



# Evaluation Brief

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Program Evaluation Unit

## Evaluation of the Implementation of High School Plus: Findings From the Spring 2008 Surveys

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### Executive Summary

This brief presents findings from the 2008 survey administered to students and teachers at high schools implementing High School Plus (HS+). These findings are only for participants and teachers of the extended day component of HS+. The purpose of the survey was to examine how the program was planned and implemented and identify areas needing improvement. The respondents were participating students and instructing teachers of HS+.

The findings indicate that students appreciate the opportunity to participate in HS+. A high percentage of the student respondents (86.8%) reported that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the HS+ opportunities offered at their school (see Appendix Table A1). Likewise, 81% of teacher respondents reported they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the HS+ opportunities offered at their school. When asked about how they were informed about HS+, most student respondents indicated they learned about the program from their counselor. More than one half of teacher respondents indicated they learned of the opportunity to teach a HS+ course from their principal.

Most teachers and students “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the attendance policy for HS+ was fair. Furthermore, there was agreement by the majority of students and teachers that HS+ is offered at a time that is convenient.

The most frequently reported concern raised by teachers was infrequent attendance by students. Teachers remarked that students either attended the first class and did not return or attended the class inconsistently, which interfered with their ability to excel in the course.

Most students raised concerns about the length of time during each day that the program was offered and wished it was held for a shorter amount of time. Although students agreed that the attendance policy

for HS+ was fair, many also raised concerns about the attendance/absence policy, requesting more leniency from teachers. Comments about receiving food or snacks also were made by students as many indicated being hungry during the program.

Key recommendations from the evaluation are as follows:

- Reevaluate the time that HS+ is offered in schools to allow for students to access the activity bus home.
- Provide teachers and students with strategies to ensure positive student engagement in order to minimize interruptions.
- Reevaluate the current attendance policy for HS+.
- Determine a way to provide snacks for students attending HS+ courses.

### Background

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) conducted an evaluation to assess the implementation of High School Plus (HS+) in all high schools implementing the program during the 2007–2008 school year. HS+ targets students who failed required courses related to the High School Assessments (HSAs) and those who failed other courses required for graduation. The identified outcomes for HS+ are as follows: 1) Students will pass the HSAs and 2) Students will pass courses required for graduation.

During the 2006–2007 school year, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) piloted HS+ in four high schools (Einstein, Kennedy, Rockville, and Wheaton). Findings from an evaluation of the pilot program revealed agreement among students and teachers that HS+ provides an opportunity for students to pass previously failed courses. Concerns raised included securing a sufficient number of teachers to offer the courses that were in demand by students, the availability of snacks and beverages for

students, and issues of student tardiness and attendance.

During the 2007–2008 school year, all high schools were to implement the HS+ program, with priority to enroll students in Grades 9 and 10 who were interested. Students in Grades 11 and 12 were to continue to enroll in evening high school. However, schools were allowed to be flexible with these criteria.

### Evaluation Questions

Information was gathered from students and teachers who participate in HS+. The major questions of the study were—

1. How is the HS+ program implemented?
2. What are the perceptions of students and teachers?
3. What are challenges to implementation?
4. What recommendations for improvements are offered?

### Methodology

Data collection for the 2007–2008 school year included interviews and surveys (both for fall and spring semesters). Eight schools were systematically selected, based on student enrollment, for in-depth analyses during the fall semester. The eight high schools selected for in-depth analyses were: Gaithersburg, Northwest, Northwood, Paint Branch, Sherwood, Springbrook, Watkins Mill, and Wheaton. OSA staff conducted 13 face-to-face interviews with school-based staff (lead administrators and principals) to examine their experiences in implementing HS+. Interviews took approximately 45–60 minutes. Findings from fall interviews and fall surveys were summarized in a memo to program staff in February 2008.

The survey instrument was adapted from the instrument utilized during the 2006–2007 school year and modified in collaboration with central office program staff. Paper surveys were sent to the lead administrator for each school and organized by teacher name for distribution. Surveys were administered to students and HS+ teachers during the extended day HS+ class.

During the second semester, 23 high schools implemented HS+ and surveys were sent to all participating schools. Fifty-three teacher surveys (43.1%) were returned. A total of 786 surveys (39.1%) were returned from students participating in HS+ at their school. Most of the students

participating in the survey were in Grade 10 (33.5%), followed by Grade 11 (27.1%), Grade 9 (22.1%), and Grade 12 (17.1%).

### Findings

#### *Program Structure*

Designed to allow students the opportunity to take courses needed for graduation immediately following the traditional school day, the extended day component of HS+ was implemented in 23 MCPS high schools. This section of the brief details students' and teachers' perceptions gathered from surveys administered during the second semester of the 2007–2008 school year. These findings are only for participants and teachers of the extended day component of HS+.

*Student findings:* The extended day component of HS+ is typically referred to as the “eighth period” by teachers and principals. The majority of students (79.8%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement *HS+ was convenient for me since it is located in my home school*. Similarly, 75.3% of students “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement *HS+ is offered at a time that is convenient for me to attend*. Although students agreed that HS+ was convenient to attend, there still was an issue of transportation for some students. Thirty-one percent agreed that transportation was an issue for their participation (see Appendix Table A2).

Loss of credit for HS+ courses occurs if students have five unexcused absences. About 80% of students “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the attendance policy was communicated to them. In asking about the fairness of the attendance policy, 63.5% of student respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the attendance policy was fair (see Appendix Table A2).

*Teacher findings:* A very high percentage of teachers (94.4%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that teaching HS+ requires additional preparation outside of their regular responsibilities (see Appendix Table A3). Additionally, teachers (92.5%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that HS+ is offered at a time convenient for them.

Compared with 63.5% of students, 77.4% of teachers “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the attendance policy is fair. Consequently, when asked about challenges to implementing the program, many teachers reported absenteeism. As mentioned by one teacher, “Five unexcused absences is too many absences (equivalent to 10 days of class). Also there

are too many legal absences after school (doctor's appointment, etc)."

### *Participation and Enrollment*

*Student findings:* Students were asked to indicate how they were first informed about HS+ opportunities in their school. Close to sixty percent of students indicated that they were informed about the opportunity to participate in HS+ by their school counselor. Fewer (17.2%) reported they were informed by their teacher, and 13.2% reported that they were informed by "word-of-mouth." Other responses included finding out about the opportunity from an administrator or school announcements (see Appendix Table A4).

Student participants also were asked to identify why they enrolled in HS+. More than two-thirds of the students (68.1%) reported that they enrolled in HS+ due to failing a course (see Appendix Table A5). Some students indicated they had lost credit in a course (21.4%) and were taking it in HS+.

When asked to what degree they agreed with the statement *HS+ provides me an opportunity to pass a course I failed*, almost all students (95.0%) specified "agree" or "strongly agree." Ninety-two percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, *I am aware of the work I am expected to complete in the HS+ class in which I am taking this survey* (see Appendix Table A6). Similarly, 81.7% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that HS+ teachers inform them of how well they are doing in their class work. A high percentage of students (83.7%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were informed about HS+ with enough time to register for a class (see Appendix Table A6).

Across all schools, 26.7% of the HS+ participants reported being enrolled in an English course, 23.5% in Algebra (either Algebra 1 or Algebra 2), 16.0% in geometry, and 14.7% in US History (see Appendix Table A7). Other courses reported included Consumer Math, Modern World History, NSL Government, Software Applications, and Matter and Energy.

*Teacher findings:* Seventy-two percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that students like the opportunity to participate in HS+. In addition, 62.2% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that HS+ participants take the courses seriously (see Appendix Table A8).

Regarding student behavior, 79.3% of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that students exhibit good discipline during their HS+ class (see Appendix

Table A8). Only about one third of teachers (33.9%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that there are many interruptions to classroom time because of student behavior. Sixty-four percent of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement (see Appendix Table A8).

Schools were allowed to establish rules regarding tardiness while the loss of credit for missing five unexcused days was standard policy. Teachers were asked to indicate whether they enforced attendance and tardiness rules for students participating in HS+. Seventy-four percent reported that they enforced rules on tardiness, while 86.8% reported enforcing rules on class attendance.

### *Benefits of HS+*

*Teacher findings:* When thinking about the goal of HS+, teachers were asked to respond to statements about benefits for students. A high percentage of teachers (86.8%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, *HS+ is effective in getting students to pass a course they failed*. Correspondingly, 83.0% of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement *HS+ is effective in getting students to gain course credit*.

Teachers were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions on the survey. One question asked them to identify positive aspects of HS+ in their school. The general consensus from teachers is that HS+ presents a good opportunity for students to receive credit and it allows students a second chance to pass a failed course. When asked about positive aspects of HS+, 17 out of 50 respondents mentioned students' ability to gain credit in the course. Twelve out of 50 reported the second opportunity to take the course as a benefit of the program. As remarked by one teacher, "Students have the opportunity to earn credit by simply extending their school day by one period."

*Student findings:* In an open-ended question, students were asked to report what they liked about HS+. The most frequently reported response by students was the opportunity to receive credit or a second chance to pass a course (196 out of 503). As explained by one student, "You have another chance to get the credit you need in order to graduate." Another student stated, "What I like is that you know that you're getting everything over with and that they provide you with the good source you need [to] pass."

Seventy-five out of 503 respondents indicated they liked the teacher who taught their HS+ course.

Students reported HS+ teachers to be better able to explain their coursework and to move at a slower pace than their regular teacher. As described by one student, “The teacher give[s] us quizzes and afterwards checks [our] understanding instead of waiting at the end of the week to see if we remember.” Another student indicated that the teacher treats him with respect and makes things easy to understand. Students also reported liking the helpfulness of the program in general (44 out of 503), not having to pay to participate (40 out of 503), not having to attend summer or night school (21 out of 503), and the time of day it is offered (18 out of 503).

### *Challenges to Implementation*

*Teacher findings:* One open-ended question asked teachers to provide challenges they encountered in implementing HS+. Inconsistent attendance was the most frequently reported challenge (24 out of 45 respondents). As one teacher reported, “Student attendance remains a problem and when students are absent for one period they miss a lot of content.” Another reported challenge was lack of focus by students. Some teachers believed that some students did not take the HS+ courses seriously (8 out of 45). As summarized by one teacher, “Students are not taking the course seriously. Most students are too tired to be focused on the lesson.” Other reported challenges cited by a few teachers included: behavior, lack of planning time for teachers, transportation issues for students from other schools<sup>1</sup>, and low enrollment.

### *Suggestions for Program Improvement*

*Teacher findings:* Teachers were asked to provide suggestions on ways to improve HS+. There were many ideas from teachers, with one recurring theme: develop a clear attendance policy or enforce attendance rules (9 out of 40 respondents). One teacher commented, “Incorporate a more stringent attendance policy [of] 5 absences [equals] LC (excused or not).” Another teacher suggested, “Students who are regaining credit from LCs should have to sign an attendance contract.”

Another suggestion was for students to have to pay a nominal fee to participate in HS+ (8 out of 40 respondents). As mentioned by one teacher, “Charge the kids. The kids will not invest the effort and time until they invest (or their moms) the money.” Another teacher recommended charging students a

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<sup>1</sup> If a school had low enrollment in a course and was not able to offer it, students wishing to take the course were allowed to go to another high school to take that course.

minimal fee as well, however, “if students meet goals, refund the money.” Other suggestions for improvements reported by a few respondents included: providing snacks for students, offering more courses, and not allowing students with discipline problems to enroll in HS+.

*Student findings:* Students were asked to offer suggestions on how HS+ could be improved. Eighty-five respondents (out of 483) reported that the program was fine as it is and does not need improvement. The most frequent suggestion for improvement made by students was to shorten the length of time the program is offered during the day (90 out of 483 respondents). As one student indicated, “Let [students] out a bit earlier, because students tend to be a bit tired due to high demands in the day.” Many students suggested that receiving food or snacks (51 out of 483) would improve the program. Students mentioned that they are hungry at the end of the regular school day and providing food will help them focus better. As recommended by one student, “Provide some sort of snack to keep students with energy during class.”

Another recurring theme among students’ open-end responses was reexamining the attendance/tardy policy to allow for additional tardies or excused absences (47 out of 483 respondents). Some students mentioned the loss of credit policy for HS+ was too strict and suggested not having one. Others recommended allowing more excused absences. Other recommended improvements included: offering more courses (39 out of 483), changing the days of the week it is offered or beginning at a later time during the day (26 out of 483), providing transportation or improving upon current transportation (17 out of 483).

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the interviews and surveys:

- Reevaluate the time that HS+ is offered in schools to allow for students to access the activity bus home. Almost 30% of student respondents strongly agreed or agreed that transportation was an issue for their participation in the program.
- Provide teachers and students with strategies to ensure positive student engagement in order to minimize interruptions. About 34% of teachers and 41% of students agreed that there are

interruptions to classroom time due to discipline issues.

- Reevaluate the current attendance policy for HS+. Teachers mentioned the current policy is too lenient and students miss too many classes to excel in the program. On the other hand, students thought the policy was too strict.
- Determine a way to provide snacks for students attending HS+ courses. This may be an incentive to decrease attendance issues as well as address late-day hunger.

**Evaluation of the Implementation of High School Plus:  
Findings From the Spring 2008 Surveys**

**Appendix**

Table A1  
Indication of Satisfaction With HS+ Opportunities Offered at  
Their School

	Very satisfied %	Satisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Very dissatisfied %	Not sure / no opinion %
Students ( <i>n</i> =786)	47.0	39.8	3.3	2.9	7.0
Teachers ( <i>n</i> =53)	28.6	52.4	4.8	4.8	9.5

Table A2  
Students Agreeing With Statements About HS+ Program Structure (*N*=786)

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	No Opinion %
HS+ is offered at a time that is convenient for me to attend. ( <i>n</i> =779)	40.1	35.2	11.4	8.7	4.6
The attendance policy has been communicated to me. ( <i>n</i> =776)	42.9	36.5	10.8	4.8	5.0
Transportation is an issue for my participation in HS+. ( <i>n</i> =771)	14.4	16.2	32.4	31.8	5.2
The attendance policy for HS+ is fair. ( <i>n</i> =769)	28.1	35.4	17.0	13.3	6.2
HS+ was convenient for me since it is located in my home school. ( <i>n</i> =767)	49.9	29.9	5.6	5.6	9.0

*Note.* Some students did not respond to all statements and thus were not included in the analyses for the question they did not answer.

Table A3  
Teachers Agreeing With Statements About HS+ Program Structure (*N*=53)

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	No Opinion %
HS+ requires additional preparation outside of my regular responsibilities.	62.3	32.1	3.8	0.0	1.9
HS+ is offered at a time that is convenient for me.	43.4	49.1	5.7	0.0	1.9
The attendance policy for HS+ is fair.	28.3	49.1	13.2	7.5	1.9
Regularly scheduled meetings are held for HS+ teachers. ( <i>n</i> =52)	1.9	25.0	40.4	26.9	5.8

*Note.* Some teachers did not respond to all statements and thus were not included in the analyses for the question they did not answer.

Table A4  
 Students Indicating How  
 They Were First Informed About the HS+ Opportunity (*n*=774)

Source	%
Counselor	59.4
Flyer	5.3
Word of mouth	13.2
Teacher	17.2
Other (e.g., announcements, administrator)	4.9

Table A5  
 Students Indicating Why They Enrolled in HS+ (*n*=774)

Reason	%
Failed a course	68.1
Lost credit in a course	21.4
Offered in my home school (no transportation required)	1.9
Other (e.g., never took the course, raise grade)	8.6

Table A6  
Students Agreeing With Statements About HS+ Participation and Enrollment (N=786)

Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	No Opinion %
HS+ provides me an opportunity to pass a course I failed. (n=778)	77.9	17.1	1.3	1.4	2.3
I am aware of the work I am expected to complete in the HS+ class in which I am taking this survey. (n=778)	57.2	35.2	3.2	1.0	3.3
My HS+ teacher lets me know how well I am doing in my class work. (n=775)	50.1	31.6	8.9	6.3	3.1
There are many interruptions to classroom time because of the behavior of students. (n=774)	18.9	22.5	29.1	22.0	7.6
HS+ teachers treat me with respect. (n=779)	56.6	30.0	4.7	5.4	3.2
I was informed about HS+ with enough time to register for a class. (n=771)	47.9	35.8	8.8	4.5	3.0
Rules on tardiness are enforced. (n=770)	29.5	45.6	12.1	4.7	8.2
Rules on class attendance are enforced. (n=773)	36.4	42.8	9.1	4.4	7.4
Excused absences are allowed in this HS+ class. (n=771)	39.3	34.0	8.3	10.5	7.9
Overall, my HS+ courses were well organized. (n=758)	46.0	37.7	6.7	4.2	5.3
I plan to participate in HS+ again next semester. (n=752)	20.7	17.2	11.8	33.6	16.6

*Note.* Some students did not respond to all statements and thus were not included in the analyses for the question they did not answer.

Table A7  
Students Enrolled by Course Subject (n=769)

Course (multiple response)	%
Algebra	23.5
Biology	9.9
English	26.7
Geometry	16.0
US History	14.7
Other (e.g., Software Applications, Matter/Energy, Modern World History, NSL Government)	9.2

Table A8  
Teachers Agreeing With Statements About HS+ Participation and Enrollment (N=53)

Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	No Opinion %
HS+ is effective in getting students to pass a course they failed.	30.2	56.6	11.3	1.9	0.0
Students like the opportunity to participate in HS+.	9.4	62.3	17.0	7.5	3.8
There are many interruptions to classroom time because of student behavior.	9.4	24.5	37.7	26.4	1.9
HS+ prepares students for taking the High School Assessments.	3.8	56.6	18.9	3.8	17.0
HS+ participants take the course I teach seriously.	11.3	50.9	20.8	13.2	3.8
There is good discipline within my HS+ classes.	32.1	47.2	15.1	3.8	1.9
I enforce rules on tardiness.	30.2	43.4	17.0	7.5	1.9
I enforce rules on class attendance.	34.0	52.8	9.4	3.8	0.0
HS+ is effective in getting students to gain course credit.	37.7	45.3	13.2	3.8	0.0
I plan to participate in HS+ again next semester. (n=52)	30.8	19.2	21.2	13.5	15.4