

Executive Summary

Durham Public Schools

9th-12th Grades

What is the purpose of the project?

The developmental project is a summary report on child development at the ninth through eleventh grade level, commonly known as high school. It was created to share with the district's superintendent, board of education, parents, and newly hired ninth through eleventh grade teachers what students should be able to do developmentally at this age.

How was the project created?

The project was created through the use of school visit data as well as child development research, some of which came from Chip Wood's *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, Ages 4-14*. The project team conducted half-day visits to three of the district's high schools.

What are the primary findings of the project?

Students in this age range need classroom activities that are both challenging and engaging while also providing for the opportunity to work cooperatively with their peers. They need opportunities to explore topics relevant to their lives and career-oriented learning.

While a developmentally appropriate set of ELA, math, science, and social studies standards are essential, it is also important to begin to teach students in this age range how to be members of a democratic society. High school students must be prepared to enter the much more independent lives of college or the workforce.

With this comes the need for these students to be taught social-emotional skills that will allow them to be productive members of society. Students in this age range need to be able to express themselves and have choice in the display of their learning. Scaffolded assignments are helpful for students in high school, as they allow them to break down complex tasks. Students in this age range also need free time without rigid expectations, such as time to do independent reading or writing.

High school staff need to strategically organize clubs and organizations to encourage students to find affinity groups to feel a sense of importance and belonging in the school building.

Finally, students in this age group are constantly thinking about the big picture of their future, often have a few very close friends, and some begin to explore possibly risky behaviors. During this time in their lives, they are becoming more independent and are beginning to take on more

and more responsibilities. They may struggle with changing peer relationships and with complex questions and projects.

How is the school district meeting the needs of students in grades 9-12?

Durham Public Schools seeks to serve the needs of each of our students. Many things that should be happening for students in grades 9 through 12 are happening. Most high schools have developmentally appropriate curriculum and standards for all the core subjects. These curriculums involve students in challenging activities and exercises and hold students to high expectations. They are often relevant to students' lives and future careers.

Positive teacher language is encouraged throughout the schools in the district, predominantly through Capturing Kids Hearts and PBIS, as well as Responsive Classroom, all approaches to behavior management, teaching, and learning. The district is in the midst of incorporating restorative practices into all high schools, which will allow discipline to be restorative rather than punitive.

Programs like AVID and Air Force Junior ROTC allow for students to grow in their self-concept and identity, and the district's athletic programs through the North Carolina High School Athletic Association allow students to grow in their physical development.

There is some focus on social/emotional learning in pockets of Durham high schools. There is no set curriculum; however, some schools are beginning to pilot Second Step or Zones of Regulation.

There are essential missing resources. First off, students do not have adequate access to mental health services. Currently, the district partners with several agencies to provide co-located mental health services during the school day. However, many of these agencies cannot provide adequate mental health services to students. They lack qualified counselors, and many of them do not have bilingual counselors.

The district needs more school counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals to work with these students. Mental and emotional health should not be a barrier to students' academic growth.