

510 Project
Front End Analysis
New Hanover High School

Overview:

New Hanover High School is one of five high schools in New Hanover County and has an approximate enrollment of 1441 students. Based on 2002-2003 data the racial make up of the school are 56% white students, 37% black students, 4% Hispanic students, 2% multiracial students and 1% Asian students.

Although each high school is relatively autonomous in its day-to-day operations they all fall under the authority of the County superintendent and the school board.

The stated mission of New Hanover High School is to continue its tradition of offering unique and diverse opportunities for all students by providing integration of learning, connection to the community and a career pathway to the future for its students. This mission does not provide any quantitative measures for performance.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has established the standard course of study and end of grade tests (EOG) for the core curriculum and elective courses that are required for all students enrolled each year. NCDPI uses these measures to identify which schools are achieving the designated performance levels. The federal government with its passing of “No Child left Behind” legislation has concentrated on these performance objectives as it relates to school funding.

Problem:

An analysis of the (EOG) tests from New Hanover High School Profiles indicates a consistent pattern of the scores of black students falling significantly behind the scores of the white students, which is the “achievement gap”. Students scores were analyzed in 5 core courses that are required for graduation along with several elective courses.

Performance measures have indicated.

- Black students scored lower on all core subjects at New Hanover
- Other minority groups while still lower than white students did not have as great a gap with the exception of English. (Due to increasing enrollment of Hispanic students)
- Black students’ scores showed significant improvement especially in English but have not improved in US History.

The Focus Area is US History. Of the 88 black students that were enrolled in US History only 24 % of those students rated proficient according to the testing data. Of the 203 white students that were enrolled 61.5% of those students rated proficient.

This achievement gap is not a problem that can only be confined to New Hanover High School. It is in fact an issue that all high schools in the county and across the state are facing as well. The achievement gap is fast becoming one of the most important issues facing the education system.

Analysis of Current Situation:

The activities of the system (New Hanover High School) are as follows: The emphasis is on educating the students through the standard course of study as handed down by the NCDPI. The objective is to attain measurable success by using a standardized testing format to verify that the students are indeed absorbing the information.

Activities related to US History include:

- Curriculum designed and developed by the NCDPI:
The curriculum has 12 core competency goals of what the student should master at the completion of the specific goal. Each goal also has a list of objectives to master as well.
- Local government Control (New Hanover County School System):
New Hanover County provides teachers with timelines to chart the progression of the class. It is designed to give the teachers a gauge how much of the information should have been covered and by what dates to be able to stay in line with the EOG test.
- Performance Measurement:
EOG tests designed to measure mastery of the content studied.
- Resources:
Staff and training for staff as well as textbook selection, which is decided locally by department. Textbooks are selected from an approved list provided by NCDPI.

The activities of this system are a requirement for graduation and should be analyzed for any weaknesses they may have. Given the fact that white students are meeting proficiency standards at a higher rate than black students are it is apparent that the mission of New Hanover High School is not fully being realized. Further analysis of New Hanover High School is as follows:

1. US History is a part of the Social Studies department. At present there are 4 teachers that teach US History. Although the curriculum is designed and developed by the NCDPI the individual teachers are allowed some latitude when it comes to instruction. However most of the teachers do not stray too far from the curriculum

for fear of not covering the necessary material required for the EOG test. The teachers are also deeply involved in the selection of which textbooks they will use. They will make recommendations to the department head that orders the textbooks. The books are chosen from an approved list. The teachers will agree on one book to use in the event of student schedules being changed around. It is noteworthy to see that this is not a uniform practice from school to school.

2. The individual teachers within the department make the instruction decisions. The county does provide a progressive timeline for teachers to use as an aid to help them cover the necessary material.
3. The performance data for New Hanover High School showed: At New Hanover HS 61.5% of the white students were proficient and 24% of black students. When compared to the county statistics, 60% of white students were proficient and 27% of black students. (See chart for EOC 2002-2003)
4. Interview with teachers in the department show: All 4 of the teachers that taught US History believe that the information they are required to teach was too great to be covered in such a short amount of time. One teacher was quoted as saying “ The same information can’t be covered in a college classroom, so why should they think we can teach it at the high school level. This course should be broken into two parts covering up to 1865 for the first section and 1865 to present for the second”. The administration also seemed to support this idea. Interviews with the teachers also showed that they felt a great deal of pressure to cover all the material necessary for the EOG and if a student got behind it would be tough to make up. The teachers in most cases felt driven toward the EOG and not the quality of the material they were trying to convey.
5. Interviews and observations with the black student’s show: Although many of the students had an interest to know about the past their complaint was the relevance of the material to them as individuals. Black students also cited the teacher expectations of them seemed to be lower especially in the AP US History class. The students who were interviewed also cited what they referred to as “acting white”. To them this meant the peer pressure they felt especially when attempting to take an AP course like US History. These students were demonstrating that they felt like outcasts because of some the courses they choose to take. With this it adversely affected the number of students attempting to enroll in the honors courses. (See Table 4) These students also showed that there was encouragement coming from the parents to achieve higher grades but there was also a lack of motivation that seemed to stem from the students themselves.
6. Possible causes –gaps:
 - Lack of motivation by students
 - Relevance of material to individual student
 - Teacher focus on EOG and not quality of material
 - Parents support
 - Peer pressure especially as it relates to AP courses (acting white)
 - Textbooks- since no uniformity exists between schools, the textbook from one school could be better than one chosen by another school.
 - Lack of minority involvement in all AP courses

New Hanover High School's resources are limited and each department is allocated limited amounts of money for additional resources to use in the classroom. The decision on who controls the department money is generally the department head. The funds are generally distributed on a first come first serve basis within the department. What the teachers are able to spend money on places limits on how much they are able to increase the relevance and interest of the minority students. The resources in place at New Hanover are:

- The administration, teachers and staff
- 3 computer labs
- Nova net lab
- Parental support
- Classrooms
- Guidance counselors
- Curriculum guides from both the NCDPI and New Hanover County

The related side effects to the present activities at New Hanover are:

- Teachers unable to adequately cover vast amount of material in preparation for the EOG.
- Minority students failing to see relevance of material being studied
- Attitudes of both students and teachers concerning the lower expectations of the black students at New Hanover.
- Black students dealing with peer pressure and issues of "acting white" which can be seen in low enrollment in AP courses.
- Instruction is left to individual teaching styles which can result in cultural bias

The hierarchical structure of New Hanover High is as follows: The teachers are joined to department with one of those teachers serving as the department head. The departments are primarily responsible for making the decisions for their respective departments pending the approval of one of the four assistant principals on site. Each assistant principal is assigned a group of departments to oversee. The principal of New Hanover is responsible for overseeing the assistant principal and making sure that the mandated guidelines are in place and are being followed. The whole structure lays much of the responsibility on the individual teachers within their respective departments. The support structure for these teachers was not apparent although there was evidence of peer-to-peer support among the teachers.