

An abstract of the dissertation of William C. Carpluk for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Education presented May 2010

**TITLE: THE SENIOR YEAR ENIGMA: A STUDY OF THE ENTRENCHED
AND SUSTAINING SOURCE OF SENIORITIS**

(To access the dissertation click on
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/stelizabeth/carplukEDD.pdf>)

As educational leaders respond to the challenges of providing a 21st century education to high school age children, the senior year in high school specifically and high school reform in general has gained national, state, and local attention. Many find the senior year in high school suffering from a malady colloquially called senioritis. This study, designed as an action research dissertation, examines the deeply entrenched source of senioritis through the context of a high performing regional high school district. The study was grounded in a mixed methods approach using data from a broad survey of students and faculty triangulated with rich qualitative data from an extensive array of relevant research participants and archived data. Guiding the study were the theoretical critical attributes identified in current literature relevant to the research problem. Critical attributes providing the framework were the shared construction of meaningful learning experiences between teacher and student, intrinsic valuing of learning, personal ownership of schoolwork, connection of schoolwork with future plans, level of expectations and the possible change in those expectations, expectation for academic rigor, and

expectation for post secondary preparation. Mental models, structures, and patterns that support and sustain senioritis were also part of the research framework. Data was collected from students and teachers in all grade levels, building and district level administrators, guidance counselors, and non-teaching faculty in the district's two high schools. Surveys, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and archived documents were the instruments used for data collection providing data for the analysis, interpretation, conclusions, and recommendations. The research finds that the curriculum and instructional program, teacher expectations, and student expectations influence and contribute to senioritis by not infusing and cultivating the critical attributes identified above as essential in mitigating senioritis. The research also finds that mental models, structures, and patterns exist that support and sustain the concept of senioritis. Furthermore, the research reveals that the senior year experience as well as the high school experience differs among students by ability grouping and grade level. The study's conclusions lead to a set of actionable recommendations.

An abstract of the dissertation of Mary Rose Scalo for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Education presented May 2010

Title: POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION FOR THE SIGNIFICANTLY
DISABLED: CONNECTING THE SCHOOL TO THE COMMUNITY

Due to a concern about the increasing number of students in the district diagnosed with autism, this action research study focused attention on the transition needs of students with significant disabilities. Prior to the inception of this study, this district had no transition program for students with significant disabilities. Individualized transition plans were lacking in evidence of student postsecondary career interests and other specific details needed in order to foster successful postsecondary transition. During the early stages of this research, the district hired a transition teacher, created a transition curriculum, implemented a transition course, established community-based instruction opportunities, and collaborated with local employers for site-based job opportunities. All of these efforts were designed to meet the specific needs of students with significant disabilities.

This research used assessments, inventories, progress reports, student observations, surveys, and focus groups. Following the implementation of the aforementioned activities and instructional supports, improvements were noted in

student attendance at IEP meetings, student participation in IEP meetings, details included in IEP transition plans, job skill knowledge, and employer understanding of students with significant disabilities.

The major findings of this research underscore the importance of transition instruction for all members of this learning community. The transition curriculum offered these students instructional opportunities that resulted in the identification of practical career goals and the development of the skills necessary to meet these goals. When provided with the appropriate assessment tools, staff members developed more detailed and specific transition plans. Finally, when afforded support and Community-Based Instruction from the school personnel, employers expressed increased expectations for student employees with significant disabilities.

Additional data gleaned from this action research points to the need to expand the current transition program to include more job and community opportunities for students with significant disabilities, consider the transition needs of students with other disabilities, revise the content area curriculum to meet the instructional needs of students with significant disabilities, and raise awareness regarding student transition needs. Future research is required to obtain longitudinal data regarding the effectiveness of transition instruction and IEP transition plans.

An abstract of the dissertation of Lauren A. Kazmark for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Education presented May 2010.

Title: WHY CAN'T WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE? A STUDY OF READING INSTRUCTION IN AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

(To access the dissertation click on
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/stelizabeth/kazmarkEDD.pdf>)

Reading initiatives in urban school districts are often implemented as a result of poor student achievement. This study sought to examine factors that affect the success of reading initiatives in an urban school district. Teacher self-efficacy, teacher expectations of students, school level leadership, and grade configuration were investigated as possible factors affecting the successful implementation of reading initiatives in one urban school district. The external research indicated that these four factors were linked to classroom instruction, student learning, and student achievement, and therefore affected the implementation of reading initiatives. Third and fourth grade teachers, literacy coaches, and principals from four elementary schools participated in this study. Two of the participating schools had achieved Adequate Yearly Progress, as measured by the 2008 NJASK 3 and 4, while the two remaining schools were labeled Schools in Need of Improvement. The outcomes of this dissertation defined connections between self-efficacy, expectations for students, school level leadership, grade configuration and not only

student achievement but the successful implementation of the reading initiative.

These connections were evidenced by feedback from teachers, literacy coaches, and principals, classroom observations, and test data. Analysis revealed differences in self-efficacy, teacher expectations of students, the role of the school leaders, and perceptions regarding grade configuration between the two successful schools and the two schools in need of improvement.