

A Formative Evaluation of the Norfolk Public Schools' Open Campus High School Program

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John Nunnery, Executive Director

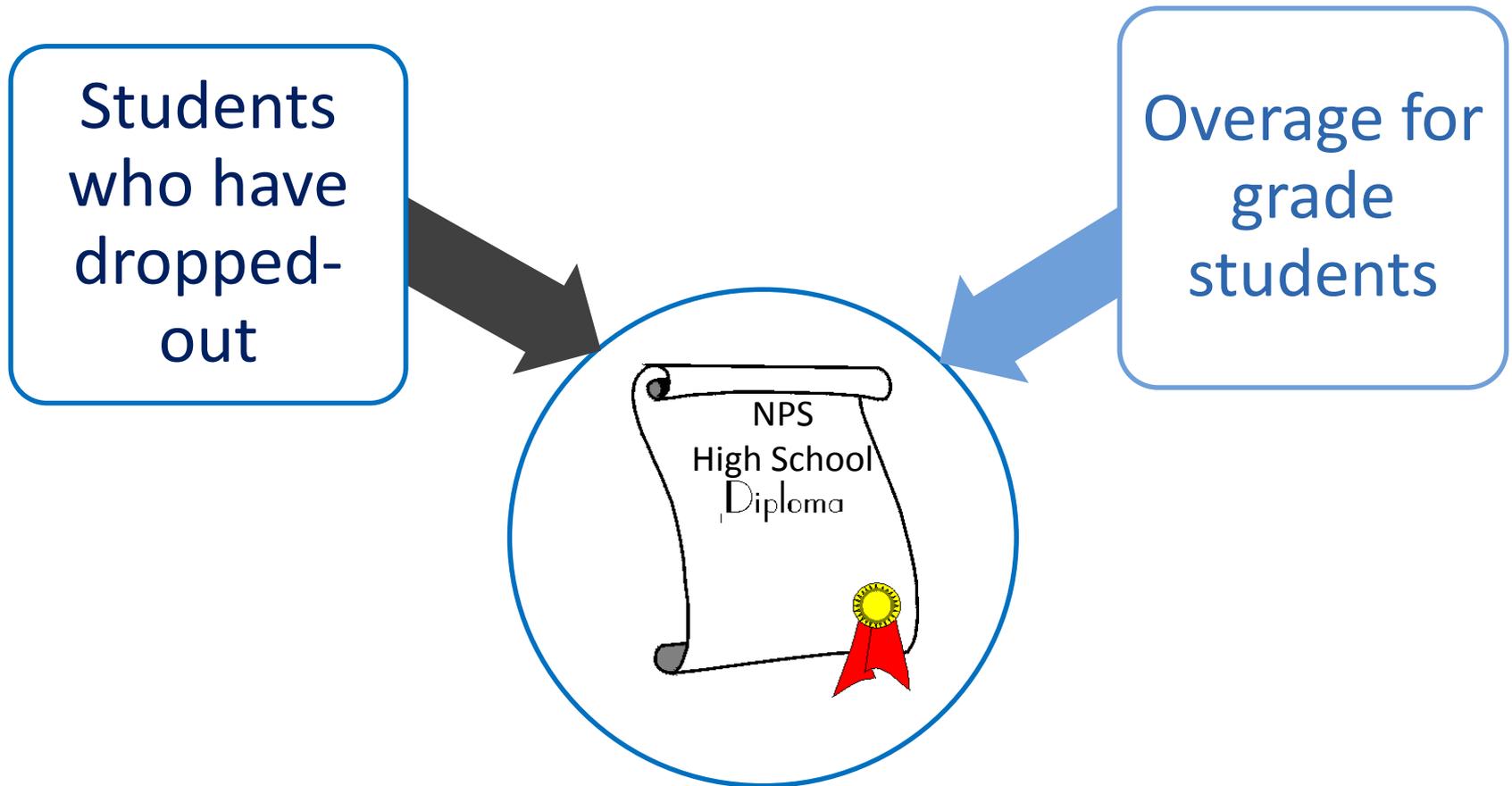
Pamela Arnold, Associate Director

The Center for Educational Partnerships

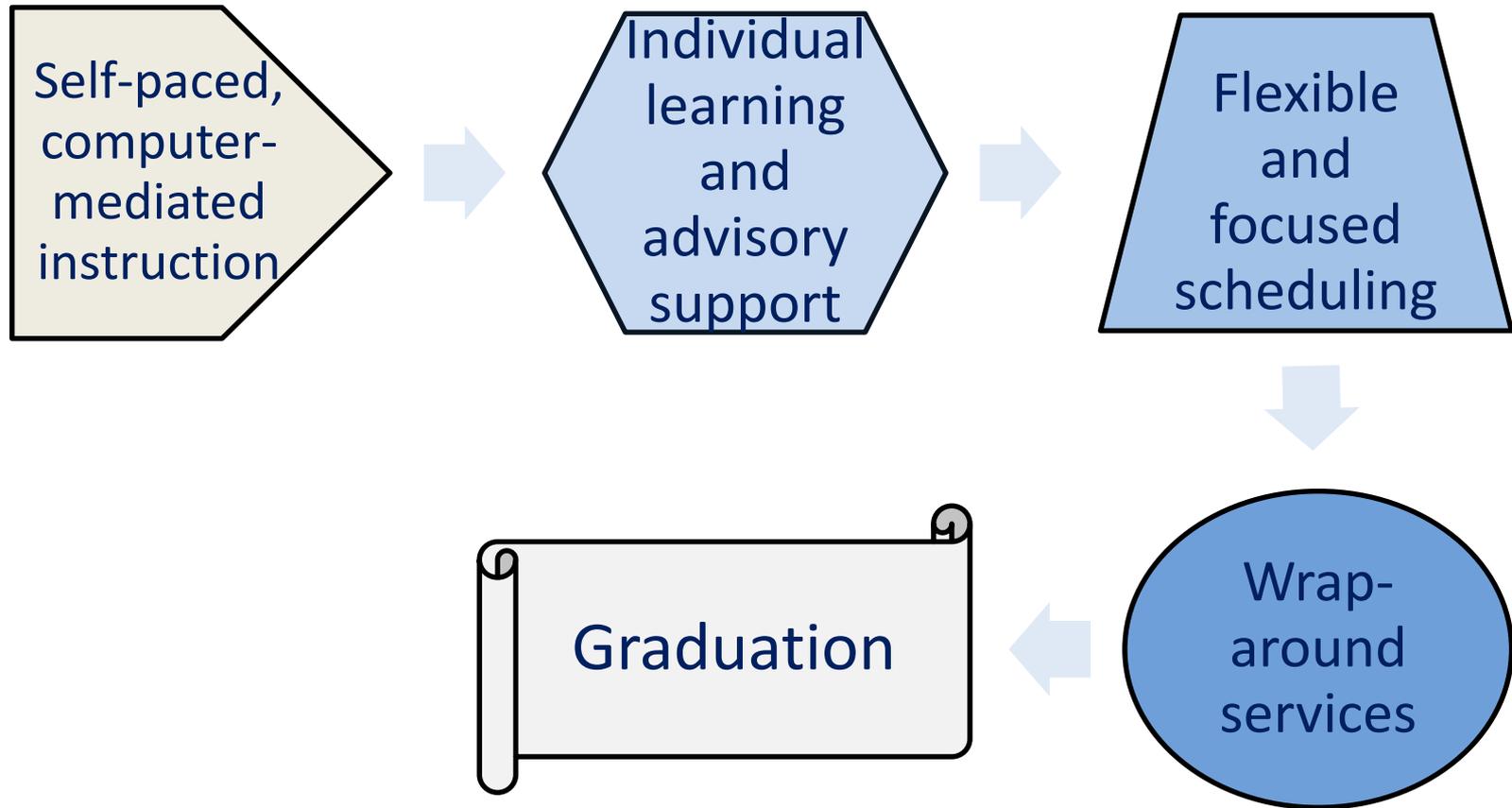


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Open Campus High School (OCHS) was piloted in 2014-2015 to assist two types of NPS students earn a *regular* high school diploma.



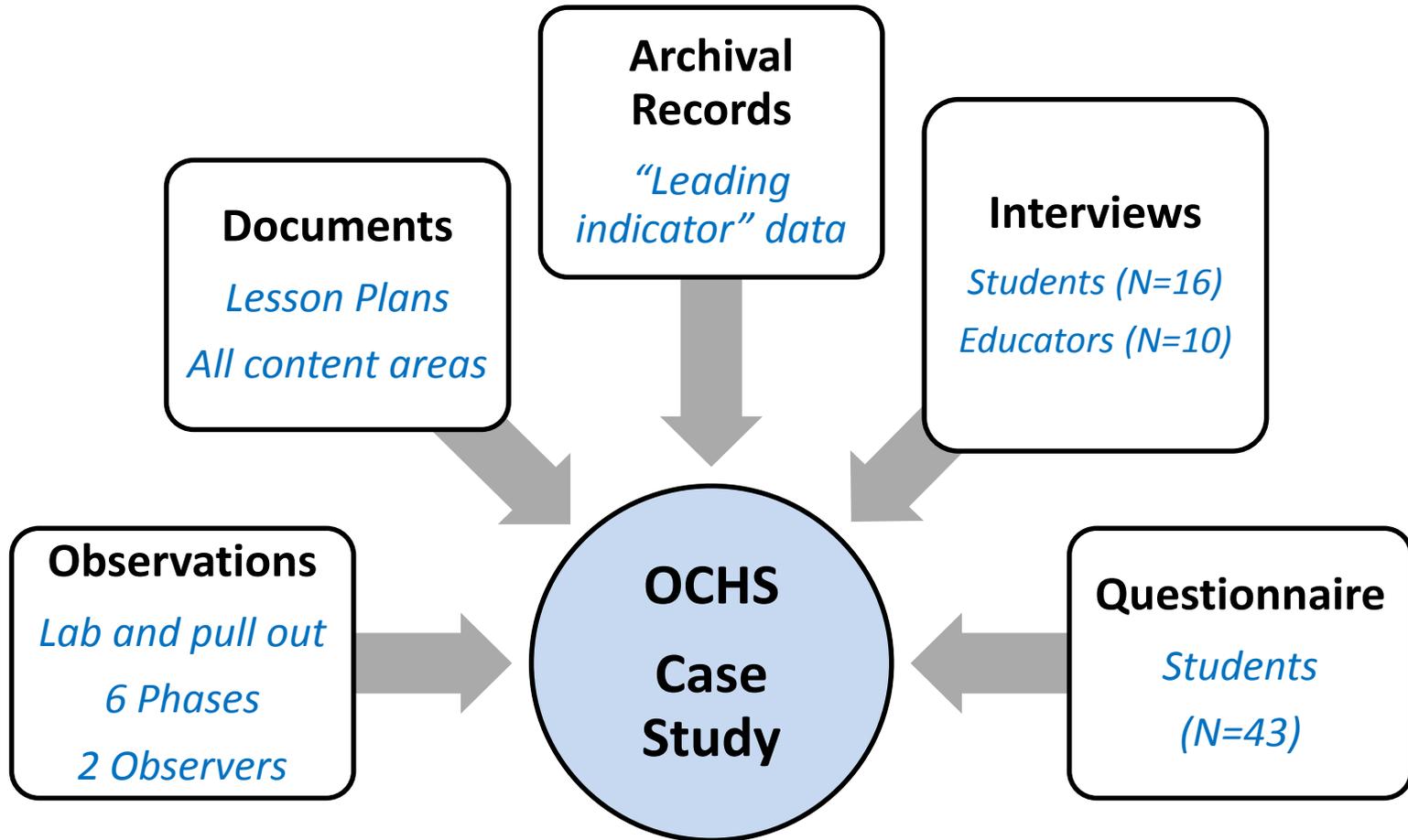
OCHS, based on the Magic Johnson *Bridgescape* program, incorporates features intended to support graduation.



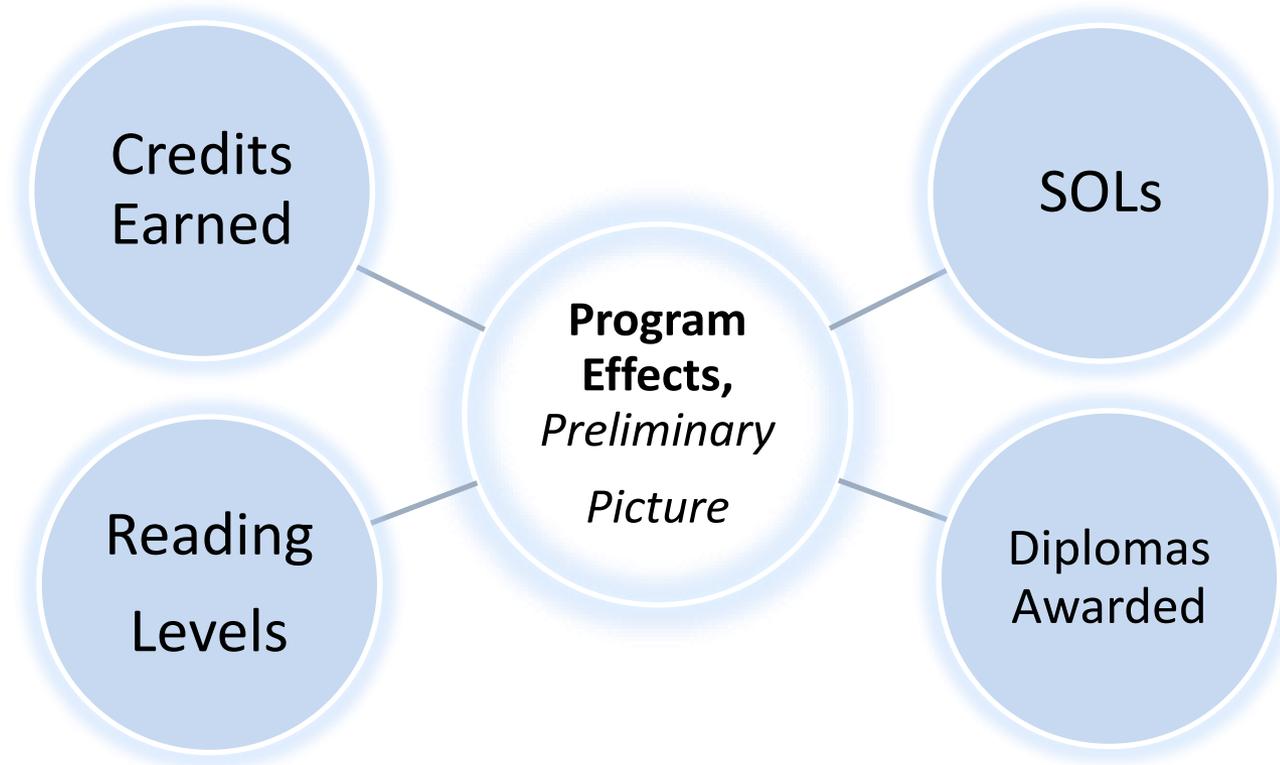
This was a *formative* evaluation designed to inform efforts to maximize program effectiveness.

1. What were the student **characteristics** and **risk factors**?
2. What factors motivated students to **re-engage** in school?
3. How does the program influence continued **engagement** and **success**?
4. What were the key **challenges**?
5. To what extent do preliminary data suggest **promise**?
6. Can preliminary data be used to guide **recruitment** efforts?

We used a mixed-methods, holistic case study design with multiple points of triangulation.



“Leading indicator” data were collected from the school and analyzed to provide a preliminary picture of program effects.



Drop-out recovery and over-age for grade students were similar in some ways, quite different in others.

OFG Students	DOR Students
0 credits at enrollment	58% had 6+ credits
2+ years behind peers	65% age 19 or older
Mean reading equivalency=2.8	Mean reading equivalency=5.2
Low reading levels (1.2-4.3)	Very wide range of reading levels (1.1-post secondary)
All lived with parent(s)	Significant number lived with others
Not employed	Significant number work
High rate of behavioral incidents	Many have children or other family responsibilities

Students and teachers perceived similar *risk factors* for dropping out or becoming over-age for grade.

Social difficulties in previous school

Negative peer interactions, influences
Behavioral difficulties
Difficulty coping, anxiety

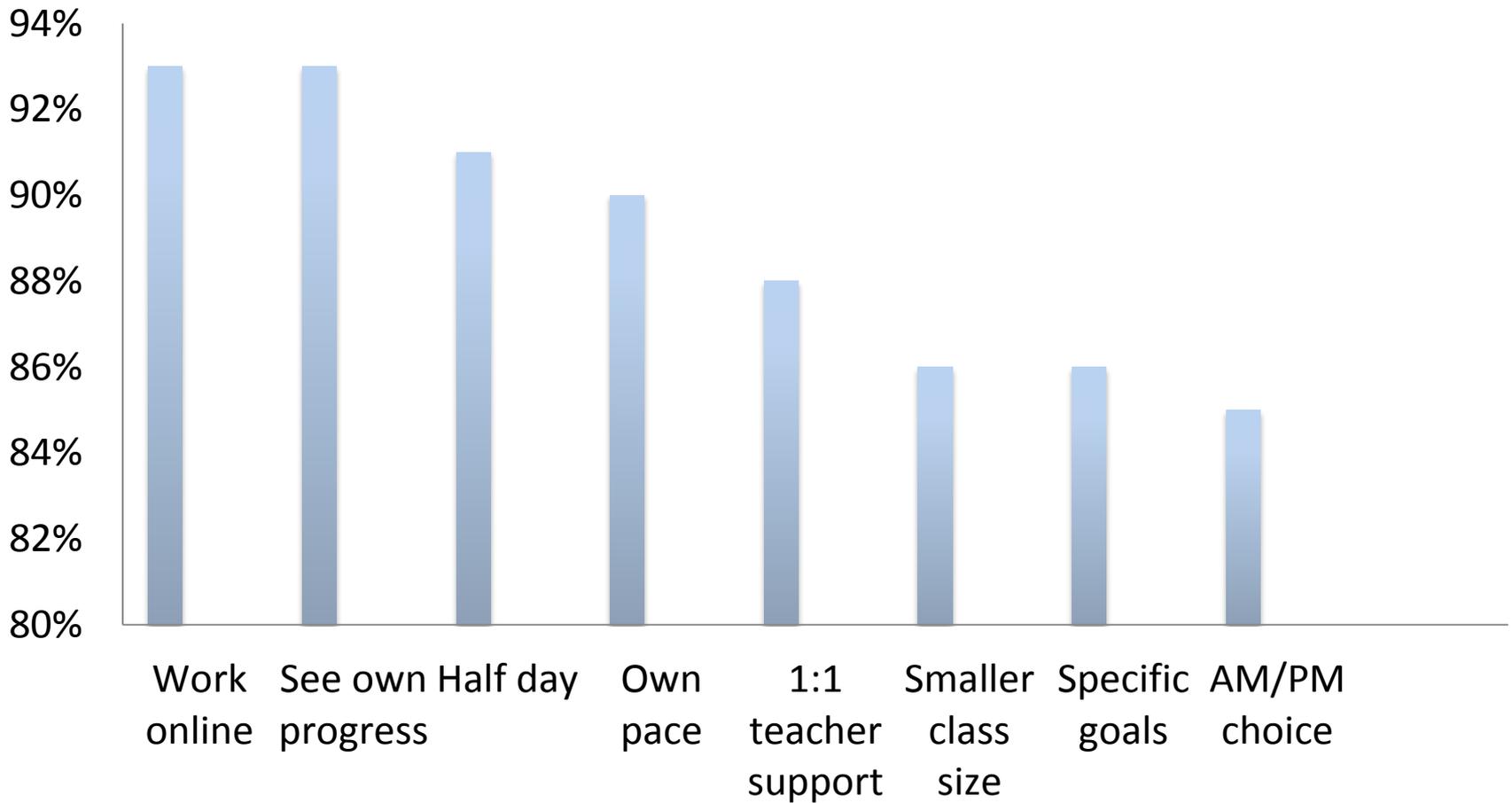
Life circumstances impact on attendance, performance

Parenthood, family responsibilities
Moving around, transitions
Financial difficulty, homelessness
Mental health issues, abuse
Incarceration, legal issues

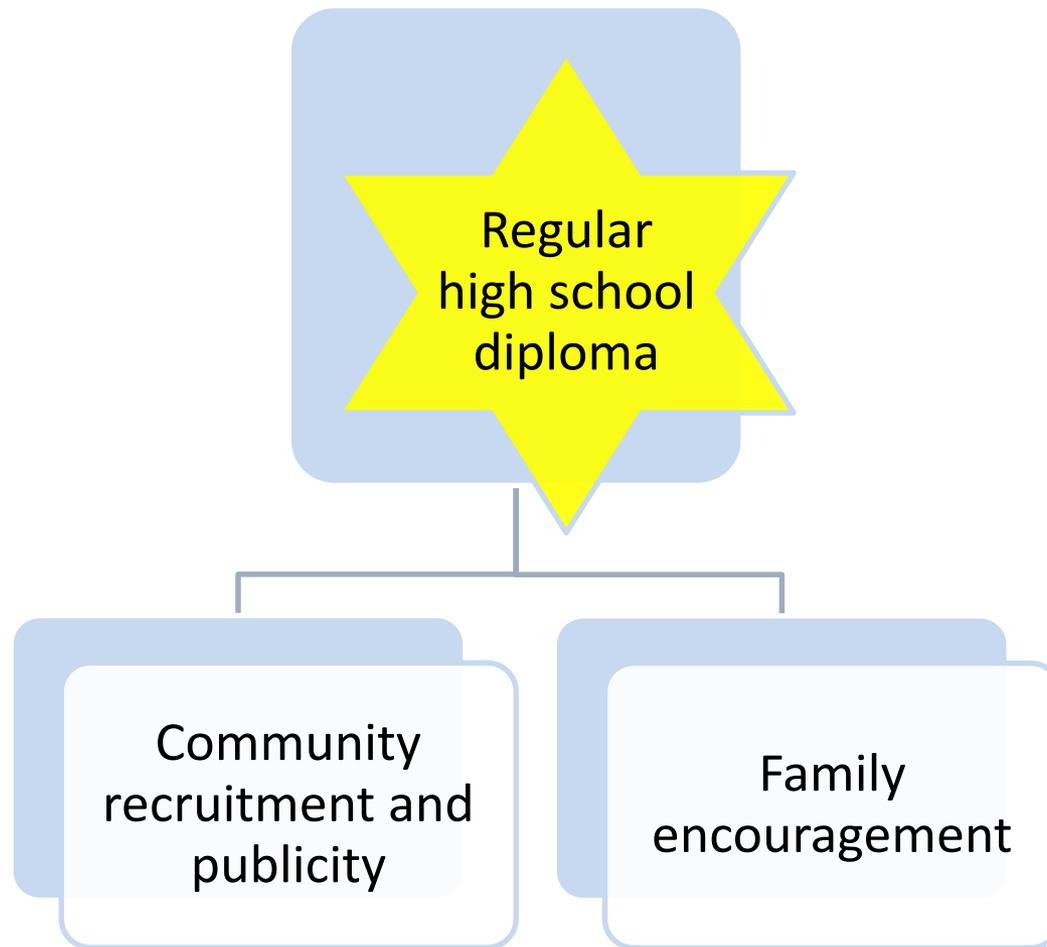
Academic difficulties in previous school

Not enough 1:1 support
Inability to keep up

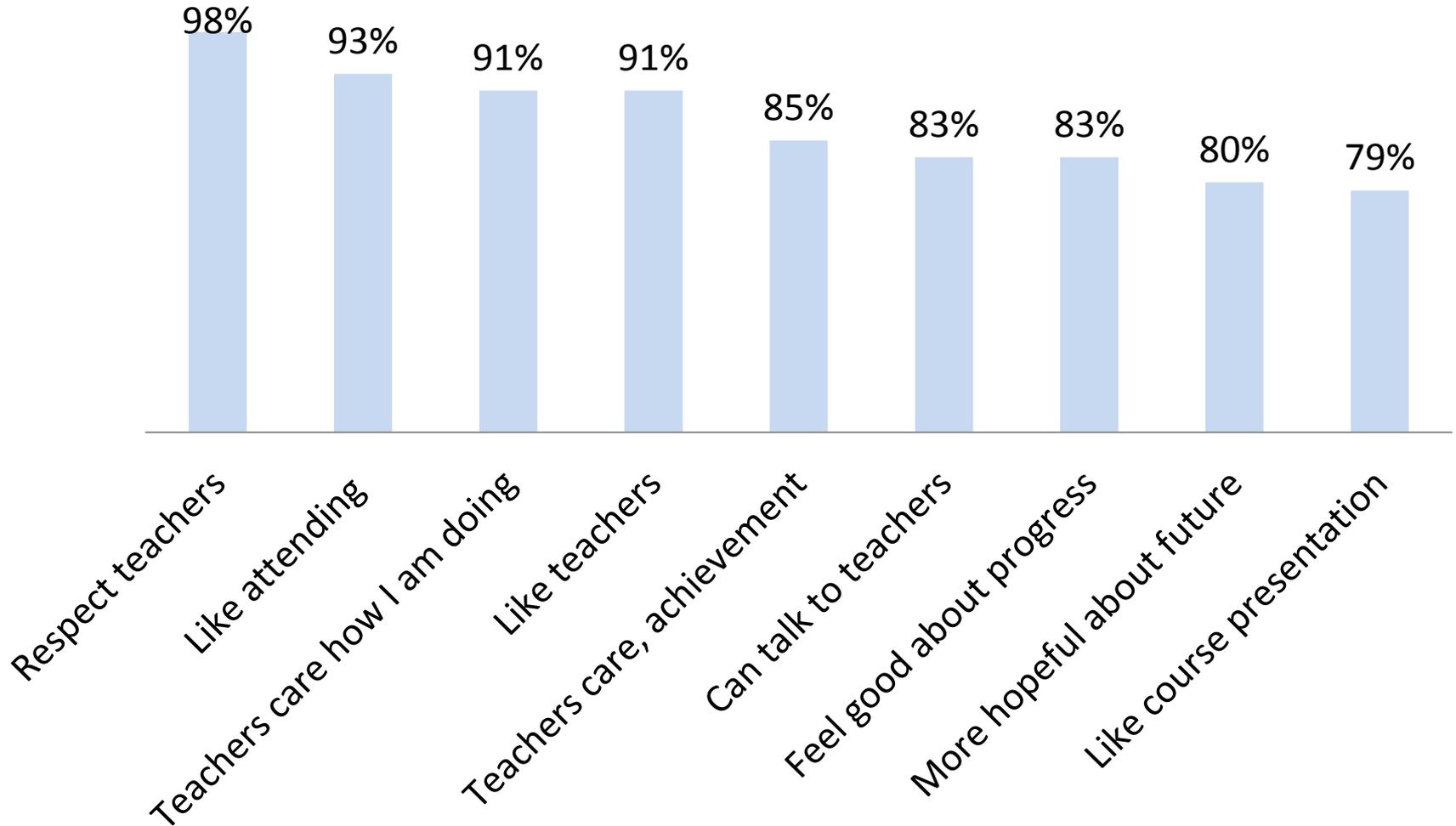
Students responding to the questionnaire indicated a number of program characteristics motivated them to enroll in OCHS.



Interviewees discussed three additional “pull-in” factors.



Students responses to questionnaire items indicated OCHS maintains a positive environment supportive of students' continued engagement.



Interviewees described three core aspects of OCHS that promoted their school engagement.

Themes	Categories
Positive School Climate	Respect
	Positive peer interactions
	Interest in students' lives
	Encouragement and expectations for success
	Comprehensive responsiveness to needs
	Supportive environment for educators/staff
Individualization of Learning	Self-pacing, self-monitoring
	Intensive teacher academic support, progress monitoring
	Scaffolding in online curriculum
	Selective curricular focus (2 courses at a time)
Supportive School Structure	Flexible scheduling
	Smaller environment
	Wrap-around services

A student on the OCHS learning environment:

“They tell us that they want to treat us like adults here. There is more freedom.”

A student on 1:1 support at OCHS:

“They take time out to sit down and help me. At most schools teachers are all over the place and cannot entirely focus on you. They have to concentrate on the whole class, but [these teachers] are right there when you need their help.”

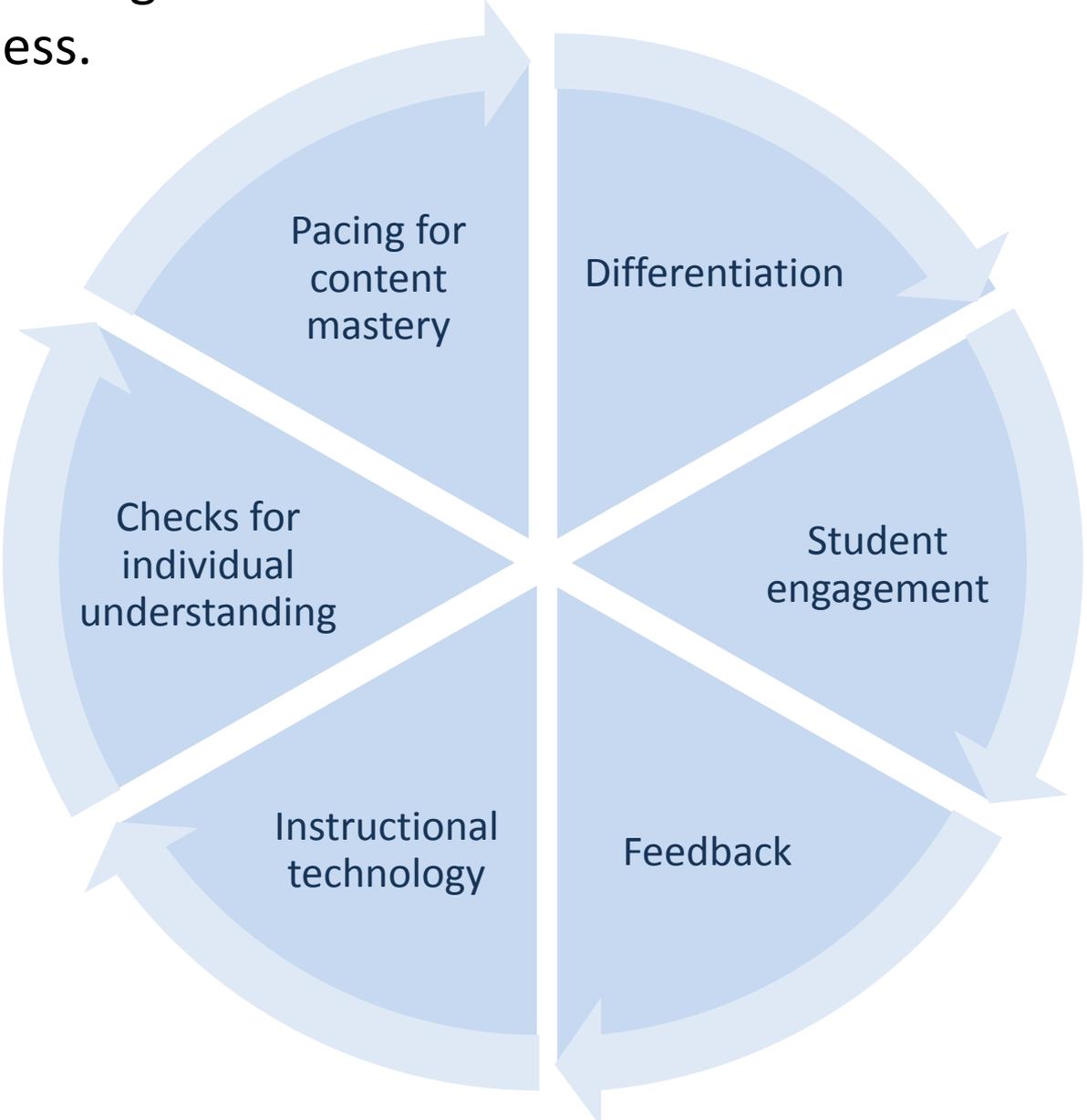
Two different students on self-pacing:

“It’s just a lot easier, because you can move at your own pace.

You don’t have the teacher stressing over your shoulder.”

“You get more done without waiting for other people.”

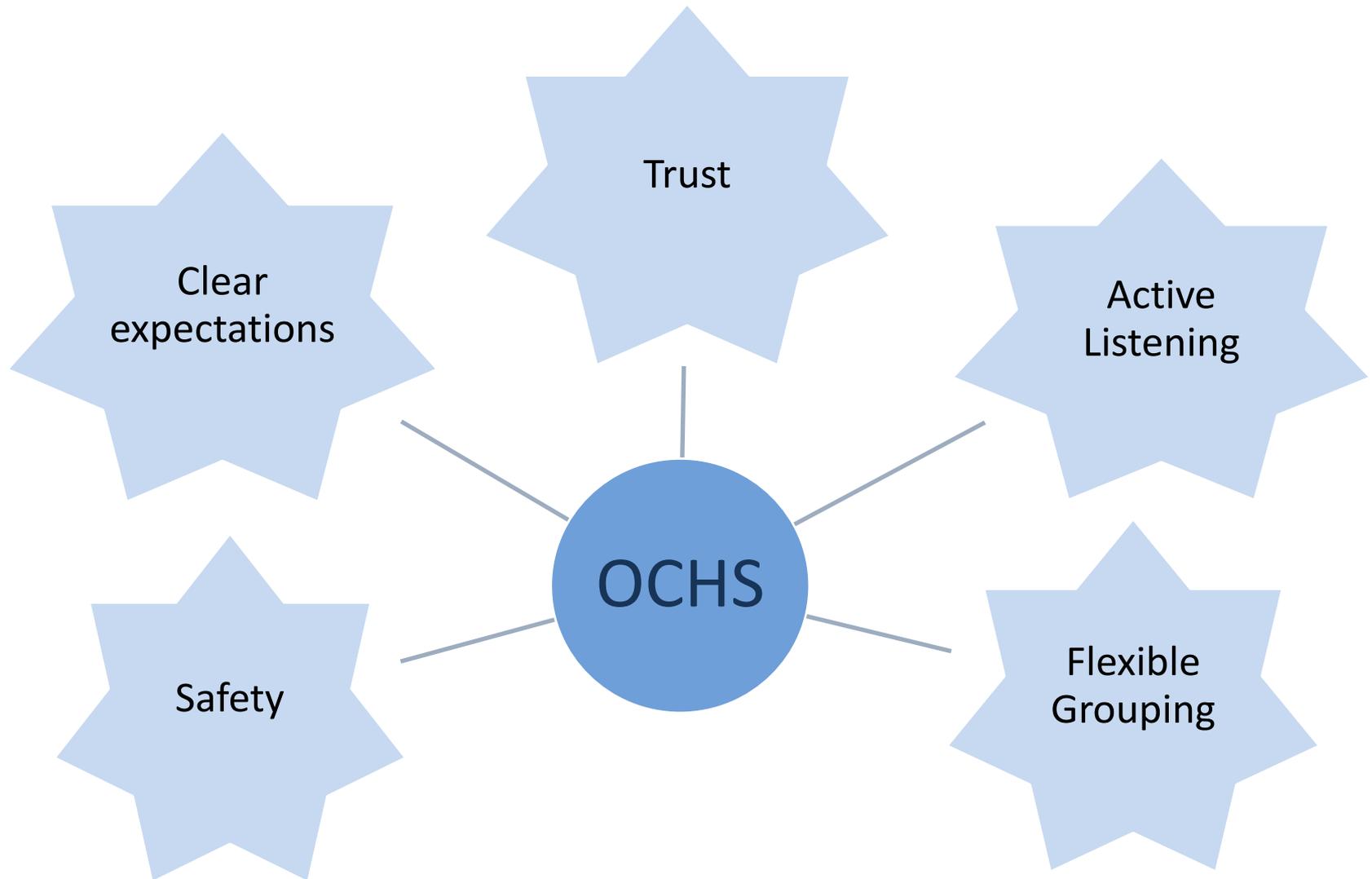
Observations by two independent observers over six phases captured strong evidence of six indicators of instructional effectiveness.



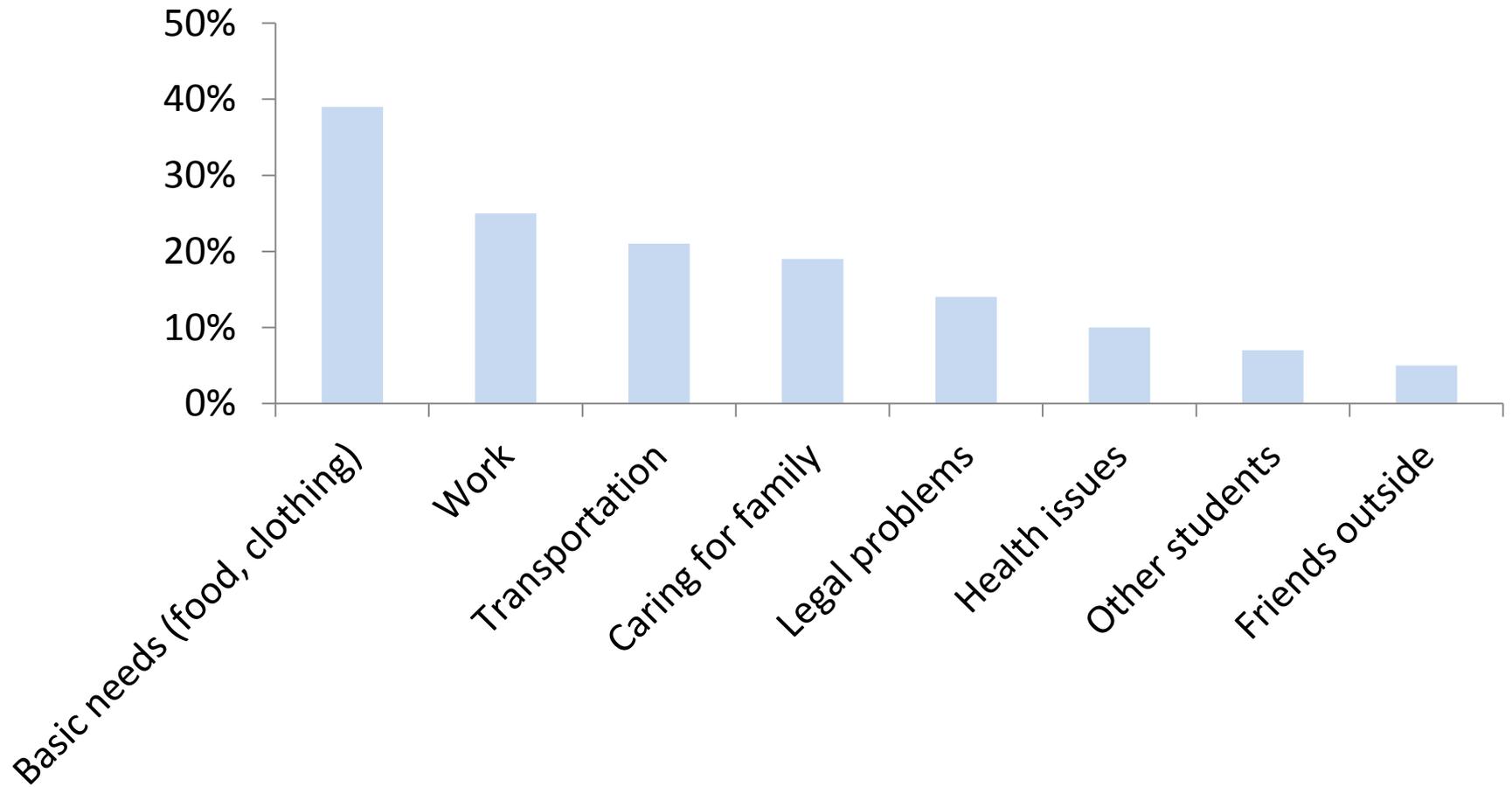
Observers captured some evidence of other indicators of effective instruction.

- Higher level thinking
- Linking present content with past and future learning, real world
- Peer to peer learning interactions
- Communication of learning objectives

Observers captured strong evidence of five of six indicators of a positive school climate.



Questionnaire respondents identified financial challenges as most impactful on their ability to attend or complete schoolwork.



Interviews with students revealed two additional areas of challenge, also related to financial circumstances.

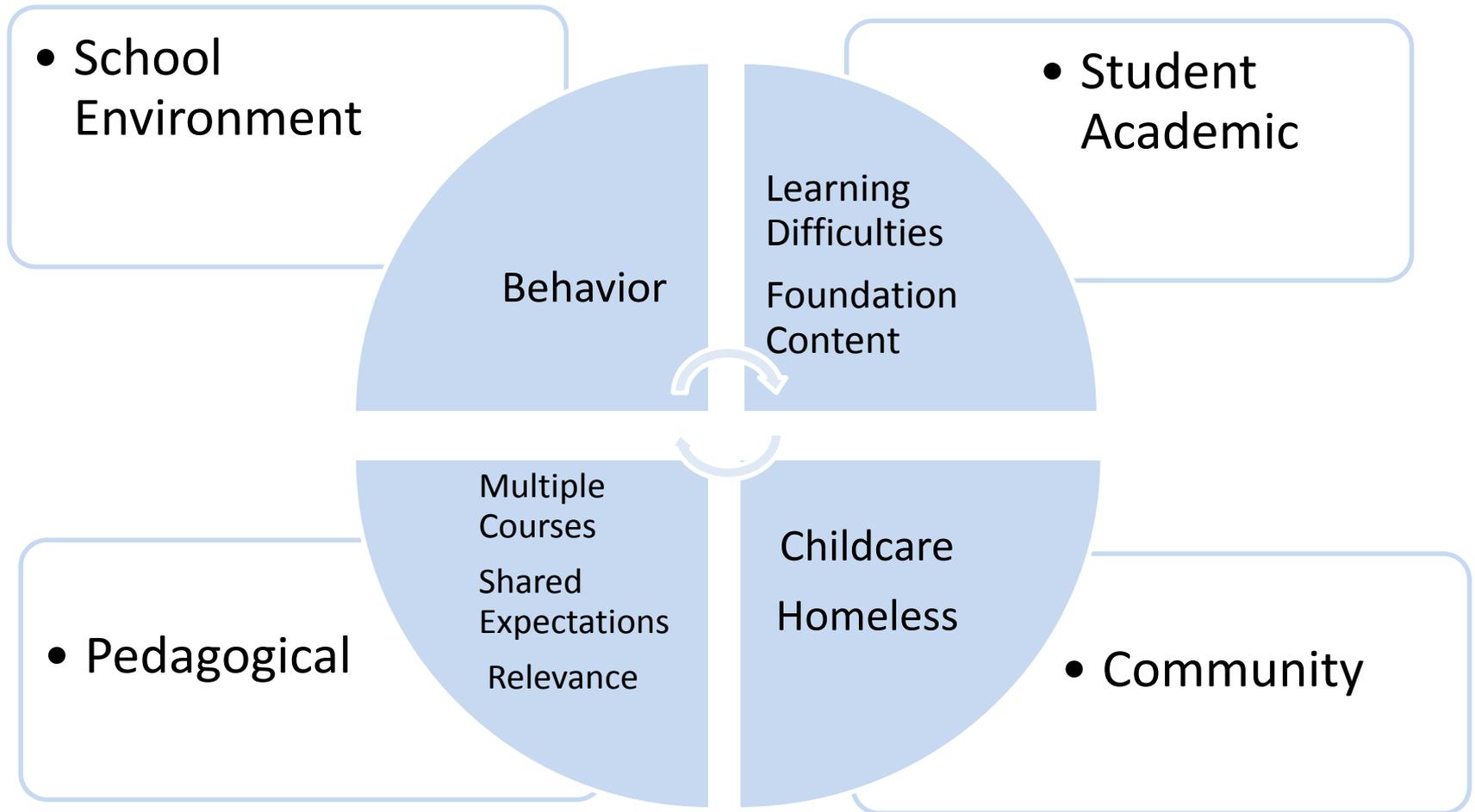


1. Need for more opportunities to complete work: other session times, resources for remote computing



2. Child care

Educators and staff echoed students' perceptions of challenge, and identified additional challenges.

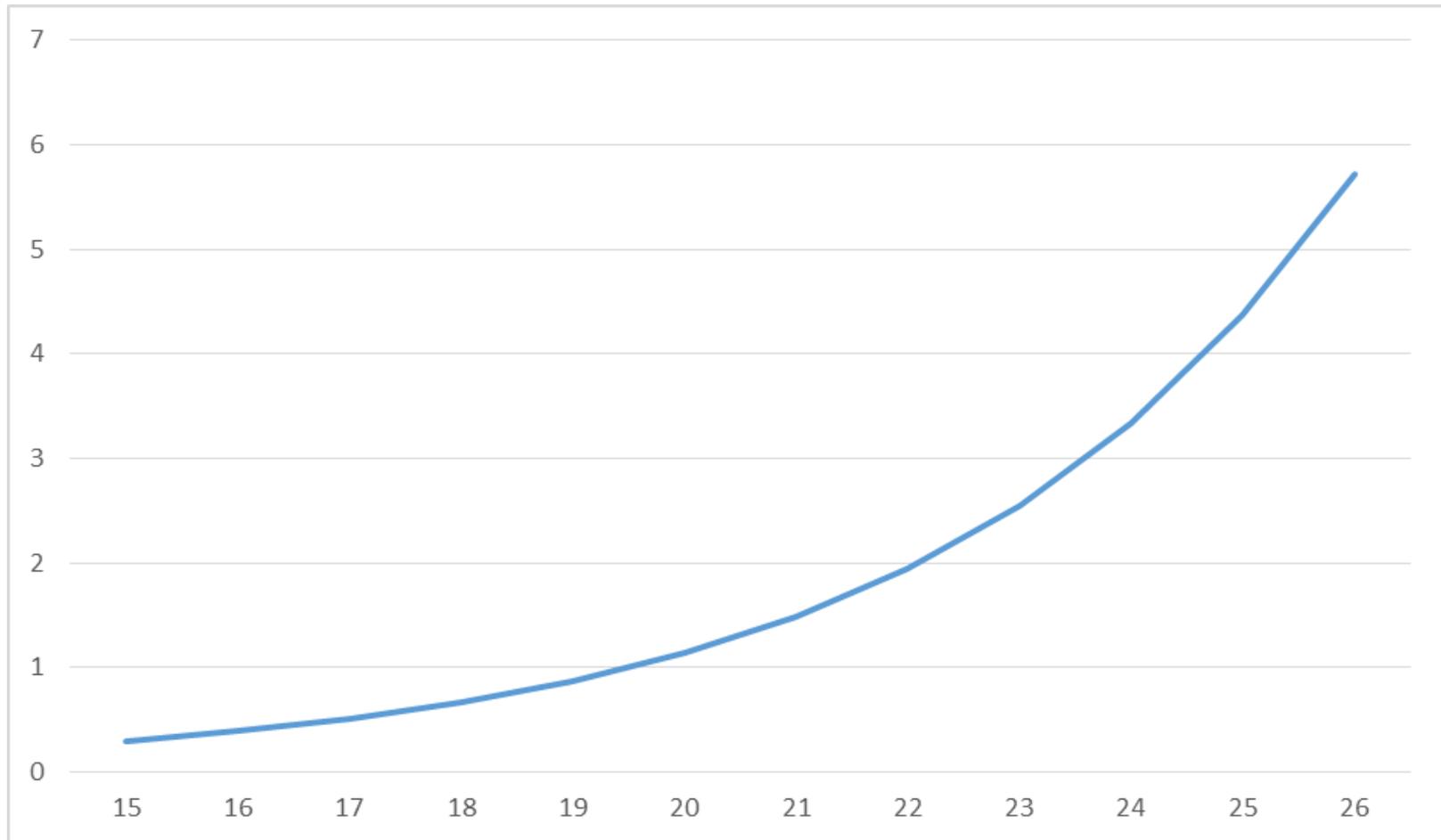


Outcomes were more promising for DOR students than OFG students.

Indicator	DOR	OFG
<i>N</i> graduates	18	0
Range of credits earned	.5-8.5	0-4.0
Mean credits earned	1.0	0.83
Mean reading grade-level change	+.2	+.3
Successful SOL attempts	14	1
SOL attempts: pass	15.6%	3.6%
Average <i>n</i> lessons completed	6	4

Note: There was a statistically significant positive correlation between average lessons completed per day and the number of credits earned ($r = .48$, $n = 152$, $p < .001$).

Number of credits upon enrollment was a statistically significant predictor of graduation status.



The findings led us to suggest six recommendations for NPS to consider:

- Target recruitment and retention efforts on DOR students
- Provide services, scheduling options and resources to support attendance
- Explore additional supports for educators teaching multiple courses at a wide variety of levels.

- Strategize ways to systematically enhance peer-to-peer instruction and interactive learning opportunities
- Consider site-based study of collaborative teaching and foster additional opportunities for teachers to interact with content colleagues
- Explore development of a process for identifying and referring high school students who are likely to benefit from the program

Contact Information

John A. Nunnery

Associate Vice President
for Research
Executive Director

Pamela L. Arnold

Associate Director
Research Associate

The Center for Educational Partnerships
Old Dominion University

757-683-5449

jnunnery@odu.edu *parnold@odu.edu*