



Star Academy Program™

A Dropout Prevention Solution

The Star Academy Program™ is a dropout prevention solution that employs multiple learning methodologies and assists failing, overage eighth- and ninth-grade students with no high school credits in earning enough credits in one school year to accelerate to the 10th grade.

A Star Academy usually operates as an academy within a school (middle school, high school, career-tech school, or alternative school) where a specially designed process assures a healthy school climate that results from students, parents, and teachers working together to assure that all those functioning in the academy do so in a safe, happy, and productive environment.

Results achieved:

- Reduces dropout rates
- Delivers two years of curriculum in one school year
- Addresses the needs of at-risk students and other nontraditional learners
- Fosters individual student responsibility for learning and behavior
- Provides coping skills for re-entry into traditional school programming
- Enables students at the 8th grade level to finish 8th grade and earn up to eight high school credits in one school year
- Enables students at the 9th grade with no high school credit to earn up to eight high school credits in one school year

Success accomplished by:

- Utilizing hands-on learning in support of cognitive performance
- Using career examples to exhibit how academic content is relevant/real
- Providing rich multimedia/multimodal learning activities
- Employing individual, cooperative-pair, and small-team learning experiences
- Providing a common understanding of what is required of the student by the teacher, the student, and the parents via the point-based grading sheet anchored to a scope-and-sequence document
- Capitalizing on students' multiple intelligences
- Assuring core content is delivered while literacy and English language skills are improved
- Accommodating learning style differences
- Creating a healthy school climate in which to learn
- Functioning as an academy within a school
- Operating as a public-private collaboration

Essential Star Academy Program Elements

A Star Academy includes the following programs:

- 2 math courses (pre-algebra & algebra)
- 2 science courses (selected from life, earth, physical, integrated)
- 2 English language arts courses

- 1 social studies course (global studies)
- 1 district-supplied elective or physical education course
- Healthy School Climate program

A Star Academy includes the following services:

- Technical support
- Scope-and-sequence and point-based grading document preparation for elective course
- Scheduled liaison visits and reports for three years
- Three-year Healthy School Climate support

Performance

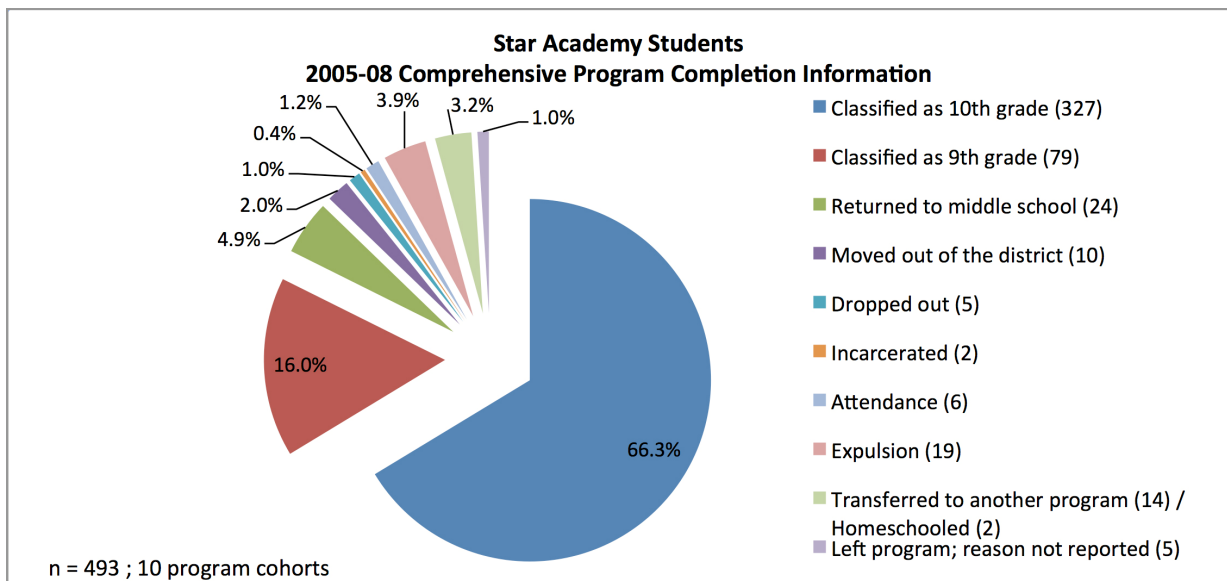
Given the Academy’s design and its supportive elements and services, how well does the Star Academy Program satisfy its goals?

Achieving its primary goals:

- Reduce the number of dropouts
- Accelerate students from 8th grade to 10th grade in one school year

Goal success is evident in data gathered from the 10 program cohorts to date. This covers operation from the beginning, in 2005-2006, through this past school year, 2007-2008. (**Note:** A cohort is one program’s student group for a school year. Group size varies by program and year. Total number of students in the 10 cohorts equals 493.)

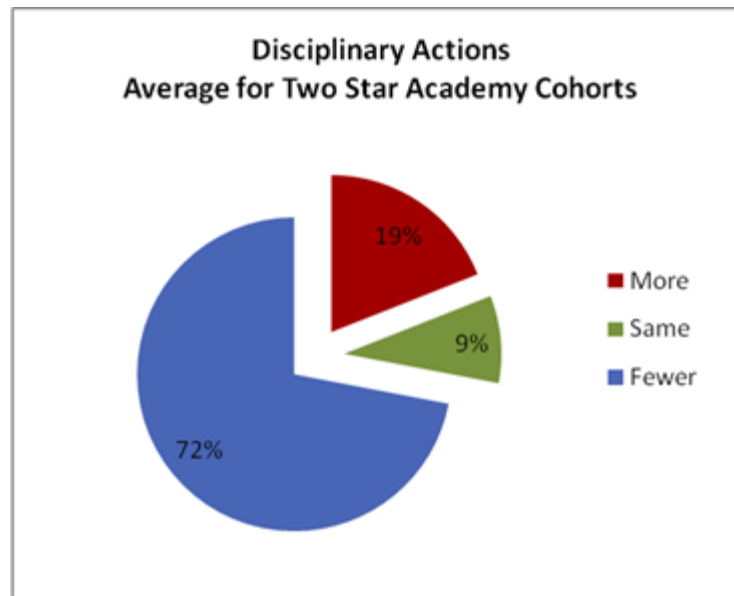
- 82% did not drop out and are continuing in high school
 - 66% accelerated to 10th grade in one school year
 - 16% became 9th graders shy of 10th grade by one or two credits



The two original programs have continued to operate using local funds. Given the performance of these two models as well as those that have followed, the Star Academy model has been proven effective at achieving its mission, is transportable to new locations with differing demographics, and is sustainable.

Positive Behavior Change

Consider the issue of deportment. The Star Academy becomes a safe, happy, and productive learning and working environment. In the graph shown one can observe a marked diminution of behavioral problems from the prior year (8th grade non-Star Academy year) to the Star Academy year.



The preceding graph is a composite (average) of the Pickens and Anderson 5 programs. There were 72% fewer behavioral incidences (from expulsions to various referrals).

Return On Investment

An ongoing study has tracked Pickens Star Academy students and will continue to do so for a total of six years. The resulting data is, at best, difficult to obtain, particularly because new privacy regulations have been implemented subsequent to the initiation of the follow-up study being conducted by researchers from Furman University and Pittsburg State University. However, here is what we know to date about what can be considered return on investment (ROI).

The Pickens County School District, during a three-year period (2006-2008), retained \$1,265,792 in ADA as a result of the Star Academy students not dropping out and a substantial number continuing to stay in school in subsequent years. That is an average of \$421,930 per school year retained by the district. At today's cost for a program of Pickens' size, the time to pay back the cost of \$523,000 is 11.2 operating months. (**Note:** Pickens received grant funding for the program and has expended only staff costs each year, so its payback was immediate from the first

month.) Also note that the annual amount of ADA for Pickens County in South Carolina is \$7,192 per student per year.

Expansion

The Star Academy Program, initially funded by ARC and the South Carolina Education and Economic Development Act's At-risk Committee, has grown in number of implementations in South Carolina. There will be 28 Star Academies by the beginning of the second semester of this school year (2008-2009). There are two Star Academy programs in Hillsborough County (Tampa), Florida, and by the second semester of this year a new Star Academy will be implemented in Tuskegee, Alabama. A unique variation of the Star Academy is to be started in January in Paterson, New Jersey, and efforts are under way in a number of other states at various levels to initiate even more Star Academy Programs.

Recognition

The Pickens County program is being awarded the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's Crystal Award in November as the program of the year. Three years of successful operation were required to be considered, and this is the beginning of Pickens' fourth year of operation.