

Snapshot #22

Using School Time Productively J.S. Chick Traditional School Kansas City, Missouri

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research reveals a close relationship between the amount of time students spend engaged in appropriate learning activities and their levels of academic achievement.

Research also shows that a great deal of potential learning time is lost in schools and classrooms. Excessive absences and tardies, assemblies and programs which are too lengthy or held too frequently, and prolonged recess and break periods account for some of this loss.

Within classrooms, still more learning time is dissipated due to slow start-up of instruction at the beginning of the school day, lengthy transitions between classroom activities, interruptions (e.g., for loudspeaker announcements), off-task behavior, disciplinary matters, and dead time (i.e., periods of time allocated for instruction but during which no learning activities have been assigned to students).

Even when students are technically "on task," research has shown that extended periods of seatwork and other noninteractive learning activities are far less effective than interaction with teachers, aides, or other students in promoting learning gains.

Productive time use is such a critical component of effective schooling that two entire subsections are devoted to this topic in the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING PRACTICES: A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS/1990 UPDATE. Researchers have found that in high-achieving CLASSROOMS, "Classroom Learning Time is Used Efficiently" (SYNTHESIS, p. 8). Specifically, they note that teachers' planning, classroom management, grouping strategies, instructional pacing, student monitoring, activity transitions, seatwork assignments, and disciplinary functions are carried out in such a way as to maximize the amount and quality of instructional time.

Researchers have likewise found that in high-achieving SCHOOLS, "School Time is Used for Learning" (p. 16), meaning that schoolwide policy and practice are focused on maximizing instructional time through providing appropriate staff development activities, minimizing administrative intrusions, emphasizing timeliness, and generally streamlining noninstructional activities.

The complete list of practices that comprise productive time use, as identified in the SYNTHESIS, may be found at the end of this report. Virtually all of these are in operation at J. S. Chick Traditional School in Kansas City, Missouri.

SITUATION

THE KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT

Thirty-five thousand students attend the district's schools, which include 14 high schools, 12 middle schools, 52 elementary schools, one college preparatory school serving grades 6-12, two Montessori schools, and six special schools serving handicapped and other special needs students, such as teen parents and juvenile offenders. Sixty-four of the district's schools are magnet schools, which were established as part of a large-scale desegregation court order, and are focused on areas such as advanced technology, agribusiness, computers, foreign languages, science, visual and performing arts, and law and public service.

J. S. CHICK TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

A traditional (as opposed to magnet) school, J. S. Chick serves 357 students in grades K-5. The student population is approximately 97 percent AfricanAmerican, and the teaching staff is evenly divided between African-American and white personnel.

With more than three-quarters of its students receiving free or reduced-priced school lunches, Chick qualifies for schoolwide Chapter 1 services, and a Chapter 1 coordinator works with teachers to identify and provide services to children in need.

CONTEXT

In 1985 Chick was one of the six poorest-performing schools in the district in terms of student academic achievement. To address the extreme need experienced by these six schools, the district made desegregation funds available to them for the implementation of the Striving for Excellence in the Performance of Students (S.T.E.P.S.) program. Initial S.T.E.P.S. activities involved intensive staff development designed to increase teachers' knowledge and application of effective schooling characteristics and practices, as identified by educational researchers. S.T.E.P.S. activities are credited with bringing about many of the academic and affective improvements which have taken place at Chick, and the school continues to receive maintenance-level

S.T.E.P.S. resources.

Under the leadership of former principal, Dr. Ida H. Love (now Director of Elementary Schools for the district), and current principal, Ms. Audrey F. Bullard, several areas of emphasis have come to characterize Chick's approach to schooling. These include:

- The use of Chapter 1 funds to establish a "DOUBLESTAFFED" CLASSROOM (i.e., a classroom with two fulltime teachers) for first graders identified as needing extra help to succeed.
- A small (ten-student) "AT RISK" CLASSROOM focused on bringing the skills of identified second and third graders up to grade level.
- Full-time Chapter 1 paraprofessional TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN ALL OTHER CLASSROOMS. Ongoing training is provided to both teachers and paraprofessionals to develop skills in working together efficiently. (There is some Chapter 1 pull-out instruction at Chick, but it is minimal.)
- Schoolwide emphasis on taking a TEAM APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING. This commitment to teaming is evident in the operation of a ten-person Site Planning Committee for school improvement, the school's seven teaching teams, the working relationships between teachers and their assistants, extensive use of cooperative learning groups in classrooms, and the support provided by regular students to their special education teammates in physical education classes.
- The establishment of MONTHLY AND UNIT OBJECTIVES, which are posted in classrooms; monthly objectives are also communicated to parents by means of the school newsletter.
- A strong EMPHASIS ON CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS for teachers, including emphasis on planning and designing lessons, pacing, monitoring, and assessment.
- DIRECTLY TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO USE TIME EFFICIENTLY by providing them training and practice in moving expediently through breaks, activity transitions, and other procedural functions.
- A program of PARENT INVOLVEMENT, which includes use of parent helpers at the school and a training program to enable parents to support their children's learning at home.
- Implementation of an AFRICAN-CENTERED CURRICULUM, which focuses on the "social, historical, cultural, and spiritual development of people of African descent" and emphasizes "expansion of those roots to meet the needs and demands of today's reality." Staff training to promote infusion of African-American culture into the curriculum was made possible by a grant from the Kansas City Power & Light Company.
- A focus on ENHANCING STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM. In addition to self-esteem-building activities inherent in the school's African-centered curriculum activities, teachers carry out various feedback and reinforcement practices shown by research to foster positive selfregard.