teachers directly involved with SSR reported having received adequate SSR information and training (96%). Most were familiar with SSR's goals (97%) and with the six core principles (91%). Among the six SSR core principles, teachers rated the *academic engagement of students* as most important, with 88 percent rating it 'very important', followed by *empowered educators* and *an integrated system of high standards, curriculum, instruction, and support* (86%).

Approximately two-thirds of SSR-involved teachers reported collaborating with other teachers as part of SSR. Many teachers created, in conjunction with other teachers, thematic lessons aligned with the academy (64%). Many collaborated with other teachers to evaluate student academic data for the purpose of enhancing student performance (78%).

Summary of Results for Evaluation Question #2.

The majority of teachers and administrators reported that SSR was fully or extensively implemented at their schools. The support for SSR among teachers was very high. Principals and teachers were familiar with the goals of SSR and reported receiving adequate support from the district for implementation purposes. As was intended by the program, the implementation of SSR led to teacher collaboration on curriculum and educational planning.

Evaluation Question #3. What is the opinion of students, teachers, and administrators concerning the effectiveness of SSR?

Students at SSR schools were surveyed in the Fall of 2009 and asked about their experiences with SSR during the 2008-09 school year. A total of 1,572 students completed surveys. Approximately, 66 percent (n = 1,037) indicated that they had participated in an SSR academy at their school in 2008-09. Since the Student Questionnaire (Appendix B3) asked students about their participation in SSR academies, these 1,037 students became the focus of subsequent analyses. Among these students, 2008-09 enrollment was equally split between Cohort 1 (50%) and Cohort 2 SSR schools (50%). At the time they completed the survey (2009-10), most students were in the 12th grade (55%), with the rest in the 11th grade (42%) and 10th grades (3%).

The majority of students (87%) reported that academy participation allowed them to acquire knowledge and skills that would help them in a specific career. About two-thirds (65%) believed the academy had helped them decide upon a career choice. Most students indicated that the academy had encouraged school attendance (73%) and motivated them to attend college (79%).

As part of SSR, students enrolled in a career academy who have passed the majority of courses in their strand can participate in a supervised internship experience aligned to their course of study. Each student in a career academy is expected to participate in an internship experience before graduating. The results show that a subset of students (20%) had participated in an internship. Almost all students participating in the internship reported that the experience had helped them gain employment skills and knowledge (97%) and that it had helped them in making career choices (86%). Overall, students were pleased with their academy experiences. The majority of students (89%) enjoyed participating in the academy and most (88%) indicated that they would recommend it to other students.

Principals and teachers also thought highly of SSR. All principals surveyed were of the opinion that students had benefitted from their participation in SSR. Both principals (100%) and SSR-involved teachers (93%) believe that the SSR experience had beneficially impacted the students' career goals.

As shown in Table 11, most SSR-involved teachers consider SSR to have been a positive influence on the students' academic performance (88%) and to have helped improve attendance (68%). Many of the teachers surveyed (58%) believe SSR exerted a positive influence on the students' behavior leading to reduced incidents of suspensions. Approximately half of the teachers (50%) believe that SSR improved promotion rates.

Table 11
Percent of Teachers Agreeing that SSR had a Positive Impact on Students*

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Overall
Did students at your school benefit from being exposed to SSR in the following areas:			
Academic Performance	87%	89%	88%
Attendance	65%	71%	68%
Promotion	49%	50%	50%
Behavior (e.g., suspensions)	58%	60%	59%

*Among teachers who participated in SSR.

Summary of Results for Evaluation Question #3.

A majority of the students surveyed participated in an SSR academy. Most of these students were of the opinion that the academies gave them career skills, encouraged their school attendance, motivated them to attend college and helped them make decisions about career choices. Students who participated in internships considered them effective and were pleased with their experiences. Overall, students indicated that they enjoyed participating in the SSR academies and that they would recommend the experience to other students.

Similarly, teachers and principals believe that SSR exerted a positive impact on student academic performance and on their career plans. All principals and almost all of the teachers surveyed were of the opinion that the SSR experience had beneficially impacted the students. Overall, students, teachers, and school administrators have a positive opinion of SSR and consider it an effective educational component.

Additional Results: Principals' and Teachers' Written Comments

As part of the survey, principals and teachers were asked to express their opinions concerning the SSR program. The majority of principals (85%) and teachers (85%) volunteered written comments that addressed the benefits and limitations of the SSR program. A list of all verbatim comments made by principals and teachers can be found in Appendices C1 and C2.

Principals' Comments: One positive aspect of the program mentioned by principals is the eight period day. According to one principal, the eight period day allows for instructional “remediation and acceleration” and also permits students to be exposed to “real world experiences” via internships and field trips. Principals also consider the SSR program to be beneficial for schools with low performing students because it allows for a greater number of course options. A limitation, principals noted, is lack of funding for the purchase of academic-specific materials and equipment. On the whole, principals praised the SSR program. One principal cited that SSR was, “one of the most beneficial programs in the district.”

Teachers' Comments: Teachers made numerous and varied comments that were, for the most part, positive in nature. Specifically, a number of teachers praised the eight period schedule. One teacher claimed that eight period days permit lagging students, “to receive mediation without decreasing the amount of core classes they take per year.” Also, it allows advanced students to take more AP courses and also compliments the graduation credit requirements of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The eight period course day also allows students to take more electives and thereby acquire a broader education. Many teachers also favor the block schedule associated with eight period days because it allows, “more time spent in the classroom and not switching classes.” A few teachers thought block schedules disadvantageous. They noted that daily instruction is preferable, particularly in specific courses (e.g., mathematics), that students have a hard time concentrating throughout a one and a half hour class period, and that eight courses are too many.

Teachers also indicated that they favor the concept of Career Academies and small learning communities. According to the teachers' comments, the Academies provide students with a sense of belonging and allows students to see a connection between their courses and potential careers. The real world emphasis of Career Academies make course work more meaningful for students and thus captures their attention.

With regard to professional impact, teachers claim that joint analysis of student data and mutual curriculum planning tend to benefit students because it enhances teaching quality. Joint planning also enhances school morale by allowing teachers to network across disciplines. Finally, some teachers believe that the academies empower teachers by granting them more control over their instructional domain.

Teachers most often cited lack of funding, difficulties in scheduling, and lack of time for joint planning as drawbacks to SSR implementation. Some teachers felt that parents and the community were not sufficiently supportive of the SSR initiative. Some teachers thought that the organizational structure of the SSR program had not been clearly communicated to faculty and students and that the SSR program itself was not sufficiently promoted within the schools. A few teachers requested additional SSR training particularly for new teachers. It was also evident by their comments that some teachers were either uninformed or unaware of the SSR program.

CONCLUSION

The Secondary School Reform (SSR) initiative has now been operating in a number of senior high schools for three years. An initial evaluation of the SSR program's impact on schools was conducted after the first Cohort's second year of operation. The results of this evaluation revealed the program to be: 1) well liked by students and staff and 2) beneficial to students' academic performance.

The present effort is a follow-up to the initial evaluation, one year later, examining the same questions and using a similar reporting format. This evaluation examined SSR implementation and its effects at 20 traditional senior high schools; ten SSR schools operational for three years (Cohort 1) and another ten SSR schools operational for two years (Cohort 2). Student performance at these schools were compared to that of students attending non-SSR schools.

The results show that across two and three year periods low performing students attending SSR schools improved their academic performance. That is, when contrasted with non-SSR students, a greater percentage of SSR students improved their FCAT-SSS scores beyond Level 3 in reading, mathematics, and science. Additionally, relative to comparison students, a greater percentage of SSR students enrolled in advance courses. Among students enrolled in advanced courses, those attending SSR schools enrolled in more courses than students attending non-SSR schools. Also, a cohort of SSR students had a higher promotion rate than the comparison group. With respect to other school performance measures such as attendance and outdoor suspensions, no differences were observed among the SSR and non-SSR students. On the other hand, SSR students were more likely to drop-out school than students attending non-SSR schools.

Relative to the comparison schools, the 20 schools that chose to implement SSR were more likely to be inner city schools with more low socioeconomic status households and larger concentrations of minority students. The SSR student Cohorts prior to entering high school, i.e., 8th grade, had lower FCAT scores, higher level of suspension and lower attendance rates than students in the non-SSR schools. This may explain, in part, why the drop out rates are not equivalent for the two groups. Nevertheless, even though the problems associated with poverty and cultural marginality are vast, the SSR students' attendance and suspension rates have kept up with that of students in the non-SSR schools and the promotion rates and FCAT performance of low scoring SSR students has improved. These results are almost identical to those reported in the first SSR evaluation. Therefore, it appears that the SSR initiatives have exerted a positive impact on the academic performance of participating students. As mentioned by principals and teachers in written comments, it is likely that low performing students benefit from eight period schedules which provide the opportunity to remediate while keeping up with required courses.

The results of the teacher, principal, and student surveys indicate that the overwhelming majority of them support the SSR program. Teachers and principals believe SSR exerts a positive impact on the students' academic performance. Teachers state that collaborating on lesson plans enhances the quality of instruction and principals report that SSR helps students establish career goals. Students enjoyed participating in the Career Academy and reported that they are willing to recommend the Academy to other students.

Different facets of the SSR program are still being introduced and consequently some principals claim only partial SSR implementation at their schools. Funding new courses, materials, and additional periods, and dealing with scheduling issues are some of the many obstacles that schools address in the course of SSR implementation. Teachers also report that it is difficult to find time within the school day to engage in collaborative planning. A few teachers claim to be unfamiliar with the SSR initiative. Therefore, these are some of the areas that need to be addressed in order to further popularize and enhance the program. In general, it is important to ensure that all participating schools have implemented the SSR program extensively and that all students and staff are aware of the details of the program.

Overall, SSR was widely implemented in M-DCPS senior high schools with moderate academic effects observed after three years of student participation. SSR is viewed as an effective educational initiative by teachers and principals and is widely liked by students. Based on the observed results the following recommendations are made:

1. Complete SSR implementation in participating schools.
2. Familiarize all new teachers with SSR.
3. Assess the long term effects of SSR on academic performance, including post graduation.

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