DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Performance Management Plan Annual Report, due May 5, 2013
April 2013

Desert Sky Community School, Inc.
Entity 88308

Desert Sky Community School
Entity 88309, Grades K-5

Submitted May 2013 by Shelly Adrian

Purpose

At the 5-year Interval Review in 2011, DSCS did not meet the academic performance level of the AZ State Board for Charter Schools. We put in place a Performance Management Plan to improve our Reading and Math scores on the annual AIMS tests. We are now half-way through this three-year plan.

The AZ State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS) requires an Annual Report that "demonstrates improved academic performance based upon data generated from valid and reliable assessment sources." In accordance with the Academic Framework and Guidance document, this annual report addresses the measures that did not meet or fell far below the academic performance expectations set by the ASBCS, as well as those measures that were not rated.

The Academic Performance Framework and Guidance document provides an explanation of the measures (see Appendix A) and the required reporting (Appendix D). Desert Sky is identified as a 'small school' for these measures.

The Desert Sky Academic Performance Rating FY2012 (aka 'Academic Dashboard') indicates the following items are to be addressed:

1. Growth – 1a. SGP – Math – falls far below
1. Growth – 1b. SGP bottom 25% -- no rating
2. Proficiency – 2a. Percent Passing – Math – does not meet
2. Proficiency – 2b. Composite school comparison – Math – falls far below
2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup ELL – no rating
2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup FRL – Math – does not meet
2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup SPED – Math – does not meet
3. Stated Accountability & Overall Rating – 3a. State Accountability – falls far below
3. Stated Accountability & Overall Rating – overall rating – does not meet

Each of these items is addressed separately with a chart, graph, or table of data and/or no more than two pages of narrative. Categories for improvement planning include: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Professional Development, and Accountability.

Introduction

Waldorf Education is a deep education: slow, steady, and spiraling toward complexity and college & career readiness. The trajectory of student learning anticipates strong early foundations in intellectual, emotional, and physical capacity-building. Learning occurs on a deep experiential level, and self-consciousness is avoided. This trajectory differs from the race to mastery, lined with benchmarks and standards-based tests which demonstrate that students know a particular body of knowledge at a predetermined time.

One of the challenges of a Waldorf-inspired charter school had been the shift in standards and expectations which create specific timelines for learning which differ from the timelines inherent in Waldorf education. Chartered to bring a Waldorf education aligned to standards becomes increasingly difficult when standards change across the years and become more specific and more fixed. Based in a classic education, similar to the trajectory of schools in Finland and other countries with high literacy rates, there is historical evidence for the success of Waldorf education in facilitating the development of college and career ready adults.

In many ways, the new Common Core is a much better fit with our pedagogy than the AZ State Standards because it identifies essential minimums and expects scaffolding as needed so each child can independently access learning. The bands in Common Core – for example, a standard is identified for K-2, or for grade 3-5 – allow for individual variation in the pace of mastery. In Waldorf Education, educators help students to navigate the stages of childhood in such a way that they not only meet individual needs for faster or slower learning, but also allow them to reap the benefits of each developmental stage. In demonstrating sufficient progress in student achievement, this paper holds that AIMS scores fail to accurately reflect the academic achievement at Desert Sky Community School, a K-5 charter school inspired by Waldorf Education.

In analysis of our trends in student achievement, it needs to be brought to attention that every year, in every grade, since the start of the school seven years ago, the number of test scores is very small – as few as three students some years! While the scores themselves are accurate, the impact of individual variation may be too great for meaningful statistical analysis of trends.

Background – Head, Heart, Hands

Waldorf education acknowledges that we are three-fold beings made up of intellect ("head"), emotion or feeling ("heart"), and the ability to get things done ("hands"). As children mature they go through distinct developmental stages where one of the three aspects – head or heart or hands – comes to the forefront of education. Curriculum and methodology are designed to meet the developmental and educational needs of students as they go through the stages. We are careful not to rush students prematurely onto the next stage. The goal of Waldorf education is to facilitate natural student development into compassionate, knowledgeable, and skilled adults who are able to impart direction to their lives. The order and timing of what we teach in a given grade does not always match up with AZ State Standards, especially in Kindergarten through Grade 3. Happily, the emphasis of Common Core on deeper understanding is a better fit with Waldorf Education.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 1. Growth – 1a. SGP – Math – falls far below

The Student Median Growth Percentile (SGP) measures the increased achievement of each student on AIMS math. The ASBCS expectation is that at least half of students will show greater growth than their peers across the state. For small schools (less than a hundred students), a three-year pooled SGP is calculated, the aggregation intended to minimize variability due to small numbers.

Table 1 shows the number and percent of students passing AIMS Math, and the number of students staying at the school for two or three years. By looking across at the percent of students in each cohort passing AIMS math as they move from Grade Three to Grade four and Grade Five, we see that there is a decrease in the number of students passing AIMS math as they move across these three grade levels. At the same time, from year to year, there appears to be gradual attrition in the number of students taking the test as the students move through the three grade levels; for example, Class of 2018, consisting of 13 students, first took AIMS Math in FY09, and the following year, the class had shrunk to 9 students, and then in FY11 there are only 6 students. One might assume we can look at the progress of those 6 students to assess individual student growth. With so few students, all of whom I know by name and remember clearly, I can tell you that only 2 of those six students remained from the original set of 13 students. There is no trend in the students who left – sometimes it is the ones who were doing poorly, and sometimes the students who score well on AIMS were the ones who left. The newly arrived students sometimes have a strong educational background and sometimes do not. The smaller number of students means that each individual's ability is carries weight that skews the representativeness of the percentages.

Regardless of the educational background of students upon arrival at Desert Sky, each is supported in doing their best, and students performing more poorly than their peers in daily classroom interactions are recommended for our Targeted Assistance Title I program. I have noted the number of the students who remained through the three years who have an IEP. Waldorf education is quite suitable for many students with learning disabilities. It should be noted that some students who arrive with an IEP, have one developed upon arrival, or experience learning gaps can make tremendous individual progress and still remain below the bar for passing. We do have students come to us from both homeschooling and private school backgrounds, and there is no clear trend in their preparedness for learning. Once students enroll at Desert Sly, obstacles and blockages to learning are addressed, whether they arrive with an IEP or not, and whether the challenges to learning are emotional, will-based, or intellectual.

Several strategies were implemented to improve student growth percentiles in math. An in-house master teacher mentors academic teachers in Waldorf methodology and child development. Weekly faculty meetings and weekly individual meetings with teachers allow consideration of each individual child's needs in relation to lesson planning and practice. Formative assessments by each grades teacher to gauge mastery of grade-level skills helps teachers pinpoint the learning tip for each child, and provide differentiated instruction or referral to supplemental Title I support. [See attached sample of grade level assessment checklist]

There is no doubt that students leave Desert Sky with greater capacities than they arrived. Quarterly progress reports by teachers, special education support, and the Title I teacher document improvements in confidence, coordination, and staying on-task as well as advances in math skills.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 1. Growth – 1a. SGP – Math – falls far below

Table 1. Number and Percent of Students Passing AIMS Math, with Number Students Staying at the School for Two or Three years.

# of students & % passing MATH	first year 2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	# students in class three years in a row.	of those present 3 yrs, how many were sped
Class of 2023							G2		
Class of 2022						G2	G3		
Class of 2021					G2	(6) 50%	G4		
Class of 2020				G2	(10) 40%	(8) 13%	G5	7 students remained FY11 to FY12 (2 yrs)	4 sped
Class of 2019			G2	(9) 33%	(7) 14%	(8) 25%		2 students remained FY10 to FY12	1 sped
Class of 2018		G2	(13) 46%	(9) 44%	(6) 33%			2 students remained FY09 to FY11	1 sped
Class of 2017	G2	(9) 22%	(8) 38%	no G5				5 students remained FY08 to FY09 (2 yrs)	1 sped
Class of 2016	(6) 67%	(5) 40%	(3) 33%					2 students remained FY07 to FY09	1 sped
Class of 2015	no G4	(4) 50%							

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 1. Growth – 1b. SGP bottom 25% -- no rating

The Academic Dashboard shows no rating for the growth of lowest-performing students. Whether because the overall SGP 'falls far below', or there are too few students to measure 'bottom 25%', the response to the previous item (ie, 1. Growth – SGP – falls far below) may be informative.

Students who assessed at more than a year behind on AIMS Math in Spring 2012, are offered Title I Targeted Assistance. Students receiving Targeted Assistance Title I support outside the regular classroom were assessed with the Woodcock Johnson III.

Table 3. Woodcock Johnson Assessment Sub-categories for Student with Title Supports.

Test May 2013 WJIII scores
Percentile Ranks & Grade Equivalent

		broad math	brief math	math calc	calculation	math fluency	appl probls
G3	Student A	(2.) 5	(GE 2.1)	(1.3) 0.2	(1.3) 0.3	(1.4) 2	(3.0) 32
G3	Student B	(GE 2.7) 8	(GE 3.0)	(GE 2.5) 3	(GE 2.9) 10	(GE 1.3) 1	(GE 3.0) 19
G4	Student C		(GE 4.4) 35		26		45
G5	Student D	(5.3) 36	(GE 5.7)	(4.4) 15	(GE 4.7) 24	(3.5) 12	(GE 7.2) 62
G5	Student E	(GE 6.4) 51		(GE 6.5) 54	83	(GE 3.2) 7	48

key

yellow	above grade level
green	at grade level
tan	approaching grade level
red	a year or more below grade level

Students receiving Title I support in math were placed due to low AIMS math, or Stanford 10, scores in April 2012. Thus these are students who have experienced at least a year of instruction at Desert Sky. Although it is a small sample for statistical representation, analysis by the subcategories of the Woodcock Johnson III suggests that the strength of these students is applied problems (students at or above grade level equivalent), and their challenge is math fluency (how quickly they perform math operations). While this data supports the claim that Waldorf education, based in experiential learning and imagination, accesses higher level thinking (problem-solving), it also suggests that AIMS math scores may improved by math practice geared toward improving fluency (more mental math, for example.), This data informs our mentor's work with teachers.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 2. Proficiency – 2a. Percent Passing – Math – does not meet

The rate of overall proficiency in AIMS math does not exceed the average statewide performance.

In addition to Targeted Assistance Title I programming, Desert Sky has been implementing an improvement plan to increases the overall level of math proficiency at Desert Sky. Per our Performance Management Plan, Desert Sky sought and hired a pedagogical director to support deepening of curriculum and instruction. In collaboration with Chris Kelly (pedagogical director) and Laura Alvarado-Coady (Sped and Title Coordinator), the following timeline was developed and implementation begun.

Table 2. Timeline for Improvement of Math Proficiency

PLAN	TIMELINE	STATUS
1. Designation of additional class periods twice a week devoted to math work.	Started in Fall 2012	Done, 'math' added as subject class.
2. Our mentor works with each teacher to identify math gaps and needs of the class overall and individual students,, according to our curriculum.	Started in Fall 2012, and ongoing.	Done; math gaps identified especially in Grade 4 and Grade 5.
3. Find math specialist to support main lesson teachers.	November 2012	HOT teacher hired who passed AEPA for middle school math.
4. Math specialist to pilot math intervention for support of all grades students.	Early Spring 2013	Mrs. Colley administered CAMS for pre-assessment, and began STAMS for math instruction.
5. Administrative and pedagogical review of pilot intervention.	Late Spring 2013	The team decided that although CAMS/STAMS is scientifically-based research, the instructional materials and rubric is not conducive to our pedagogy. Also Mrs. Colley left. We are actively searching for a SBR math assessment for pre-test, instruction, and post-test.
6. Administrative and pedagogical needs assessment for FY14.	Late Spring 2013	The team will consider math intervention for Tier II and III, and assess extent of programming when AIMS results are received. Key Math has been purchased as a resource.

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Item: 2. Proficiency – 2b. Composite school comparison – Math – falls far below

To increase math proficiency, Desert Sky has piloted a math intervention. With AIMS Math scores available in June, the team will revisit the needs assessment for math support, whether broad-based or more individualized. Curriculum mapping work over the summer, considering Common Core, will be presented at beginning-of-the-year in-service with faculty, to foster consistency and depth in math instruction. [See previous item also].

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Item: 2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup ELL – no rating

Desert Sky is ready to support students designated as English Language Learners (ELL), however we have no such designated students at this time.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup FRL – Math – does not meet

The Desert Sky student population is 69% free and reduced lunch eligible. Please see all previous items.

[CONTINUE HERE]

Transient families, inconsistent educational background, diagnosed and undiagnosed learning needs.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 2. Proficiency – 2c. Subgroup SPED – Math – does not meet

From appendix A=

Plan addresses all students; add'l support for SPED – math specialist sped teacher?
This is one students? Speech students? ? See 2b

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 3. Stated Accountability & Overall Rating – 3a. State Accountability – falls far below

From appendix A=

From Appendix D =
* A sustained improvement plan that includes evidence of increasing student growth and proficiency not discussed in a previous measure.
* A sustained improvement plan to meet targets as described in the appropriate A-F letter grade model don't discussed in a previous measure.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUFFICIENT PROGRESS
Item: 3. Stated Accountability & Overall Rating – overall rating – does not meet

Desert Sky's overall rating is 52.5 out of 100.

"A school with an overall rating that does not meet the Board's academic performance expectation may demonstrate sufficient progress … by documenting success of an implemented improvement plan aligned with the academic framework."

From appendix A=