



FEBRUARY 2003

AN EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY PROGRAM IN MONTCLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

Elaine M. Walker, Ph.D.
Dorothy Varygiannes, Ed.D.
Marcia Sutherland, Ph.D.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of the implementation of the Youth Leadership Academy in Montclair High School. The Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) is an innovative web-based program that integrates character education, technology, and core academic skills into a seamless learning experience for students. The program is an integral component of the school's special education curriculum, and is used primarily to inform the instruction of students who are in self-contained classrooms. The evaluation is formative in nature and focuses on determining the status of the program's implementation, and its perceived effectiveness on teaching and learning. Although outcome measures on student performance are included in the report, these measures function primarily as benchmarking information against which subsequent progress will be gauged. The evaluation employed a multi-prong design that incorporated structured group interviews, focus group discussion, classroom observations, student surveys and measures of students' performance. The evaluation sample was inclusive of all the major constituencies that are impacted by the program.

Our overall findings are that the program is contributing to student growth and to faculty development as well. The program has created significant paradigmatic shifts to the teaching of character education, technology, and to the core academic subjects, such as English and Language Arts. The way in which the program allows for the design of knowledge work, the creation of an environment that supports learning, and the employment of pedagogic strategies to facilitate knowledge acquisition is commendable. This has resulted in increased levels of student

motivation. Students' interest in technology has spawned improvements in their academic self-concepts and has enhanced their general optimism about the future.

The report proffers some key recommendations based on the findings that, if implemented, will serve to strengthen the program as it moves into a second year of full implementation. These recommendations address such issues as planning time, additional professional development support for teachers, and a longitudinal follow-up study of students.