

West Brunswick Likes Early Results From Outcome-Based Education Trial

BY SUSAN USHER
An experiment in outcome-based education (OBE) at West Brunswick High School is changing the way both teachers and students approach their work—and for the better, says Principal Ed Lemon.

The school is using OBE in core ninth grade classes including English, math, science, social studies and physical education. It hopes to expand the program, adding a grade each year for the next three years until the entire school is using the same model.

So far, Lemon and Anness Haire, social studies department chairman and OBE coordinator, are pleased with the results of what they describe as a "results-oriented" approach to the business of schooling, an approach based on the premise that all individuals can learn, though at different rates and using different styles.

They say the school's ninth grade students see themselves as a class set apart, something special.

"It breaks down the theory that you have to be smart to make decent grades," said Lemon. "You may have to work and do it over, but you can have, you can experience, success in academics."

Students are evaluated on their progress in reaching standardized outcomes, not in relation to the per-

formances of other students or against a calendar. Teachers are charged with providing students more than one way—and more than one opportunity—to demonstrate that they know and understand what they've studied.

OBE is based on several other assumptions as well: that success breeds success, and that schools control the conditions of success.

With OBE fully implemented, a school knows exactly what it expects a student to know and to be like upon graduation, and sets out to design a school and curriculum to make that happen.

At West, OBE isn't fully in place. For now the school is working with end-of-course outcomes rather than end-of-school ones.

The results are documented better by a J-shaped curve than the traditional bell-shaped curve of educational circles.

Instead of accepting the "bell curve" theory that a certain percentage of students will fail, the school raises its expectations. All students are expected to meet high level performance standards in those outcomes that are within their reasonable grasp.

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riod, seven of the 17 students with all As were ninth graders. Of the 289 students with a 3.0 to 3.9 better grade point average, 123 were freshmen.

In various courses, anywhere from 89 percent to 95 percent of the students finished the six weeks with no incompletes, earning grades of 78 or above.

"You hear comments like, 'What about that ninth grade!,'" said Lemon. "And they see themselves that way, as different, better."

Rocky Fallon, a freshman from Holden Beach, says OBE is "great," but admits he isn't taking full advantage of the opportunities to excel it offers.

"A lot of students could be making B's and C's in things. It's a really good program. I could be making all A's but I'm not."

"It can help you make up work, especially in harder classes like civics," said Fallon, who wants to be a commercial helicopter pilot. "You have a chance to do it over for a bet-

ter grade when normally you can't make it up. They tell you what work you're missing and you can make it up."

Lemon said most students are accepting more responsibility, voluntarily coming in to complete work to erase incompletes and buying into the higher standards of performance set by the program.

"We expect to see fewer incompletes as the program progresses," he predicted.

"What we're down to are the few students who are just refusing to come back and do the work," he said. "Most of them won't fail."

These few students are generally older students who have already been retained at least once before ninth grade; some are older students who have left school and returned.

Having those older students, including 19 year olds, said Fallon, is the only "negative" he sees. "They don't belong in ninth grade."

Lemon said the few who are failing are those who don't have an ade-

quate support system—low self-esteem, little or no parental support, reflected in a high absenteeism rate. It's a problem Lemon and Ms. Haire hope the school can tackle next through more of what it calls "intervention," going beyond the minimum. In this case that means development of a "Big Buddy" type of mentoring system that matches a staff person with an at-risk student.

At West Brunswick High, ninth-grade students aren't allowed to initially earn less than a minimum grade of 78, a C, on any subject on their report card.

Instead, a student whose work is at less than a 78 receives an incomplete on his or her report card and then receives extra assignments aimed at helping him or her master the subject matter.

The student has until the end of the next six-weeks grading period to work off the incomplete by demonstrating mastery. Then the grade can be changed by teacher and principal acting together.

If a student chooses not to complete the extra work, then at the end of the second grading period, the initial grade earned replaces the in-

complete on their report card. Meanwhile, parents are notified by letter that their child's performance has been unsatisfactory and are expected to work with the student and school to help the student's performance improve.

Students who don't make up the work are called in for a parent-faculty/student conference.

Students can make up or catch up work at any time during the grading period, either voluntarily seeking out after-school help from OBE teachers assigned to "eighth period" or from their regular classroom teachers.

In more extreme circumstances students are assigned to "eighth period" tutoring sessions. At least one teacher in each key subject area stays after regular classes to work with students who are having problems.

Though in some instances it means providing after-school transportation for their children, parents have been supportive of the program, Lemon and Ms. Haire agreed.

Ms. Haire said parents generally seem to appreciate the higher expectations set by the school.

Lincoln School Marks Holiday

Students and faculty at Lincoln Primary School held several programs and celebrations in honor of the Christmas holiday.

A play titled *A Teddy Bear Christmas* was performed by Mary Sandlin and Beth Crawford's second grade classes Dec. 12 and 13 for PTA members, fellow students and teachers. The students also performed the play on a later date for residents of Brunswick Cove Nursing Home, and were joined by students from Faye Nelson's class who presented a medley of poetry and songs.

On Dec. 17, Lincoln kindergarten students presented a musical Christmas show, *A Trip to Santa's Toy Shop*, for parents and teachers.

Teachers of Lincoln Primary's second grade classes teamed together to present *Christmas Around the World*, Dec. 2-13, in which each teacher selected a country and transformed the classroom to take on the feeling and appearance of each culture.

Students learned stories and songs and sampled food from each country during the two-week program. They also had the chance to recognize differences and similarities in Christian and Jewish ceremonies.

The teachers selected the following countries: Gilda Waddell, Africa; Beth Graves, United States; Helen Davis, Germany; Mitzi Daughtry, France; Beth Crawford, England; Mary Sandlin, Israel; Faye Nelson, Sweden; and Maria Carey, Mexico.

Connie Bryant, cafeteria manager, and her staff prepared special foods each day so that students could taste treats native to particular countries.



STAFF PHOTO BY DORI C. GURGANUS

Beautifying Their School

Andy McAllister and Diane Anderson, seventh graders at Shallotte Middle School, brave a chilly morning to pull some stubborn weeds in the courtyard outside the media center last Thursday. Beautification of the previously overgrown area is part of an ongoing project undertaken by Sylvia Pullen's Advisor-Advisee group. They received supplies and guidance from Long Bay Garden Club, several local garden centers, parent Tripp Sloane and school custodian Howard Bryant.

Learn To Speak Spanish At BCC

A class in conversational Spanish will be offered starting Monday, Jan. 6, at Brunswick Community College in Supply.

The course is designed for clinical personnel, teachers, store managers and others who work with Spanish-speaking persons or have Spanish-speaking friends.

The introductory class will be taught on Monday and Wednesday, and the second-level course will meet every Tuesday and Thursday. All classes are from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in room 162 of the ALS Building.

The \$30 registration fee can be paid at the first class. North Carolina residents age 65 and older can enroll for free.

For more information, call the BCC Continuing Education Department at 754-6922 or instructor Paul Hernandez at 754-2032.



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