



Students' Perceptions Regarding Earning D's and F's

ABSTRACT

THIS REPORT PRESENTS THE FINDINGS OF A STUDY CONDUCTED BY DR. FERRER, AT A HIGH SCHOOL, IN THE WEST SUBURBS OF ILLINOIS. THE PURPOSE WAS TO FIND OUT, FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES, THE REASONS BEHIND STUDENTS EARNING D'S AND F'S AND WHAT THEY THINK THEIR SCHOOL CAN DO TO HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE.



Wherever there is a gap, we can build a bridge...

March 19, 2010

[REDACTED], Principal
Valley High School
[REDACTED]
IL 605 [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. [REDACTED]

We are pleased to present to you the eight (8) Emerging Findings from the study, Students' Perceptions Regarding Earning D's and F's, which was conducted at your school on February 2010.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find out, from the students' perspectives, the reasons behind students receiving low performance grades (D's and Fs) and what they think the school can do to help students improve their performance.

We support the efforts that you, as the principal, your leadership team and staff are making to improve your understanding regarding students' low academic performance. It has been our privilege to serve you and your school. I hope that this report will assist you and your staff in your continuous school improvement efforts.

If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our office. The Equity and Excellence Department stands ready to serve you and your staff.

Dr. Lourdes Ferrer
Equity and Excellence Department
Academic Achievement Specialist

Methodology

The [REDACTED] school administration identified four groups of approximately nine students each (36 in total) to participate in a focus group conversation with the ROE Equity and Excellence facilitators. A list of focus group participants was provided for the two facilitators prior to the start of the four focus groups.

Two days prior to conducting the student focus groups, student participants were introduced to Dr. Lourdes Ferrer and Mr. Stephen H. Garlington to establish a positive rapport with the students before facilitating their focus groups. Each facilitator conducted two focus groups each and recorded the conversations. At the conclusion of each focus group, the students were relocated to the school computer lab where they recorded their comments using Word. Student participants consisted of random selection of students that had earned D's and/or F's during the previous semester.

A brief PowerPoint presentation was shown as a conversation starter. The students seemed to feel at ease in sharing their thoughts and feelings regarding the following two focus group questions:

1. What are the reasons behind students receiving D's and F's in school?
2. What can the school do to assist students in improving their grades?

Eight Emerging Findings

1. Teachers do not care about their students' education.

According to the students, teachers did not seem to care about their education. Students cited examples to include boring classroom instruction, lack of teacher motivation, teachers rushing through their lessons, a "one size fits all" approach to teaching the lesson and poor staff/student relationships. They also stated that students do not receive enough and/or in time feedback about their grades to improve. They think that, "Some teachers are just there for the money." Students frequently cited examples and in some cases provided names to support their opinions regarding teachers' indifferent attitude towards students.

2. Deans and their assistants are too authoritarian.

According to some students, the Deans and their assistants are mean and do not seem to respect students. Students' interactions with the Deans were viewed as additional stressors on students thereby affecting their abilities to perform better in school. Students consistently expressed that, "Deans never listen and do not care about students' thoughts and feelings."

3. Students lack motivation or do not care about their academic achievement.

A good number of students expressed that students' lack of motivation played a major role in their lack of academic achievement. It is their belief that this lack of motivation (or care) is fueled by their:

- a. Lack of discipline regarding school assignments
- b. Inability to ask for assistance from the teachers when needed
- c. Inadequate communication skills in addressing their needs to teachers
- d. Senseless concern or pride regarding people's opinion about their academic struggles
- e. High levels of stress created by the school environment and staff in general

4. Students do not see the relevance of their education.

Students often expressed that too many of them fail to see the relevance of a good education to their future career and life success. They stated that students do not complete class assignments but focus on sports and social activity as opposed to making their academic achievement a priority.

5. Adverse issues outside of school have a negative impact on students' academic performance.

Among the reasons for low performance in school cited by students were:

- a. The need to work in order to assist their families
- b. The lack of family support or involvement in their education
- c. Family problems such as poverty, sickness and drug usage

In addition, some students stated that learning disabilities and mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and mood changes hampers their academic success.

6. Some students expressed that poor grades was not the school's fault.

Student who shared this view expressed that, "Many students simply do not put in the necessary effort and are quick to blame the teachers." They think that teachers do a good job but students are not motivated to do their schoolwork. It is their opinion that students' procrastination in completing their schoolwork was a major contributor to poor grades.

7. The lack of homework completion led to academic failure.

A significant number of students stated that the leading cause for their poor grades was the lack of homework completion. Their teachers were giving too much

homework and they resented not having enough time to comply with all of them. Students added that in many cases, “The homework assignments are not even checked by the teachers; so why bother doing them?” Some students stated that they did not understand the assignments or were ill prepared to do them on their own. Others reported simply being too lazy to do any work at home after a long day in school.

It is also the students’ beliefs that homework completion not always shows what students learned in school. They can complete their homework assignments and get good grades simply by cheating. The internet provides students ways and resources to comply with their homework assignments without doing the work.

8. The school culture is not student friendly.

In general, students seemed somewhat hostile regarding the authoritarian nature of the school administration. Some students expressed poor or non-existent student-teacher relationships and described teachers as self-serving professionals. The students expressed that more class discussion instead of “top down” teaching could create a friendlier classroom environment.