



**Office of Education  
Performance Audits**

**INITIAL EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT**

**FOR**

**PRESSLEY RIDGE AT GRANT GARDENS SCHOOL**

**JUVENILE INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

**OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**NOVEMBER 2011**

**WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

An announced (five days in advance) Education Performance Audit of the Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School, a Juvenile Institutional Education Program under the governance of the West Virginia Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools, located in Cabell County was conducted on October 11, 2011. The purpose of the review was to verify compliance with Policy 2325, *High Quality Standards for Institutional Juvenile Education Programs*, and to make recommendations to the West Virginia Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools on such measures of the procedures manual and current Policy 2325 to effectively assess juvenile institutional education programs.

The Education Performance Audit Team reviewed the Five-Year Strategic Improvement Plan, interviewed school personnel and host agency staff as available, observed classrooms, and examined school records.

## **EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT TEAM**

Office of Education Performance Audits Team Chair – Allen D. Brock, Coordinator

West Virginia Department of Education Team Leader – Jared Hughes, Coordinator,  
Office of Institutional Education Programs

Team Member – William DesRochers, Principal, Barboursville School and Robert L. Shell Juvenile Center

## **JUVENILE INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

### **PRESSLEY RIDGE AT GRANT GARDENS SCHOOL**

Pam Abston, Principal

#### **OVERVIEW**

Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School (PRGG) is an on-campus school operated under the direction of the West Virginia Department of Education in collaboration and cooperation with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Pressley Ridge organization. The official configuration of the facility is to serve neglected and delinquent youth ages 13 to 18; however, a waiver may be granted to acquire students as young as ten and on rare occasions to serve those past their eighteenth birthday. The facility is a 40 bed facility serving 10 males and 10 females in Level II and 10 males and females in Level III. Students range from those abandoned or neglected to those who have felony charges and who are stepping up or down from a higher level of security.

Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School is a Title I school and is able to provide reading support for all students through a Title I reading program. Mathematical support for students is provided by retired teacher volunteers and through the Title I tutoring plan. Students have opportunities for physical activity, writing across the curriculum, Positive Behavior Support activities, multicultural education, interdisciplinary lessons, and fine arts in each class on at least a weekly basis. Through the innovation of customized lesson plans and the support of 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology (Acuity, West Virginia Writes, TechSteps, on-Target West Virginia, Thinkfinity, READ 180, Apangea and Carnegie, etc.) instructors are able to provide targeted individualized instruction for each student.

Students' post-release needs focus on including re-articulation into their home high schools, high school graduation, GED preparation and completion, affective restructuring of their attitudes toward school, and post-secondary career opportunities. The Transition Specialist and the Professional School Counselor begin the transition process from the date of the student's arrival. Each student's schedule is established to meet the graduation needs of his/her home county. In addition to participating in the core academic curriculum, students are given extra time and extra support to acquire missed skills and to embellish acquired skills.

In the past two years, Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School recorded the following student successes: Graduate through the school at PRGG; graduate through the GED program; enroll in post-secondary education; acquire or work toward acquiring previously failed credits (14 students); earn nearly 500 high school graduation credits; re-enroll in their home high schools upon release (over 175 students); obtain employment; and obtain housing or independent living status.

## EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AUDIT

### COMMENDATIONS

- 3.2.2. High expectations.** It was evident through teacher observations, teacher and principal interviews, and student interviews that all staff had high expectations for all students. Instructional time was maximized and all students were kept on task with high quality instruction and a challenging curriculum.
- 3.2.3. Learning environment.** The staff had invested a great deal of time to ensure that the learning environment was high quality and conducive to the learning process. The decorations were attractive and fostered a positive environment.
- 3.8. Leadership.** The principal and assistant principal possessed and demonstrated the highest ability to guide the staff and students in their educational endeavors. They had a high level of knowledge of the needs of the students and the resources necessary to achieve their goals. In addition, the staff provided high quality leadership in the classrooms to enable the students to reach their highest potential.

### Exemplary Program & Practice

#### 3.3.8 Lesson Planning.

Title: Individualized Educational Programs for All Students with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Assistance.

#### Description of Program

The educational programs at Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School (PRGG) afford opportunities for students to acquire an individualized education tailored to their particular learning needs and ambitions. Upon intake, students are given a battery of assessments to enable teachers to design the educational path to meet the students' individual needs. Through transcript evaluation and standardized assessments to determine learning styles, skill strengths, skill gaps, and career interests, teachers develop an individualized instructional plan (IPP) to serve the students' best interest for success while in the facility and after release. According to the data acquired through surveys, assessments, intake, and teacher formative assessments, over 90 percent of the students in Grades 9 to 12 report with skill and credit deficits. Over 80 percent of middle school students report with skill deficits across the grade spectrum, over 50 percent report with math deficits, and over 30 percent report with reading deficits.

Once a student enters PRGG, the staff searches for ways to individualize the students' learning experiences so that he/she may see graduation as a reality. Twenty-first

century technology provides teachers resources to teach skills, scaffold skills, reinforce skills, and drill down in Depth of Knowledge of Skills. The technology gives the instructor an individual read-out for each student and allows him/her to base the next lessons on students' needs. This enables the teacher to look for mastery of CSOs and distinguish those CSOs lacking in students' experiences.

In school year 2010-11, PRGG was part of the Office of Institutional Education Programs (OIEP) pilot projects in several 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology initiatives (Acuity, West Virginia Writes and on-Target West Virginia). These pilot projects lead to better instruction for individual students and for assuring a stronger positive affect toward school. Beginning in January of 2011, PRGG agreed to be the OIEP pilot for Acuity. Acuity allows a teacher to assign skills up to two-levels lower for students which is paramount to scaffolding and doing vertical curriculum alignment with PRGG students. From January to May of 2011, 178 customized math tests were created, 132 customized language arts tests were created, 37 customized science tests were created, and 8 customized social studies tests were created. Of those, 16 math exercises were completed and 255 language arts exercises were completed.

As one of the OIEP pilots for West Virginia Writes from January of 2011 to September 2011, PRGG students wrote and had scored 265 essays of the 872 essays written and scored for OIEP - this was a total of 30.3 percent of all essays in the pilot. Using the West Virginia Writes data formatively, the language arts teacher developed grammar and writing lessons entrenched in age-appropriate literature to assist students in continuously increasing their writing scores based upon the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills rubric. Based on the belief of continuous improvement, students were allowed to challenge themselves and continue to re-write their work to attain higher scores.

Since the inception of PRGG involvement with on-Target West Virginia (AVENTA) in October of 2010, PRGG has enrolled 16 students in the West Virginia Department of Education supported credit recovery program. This allows students who have completed the time in a class, but who have not successfully completed a credit, to gain current grade-level skills in a traditional class while also securing those credits of missed opportunities in other time slots during the day. This program is supported by the Title I program in math and English and by classroom teachers in other areas. A volunteer tutor (a retired special educator) visits the school twice a week to assist AVENTA students, especially those enrolled in mathematics.

### Summary of Results

While WESTEST2 scores were not disaggregated according to a writing score and an overall reading/language arts score, the results of the students who were involved in the Acuity and West Virginia Writes programs showed 70 percent of students gained significantly in skill deficits with most of them moving up at least one level on the WESTEST2 scale (novice to below mastery, below mastery to mastery, etc.). In at least three cases, students gained two levels or more from the previous WESTEST2 scores. To support this data the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) confirmed that of the eligible 38 students counted in the end of year report that completed pre-testing and

post-testing, 21 of the students progressed a grade level or more in the reading/language arts and 18 showed the same growth in math. Additionally, two other students increased in reading/language arts and three other students increased in mathematics equal to or greater than the time they spent at PRGG in the educational setting. For example, they were residents six months but showed nine months gain. Every student completed the initially assigned remedial grade levels and nearly 90 percent achieved success at the next level of the language arts Acuity lessons assigned. In West Virginia Writes, over 60 percent of students came in writing more than two grades below their traditional same age peers. One hundred percent of those students improved to their appropriate grade levels and over 50 percent of them scored at least 3 or 4 on the essays at that age-appropriate level (considered mastery). Two students who worked through the West Virginia Writes program and Acuity toward mastery were court-ordered to be non-traditional graduates (GED). One student increased the GED reading/language arts score by over 170 points and another student increase the score by 50 points. Three on-grade level essays at PRGG received perfect scores to date (scoring a 6 in all categories).

The on-Target West Virginia program allows students to secure lost credits and to have grade-level classes to prevent them from losing ground. Since October of 2010, PRGG enrolled 16 students in the program. Three students were at PRGG long enough to finish the courses and achieve passing grades. Four students transferred out of PRGG while still in the course; none of them successfully completed the courses due to a lack of support from the home area school. Nine students are currently enrolled and all are making satisfactory progress with three over 90 percent complete with a score of 70 percent or higher.

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### **Exemplary Programs & Practices**

#### 3.2.5. Instruction.

Title:    Agriculture Awareness and Exploration Day; Observance of Earth Day.

#### Description of Program

As a Title I school, Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School (PRGG) is afforded a half-time Transition Specialist to work with the youth along with the Professional School Counselor. Through the Transition Specialist and the services provided by the Professional School Counselor, many students have embraced non-traditional and previously unknown career paths. Focusing on one of the many areas of careers, PRGG staff has sponsored an annual Agriculture Awareness Day. This opportunity has allowed many students to discover a love of agriculture, horticulture, and conservation.

Once a year, near Earth Day and as part of the multicultural and interdisciplinary planned units at PRGG, presenters from the United States Department of Agriculture-Farm Service, Greater Kanawha Resource Conservation and Development, the West Virginia University Extension Office program, the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources Guyan Conservation District, and local agriculture practitioners and enthusiasts visited the campus. Last year two local beekeepers, including the President of the West Virginia Beekeepers Association, visited and allowed students to sample different types of honey. They described the pollination cycle and its impact on the entire food chain.

This project has been expanded on campus with an on-site garden and a greenhouse. Additionally, this program is run collaboratively with Cabell-Midland High School's agriculture program. Many of the plants and supplies needed are raised/cultivated by the CMHS agriculture program. The Agricultural Awareness unit involves a campus beautification project and a garden project. The CMHS agriculture program donates flowers and plants for the beautification project. This collegial connection has encouraged students' interests in returning to public school and involvement in career and technical education programs.

#### Summary of Results

Since the inception of this program, over 120 students have gone through DNR processes of testing water, setting planes, running soil samples, developing rain barrels, building tables, building chairs, and building raised planting beds. A quasi-experimental survey was done of the students at PRGG last year upon the completion of the project. One hundred percent of students said they were introduced to occupations that they did not previously know existed. Sixty percent said they are likely to use the information to choose post-secondary training and 80 percent said that upon their return to their traditional school they will pursue attending career and technical education courses.

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### **Identification of Resource Needs**

A thorough and efficient system of schools requires the provision of an adequate level of appropriately managed resources. The West Virginia Board of Education adopted resource evaluation as a part of the accreditation and evaluation process. This process is intended to meaningfully evaluate the needs for facilities, personnel, curriculum, equipment and materials in the schools and how those impact program and student performance.

#### **3.4.1. Facilities are safe, free of hazards and adequate to meet the needs of students and provide an environment conducive to learning.**

Section 3.4. Regulatory Agency Reviews of West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2325 governing accountability for juvenile institutional education programs for public school age students establishes standards for safe and adequate facilities for learning.

A host agency provides and maintains all facilities for the 10 juvenile institutional education programs in West Virginia. The West Virginia Board of Education through the State Superintendent of Schools and the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Institutional Education Programs provides the education programs in these facilities. Such provision of adequate services compels interagency collaboration and cooperation regarding adequate facilities for juvenile institutional education programs.

**The Office of Education Performance Audits Team found that the Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School had a great deal of equipment and materials for student use and provided a safe and conducive learning atmosphere for all students.**

### **Education Performance Audit Summary**

The Team presented three commendations and two Exemplary Programs & Practices.

Based upon the results of the Education Performance Audit, the Office of Education Performance Audits recommends that the West Virginia Board of Education approve the Pressley Ridge at Grant Gardens School's Education Performance Audit Report.