New Visions Academy

Report to the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools
August 2013

Demonstration of Sufficient Progress

Curriculum

Transition to the Common Core Standards
All of the teachers of New Visions Academy participated in the development of the curriculum maps, which include the Arizona Academic Standards, pacing guides, student outcomes, resources and assessments for the core subject areas. These maps are available for review.
In addition to the completion of the curriculum maps, the staff has been working toward implementation of the Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics for the past two years. This year, teachers are preparing lesson plans for the first semester of the current year that incorporate strategies from the Common Core emphasizing increased rigor, academic vocabulary, the inclusion of informational text, and integrated instruction. They are focusing instruction more on depth and quality rather than coverage and quantity.

Instruction

Staff Reports
The Cottonwood staff meets twice weekly to discuss all school issues. Included in these discussions is the progression of standards-based instruction in all core areas. All New Visions teachers have a high regard for teaching the full scope of knowledge embodied in the standards which provide the organizational foundation for the subjects taught. It is clear to them that, in principle, teaching through the standards will lead to success on the AIMS assessments. The efforts of the teachers are invariably about helping students attain success and overcome impediments including the personal and social as well as academic. Staff meetings provide a continuing forum for discussion regarding how to best address the needs of our students.

The Cottonwood teachers all participate in the review and analysis of AIMS results, and the teachers of both sites review and discuss the data produced by both AIMS and AYP in an effort to identify areas for improvement and plan strategies to address them.

Observations
The director is continuously monitoring the content of what is being taught in the classrooms at the Cottonwood site through informal walk-through observations. This past year, more formal observations were instituted for both sites in which teachers were asked to prepare lesson

plans, which identify both the Arizona Academic Standards and the Common Core Standards that the lesson will address. These were submitted to the director prior to the scheduled observation for review. The formal observations will become a key element of the two evaluations that will be completed for each teacher this year.

Core Curriculum
It should be noted that the New Visions schools are largely devoted to an academic course of study. The expectation for all students is that they will attain the minimum number of credits and meet all of the course requirements prescribed by the Arizona State Board of Education in order to graduate. Our efforts are to prepare students to attend community college if they choose to do so.

Credit Recovery
Most of the students who enroll in our schools are missing required credits. They have either failed classes or were never enrolled in classes that are required for graduation. The schools make credit recovery possible through a variety of means, but are primarily using A+ or ALS computer curriculum which allows students to accelerate their progress through required courses and have the opportunity to get caught up.

In addition, because math is a continuing concern for our students, the math teachers at the Cottonwood site have made more structured algebra and geometry credit recovery sessions during the 5th period after lunch available so that students who did not pass those classes can complete the work and earn the grade and credit while they are progressing through the next levels of math in their regular math classes.

Friday Schedule
In accordance with our Title I Continuous Improvement Plan, the class schedule on Friday has been modified to address the needs of students who are preparing to take or who have taken but not yet passed sections of the AIMS. Teachers are using alternative curriculum sources to help students master the skills tested by AIMS. The math teachers and English teachers are conducting skills remediation classes for those students. In addition, all teachers are assisting students in general tutorial sessions, credit recovery, and advisory.

Assessment

AIMS
The data comparisons for the LEA are drawn from Fall and Spring AIMS results due to the fact that these are the most direct assessment results available and the ones that carry the most weight with teachers, students, and those monitoring school progress. AIMS results are also the clearest school-to-school comparisons of student achievement that we currently have. The guidelines that we are using look for improvement rather than only looking at meeting the point of proficiency.

In order to be included in our analysis, students have to have been enrolled from one testing session to the next. Students who have just enrolled, but pass are not counted. Students who retest and attain a score in the "exceeds" range are also not counted.

The guidelines employed for the evaluation of the AIMS data will accompany the analyses for both schools for the following testing sessions:

- Fall '11 to Spring '12
- Spring '12 to Fall '12
- Fall '12 to Spring '13

Laurus Math
This past year, the Cottonwood site obtained a license to pilot Laurus Math as a means of addressing the skills deficiencies of students and preparing quarterly benchmark assessments. This program offers problem sets derived directly from the Arizona Academic Standards and, while it cannot be employed to replace classroom instruction, it is an excellent supplemental resource for students who need to review and build skills.

Classroom
The teachers have designed curriculum that provides for assessment in each of the subject areas. This is the traditional and familiar process that schools have employed perennially. Assessments in the classroom involve bellwork, daily work, quizzes, tests, written responses, essays, and research projects. The staff is currently making decisions about the specific classroom data that should be compiled as we look at the data component for evaluations. The schools are also planning to undergo training to track grades and progress within Schoolmaster so that we have greater coherence with the STC system.

Professional Development

Yavapai County Educational Service Agency
The staff of the Cottonwood site is receiving professional development training through the YCESA for Common Core curriculum development. The following table outlines our plan for the first half of the current school year. Additional trainings will be scheduled as they are made available by the YCESA.

TEACHING POSITION	TRAINING COMPLETED	TRAINING TO BE SCHEDULED	DATE OF NEXT TRAINING
Math	Phase 1 and EQuIP Phase 2	Math- Creating Formative and Summative Assessments	11-21-13
Math	Phase 1	Phase 2 EQuIP	11-22-13
English	Phase 1	ELA Phase 2 EQuIP	11-20-13
Social Studies		ELA Phase 2 EQuIP	12-4-13
Director	ELA Phase 1 and EQuIP Phase 2	Leadership- 2 days	11-21-13 and 11-22-13

Curriculum Consultant Debbie Petersen
In additional to the YCESA, the staff is continuing to work with curriculum consultant Debbie Petersen. Two days of training were completed July 30th and 31st and the next scheduled day of training for all teaching staff from both sites is October 14th. Ms. Petersen has guided the staff through the curriculum mapping process since 2008 and has been assisting in the transition to the Common Core Standards for the past two years. Our long-range plan is to restructure our curriculum maps based on the Common Core Standards. In the July training session, the teachers were given new resources that have become available recently and have been produced by respected sources to guide them in the process of implementing the Common Core. The teachers of both sites were given the opportunity to work together to plan lessons for the new semester. The progress of implementation will be reviewed in October and preparation for the second semester will commence.

Accountability

Classroom Observations
This past year, instruments were developed and utilized to observe the relative effectiveness of the classroom teachers. The data component for evaluations is still being developed at the school level.
Of the four teachers observed at the Cottonwood site, two teachers were judged to be highly effective, one was effective, and one new teacher was developing.
Of the two teachers at the St. Johns site, both were judged to be in the developing range. They have since received additional training in the expectations for observations.

Evaluations
The instruments for evaluation are complete at this time. The director needs assistance in deriving the data to be used and the weighting of the data for alternative schools. The plan is to use the teacher and principal evaluation frameworks developed by Yavapai County, but with adjusted weights. Some training has been completed, but practice in the formal use of the instrument is needed. Assistance has been requested from Dr. Nancy Alexander who conducted the initial training and has offered help with the implementation.

Student-Teacher Course Connection
This past year, both sites were successful in completing the submissions for the Student-Teacher Course Connection. As we begin this new school year, we are refining the course submissions and providing training for the two staff members who submit this information through Schoolmaster on behalf of the schools. This system adds another layer of accountability since it provides a fairly complete picture of the teachers, the students, and the levels of achievement.

Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP)
Career planning for all grades, 9-12, is included as part of the academic advisory in which students are given the consistent message that they need to graduate from high school and set

goals for the next steps following graduation. Students who follow the course of study provided by New Visions are prepared to fit comfortably into the courses offered by Yavapai College and this is the path that the staff usually urges students to follow. The ECAP plan and documents submitted to ADE this past year were approved.

Academic Persistence

Electives
The electives that we offer provide students with an incentive to continue in school. They appeal to their interests and encourage them endure the academics to get to the "fun stuff" at the end of the day. At present, the Cottonwood site offers drawing and painting, guitar, creative writing, computer applications, and criminology.

Character/Life Skills
All ninth grade students at the Cottonwood site are required to participate in the Character/Life Skills class which is geared toward helping them understand many issues that face them, the primary one being the need to graduate from high school.

Advisory
All students at the Cottonwood site are assigned an academic advisory from the teaching staff with whom they meet every third week to plan in the following areas:

- Academic Planning- Transcripts are reviewed and analyzed in order to help students gain a clear picture of what they need to do to complete the requirements for graduation.
- Career Planning- Students are asked to identify career goals based on their interests and record pertinent information about the careers they investigate.
- Personal Concerns- Students are encouraged to discuss with their advisors how they feel they are progressing and identify any obstacles to achieving their academic goals.
- Portfolio- Seniors are required to complete a more extensive career exploration as part of their final portfolio in order to be prepared to transition to post-secondary life.
- Community Service- As part of the portfolio, students are required to complete a 20-hour community service project as a means of increasing awareness of the needs of the community, developing a work ethic, and making beneficial community connections.

The purpose is to give students clear direction, personal attention, and academic encouragement.

The Peace Project
In addition the standard curriculum, this year the school is initiating a new website called "The Peace Project". Students will be asked to explore various topics and themes relating to peace in an effort to disseminate well-developed quarterly research projects promoting peace in the world. These projects will encompass all of the core subject areas and will incorporate the

common core and technology literacy standards as students investigate issues, evaluate sources, analyze data, write about their findings, and create complete presentations. The underlying idea is to transform the culture on a microscale, the school, and make a positive impact on the macroscale, the world. The hope is that, by investigating the imperative for peace, students discover the integrity to be the ambassadors for peace in their own right.

SUMMARY

Obstacles to AYP

Graduation Rate

The schools of New Visions Academy exist to serve the students in our communities who have struggled with academic success in other schools but continue to strive toward the goal of graduation. At the high school level, it is unrealistic to expect that our schools can overcome multiple years of deficits in knowledge and skills in a single school year. It takes time and dedication to bring students up to the level of their peers when they have suffered personal reverses that have prevented them from earning the grades and credits required to graduate. Nonetheless, it is an issue of integrity that our schools provide those students the opportunity to attain academic goals while holding them to an unwavering standard of achievement.

Only those students who stay with us long enough to complete the 22 credits now required for graduation and pass all of the AIMS tests are awarded a diploma. This seriously impacts our graduation rate which is the single consistent factor preventing us from meeting the criteria for Adequate Yearly Progress. Yet we do not believe that we can, in good conscience, turn away students who are too credit deficient to graduate with their cohorts but still need the chance to finish high school. To illustrate the point, the Class of 2013 at the Cottonwood site consisted of four students; three of these were 5th and 6th year seniors who are intelligent and talented individuals with inspiring stories of overcoming adversity to accomplish their goals. These entirely worthy young people needed our help and we take pride in having been here to give it to them. If graduation rates in the near future are calculated to include students like these, our schools will have a much better chance of making AYP.

Mathematics

The majority of students who enroll with credit deficiencies have been struggling with math for years. They often lack the basic skills that beginning middle schoolers are expected to be proficient in, but have continued through the grades to reach high school without the requisite skills to approach algebra, let alone master it. It is quite common for students to not yet know multiplication facts making algebra problems incomprehensible and altogether unsolvable. Our schools begin working with these students at their individual skill levels building on what they know and helping them to attain proficiency. It tends to be a long, slow process, but we don't give up as long as they don't. In the long run, we do a very good job of making math accessible to students who have lost confidence that they could ever understand it as evidenced by the number of students who do eventually pass the math AIMS.

Small Schools

The two remaining New Visions schools have a combined enrollment of less than 100 students. This fact renders statistical analysis of our data only marginally meaningful. We are small enough that it is more relevant and informative to consider data on a student-by-student basis. We also have a relatively high turn-over rate among our students making it more difficult to find that small group of students who have had the chance to benefit from continuous instruction for the majority of the school year. We do not actively recruit students for the 9th grade; they gradually filter in as the year progresses. We often have 11th and 12th graders who begin the year but do not complete it due to life choices that we have no control over. For instance, of the 15 Cottonwood seniors currently enrolled, only two students have been with us since 9th grade when they transferred from other high schools and only one has been continuously enrolled. On the other hand, only two seniors are completely new to us this year indicating that we have a large proportion of returning students who have been with us for more than a year which encourages us to believe that we are doing something right, but that is a statistical consideration for a later date. It is our smallness that creates the greatest resistance to valid statistical analysis coupled with the population of students we serve.

This fact is evident each time the staff sits to review the AYP data and they have now seen the Academic Performance Ratings for FY12 so that they can be shown by yet another standard that they appear to not be doing their jobs. Our schools are being held accountable for the failures of the previous schools our students have attended and the idea that we are not able to reverse those failures in a matter of months should not come as a surprise to anyone. The point is that we try. We are strongly committed to improving on every level for the sake of our students, but the numerical point ratings of “59.375” and “50” do not mean much to us when we know that they are based on sparse evidence that is not an accurate reflection of what we do.

The positive qualities of our schools cannot be measured and understood statistically. Our importance to our communities is that we are often the last and best chance that students have to graduate. The term “at-risk” takes on a whole new level of urgency at the high school level when students live in a state where they are free to drop out at the age of 16. Many students who enroll at the 11th and 12th grade levels are looking for a short-term solution to a long-term problem. But there is no “drive-through” education; it is a process and only those students who are willing participants can succeed. We do our best to help them all, but we are struggling against some powerful negative forces.

It is because we care for our students and the quality of their lives now and in the future that we succeed to the degree that we do. We are continuing to work to improve our schools in spite of economic reverses that have caused families to leave our areas which in turn has put a strain on our enrollments and our budgets. We continue because we know that what we do matters. We know that it is on a small scale, but our students deserve an education and are worth whatever effort it takes to help them attain it. All students who attend our schools receive some benefit, but, for those who stay with us to the end, we work wonders.