Center for Academic Success High School #4

Performance Management Plan Narrative

The Center for Academic Success Middle School (CAS) is located in Douglas, Arizona, approximately three miles from the Mexican border crossing at Agua Prieta, Mexico. The student population of CAS averages between 100 and 135 students. Approximately 99% of the student body in any given cohort is Hispanic and the number of students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program averages just under 96%. Most of our students are first generation Mexican-American and come from families where no English is spoken in the home. There are two relatively large district middle schools in Douglas that serve students in Douglas as well as some of the smaller surrounding communities. These district middle schools are consistently labeled as underperforming, failing to meet academic standards, and failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind. As CAS has outperformed these district middle schools consistently over the past five years, many parents desire to enroll their children in our school. Unlike the district schools, CAS offers very limited extracurricular activities for its students, focusing instead on improving basic academic skills. CAS does not offer extracurricular programs in music, art, theatre, or interscholastic sports, for example. Students who wish to participate in these activities do not generally enroll in CAS. The overriding reason students choose to attend CAS is the fact that they view Douglas' large district middle schools as being ineffectual and impersonal. Many parents choose CAS for their students because of the safe and secure environment conducive to learning CAS provides, where drugs and gang activity are simply not tolerated and all staff members provide a hands-on approach to every aspect of the

learning environment. Constant and meaningful communication between parents and CAS instructional staff is a critical part of our mission. CAS also provides students with intensive and individualized instruction, including remedial instruction in English acquisition and basic reading and computation skills.

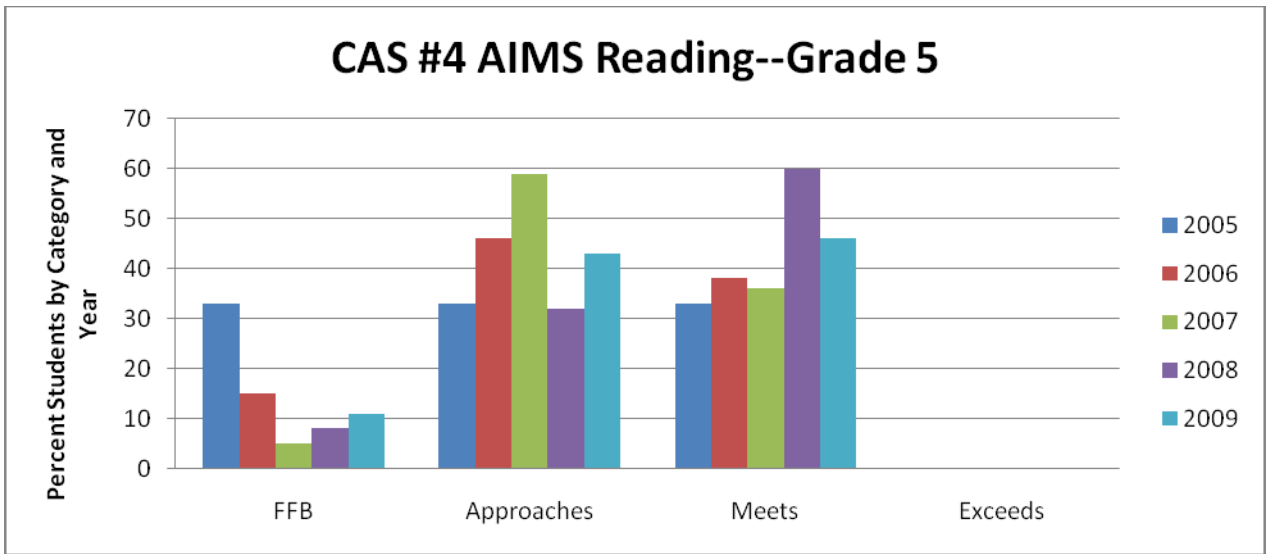
Nevertheless, there are still certain consistent characteristics that exist among our student body that result from the fact that Douglas is a border town with a high incidence of poverty, criminal and drug activity, unemployment, and illiteracy. A majority of our students are considered at-risk, including students who speak little or no English, are homeless, juvenile offenders, pregnant teens, students with disabilities, extremely low-income students, and students who are significantly behind their peers academically. Obviously, the proportions vary from year to year; however, students in these categories are desirous of attending CAS because of our unique approach to educating at-risk and especially English Language Learner students.

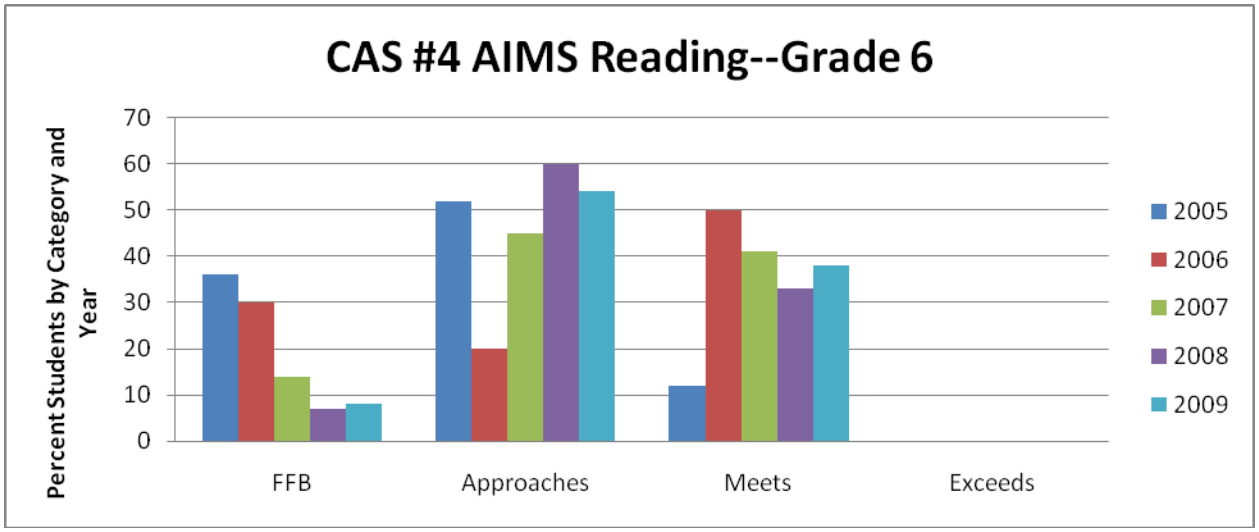
Students from the categories previously enumerated frequently exhibit common qualities, attributes, and conditions associated with poor performance in high school. Many are middle school children who have not mastered early literacy skills or who have not attended school outside of Mexico; many exhibit high rates of absenteeism; there is often a high level of transience; many have a sense of academic futility. While there are certainly many other factors present, these are some of the more predominant reasons that account for our past academic performance. Our data reveal that during many of the last five years, a disproportionately high number of these at-risk students enrolled at CAS. Because of an extremely small “N,” academic performance for the total group can drop precipitously.

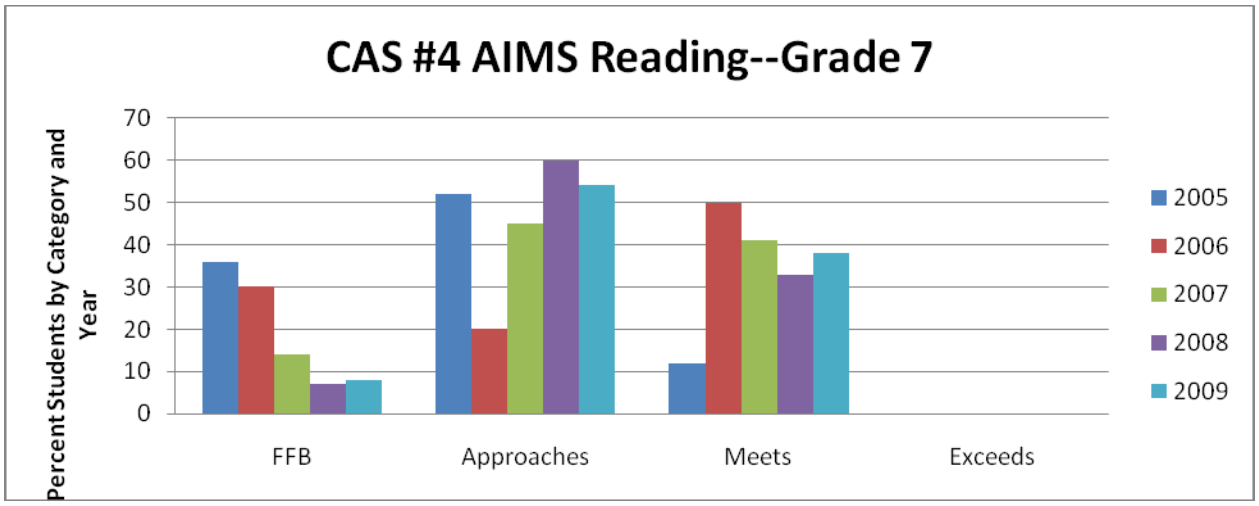
CAS has conducted an extensive review of all relevant student achievement data, including state-mandated criterion reference-based assessments as well as norm-referenced

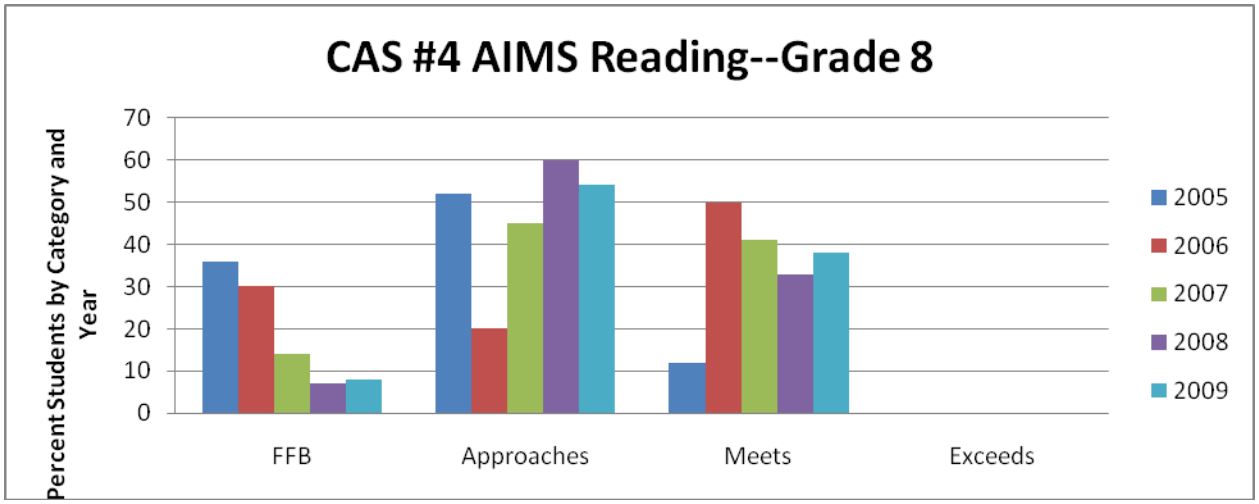
assessments, district-level criterion-based assessments, and curriculum-based assessments. Although CAS is considered an extremely small school with data drawn from group sizes that are not large enough to produce reliable samples, we have attempted to identify trends in the data and provide explanations for the past five years of academic performance in the critical academic areas of reading and mathematics. As a starting point, we can consider CAS' achievement profiles under the state accountability system created by AZLEARNS. CAS has received a label of "Underperforming" only once in the past five years. It is important to remember that many of these students come to CAS with limited or no English skills and in many cases are not literate in their native language.

Our academic achievement results, as reflected by Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), indicate moderate but consistent growth over time. The following charts show that reading continues to be an area of concern, especially for our English Language Learners. The charts track percentage of students who meet or exceed on AIMS Reading by grade level for the past five years. While the small sample size makes it difficult to establish clear trends in the data, a more in-depth analysis of the data reveals that most students are improving across time. We anticipate that this improvement will continue as our efforts to implement the required English Language Development Models over the past two years begin to show real success in terms of student achievement.


CAS #4 AIMS Reading--Grade 5
Percent Students by Category and Year
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
FFB
Approaches
Meets
Exceeds
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009

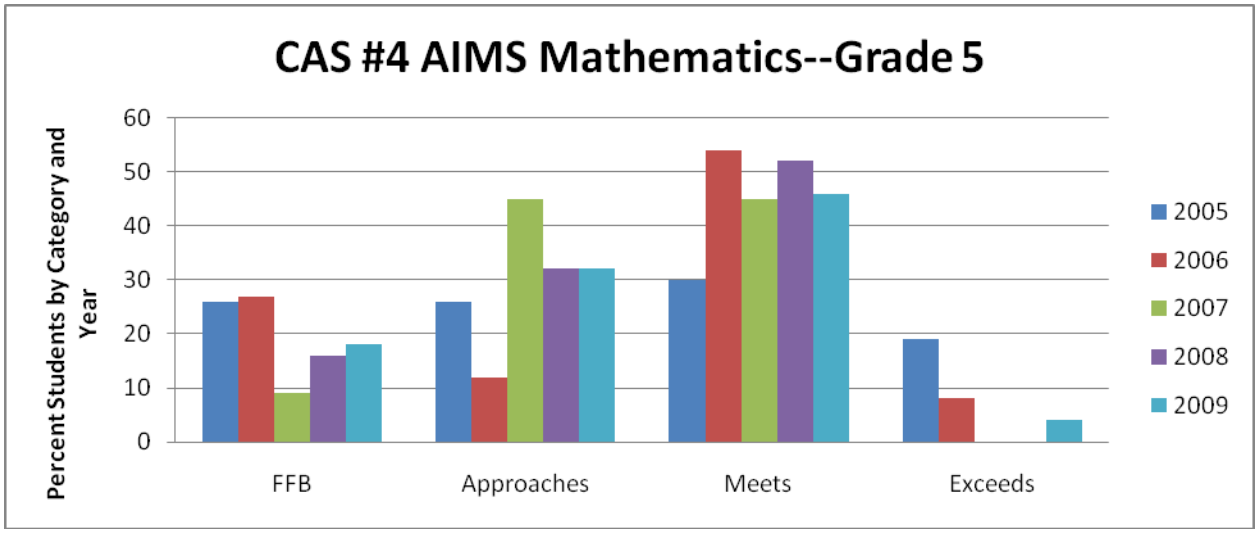

CAS #4 AIMS Reading--Grade 6
Percent Students by Category and Year
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
FFB
Approaches
Meets
Exceeds
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009

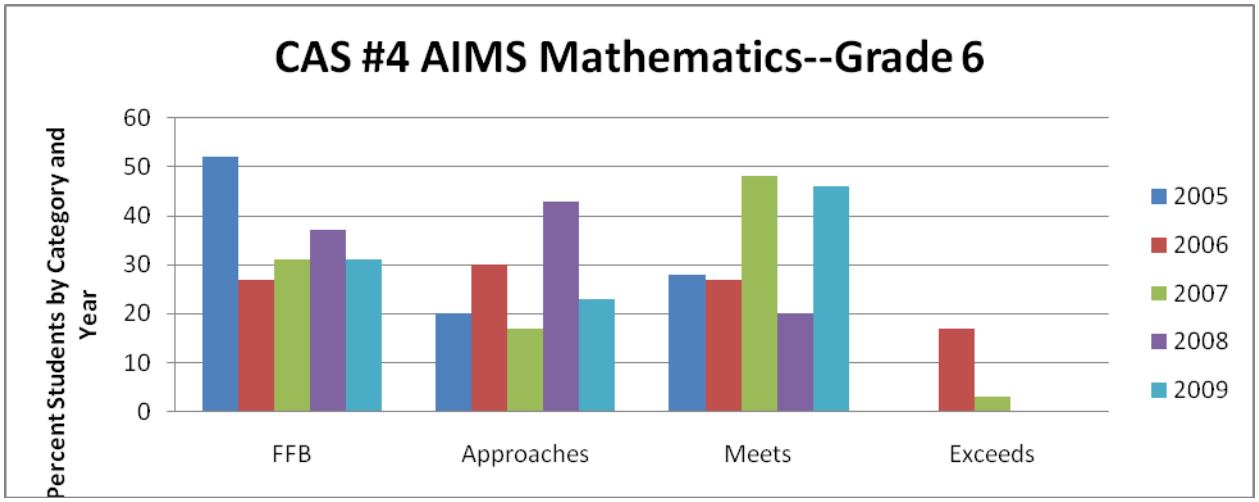


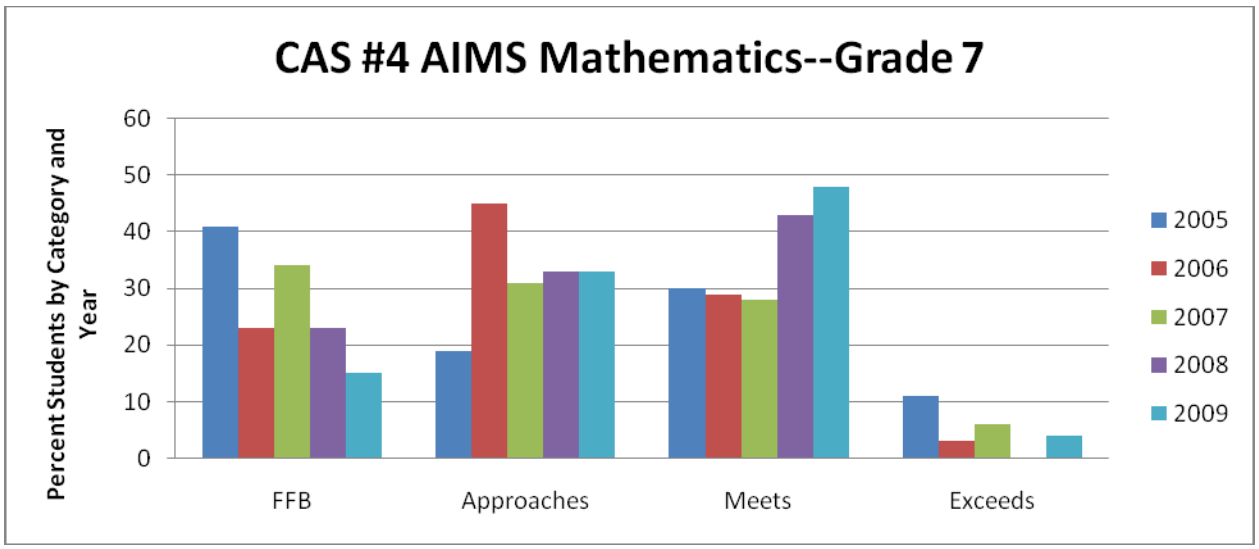


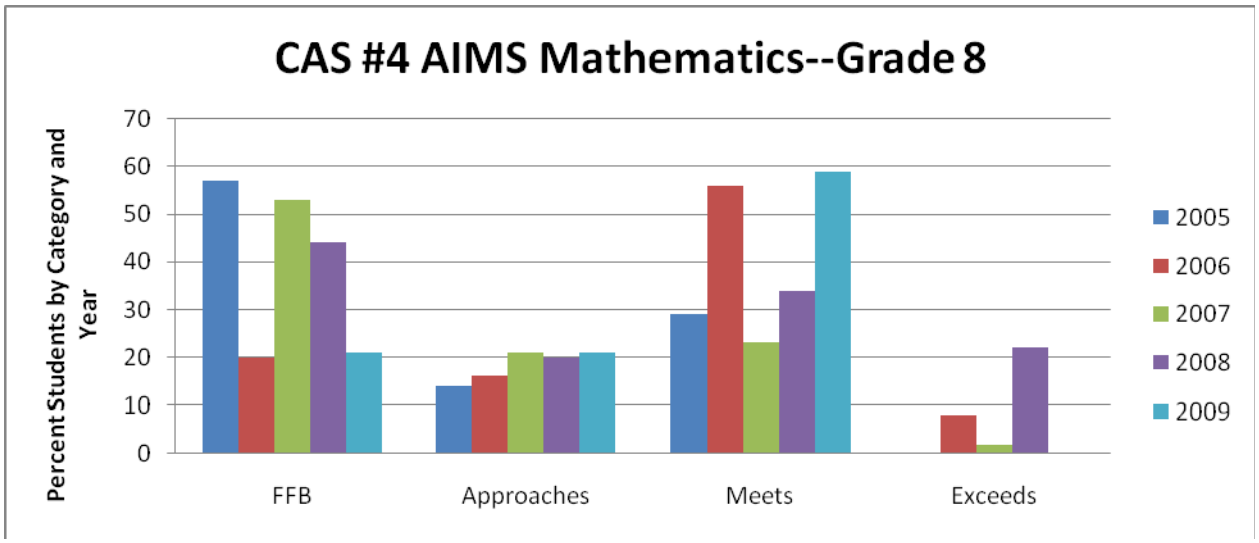
As noted above, these data reflect the fact that a high percentage of students enroll in our school without having mastered basic English literacy and computational skills. The data indicate what is borne out by research: Students who enter middle school lacking grade-level basic skills require extensive remediation under the best conditions, and at-risk students often do not often pursue their academic careers under ideal circumstances.

Again, it is important to note that our student population is both extremely small and transient, so academic growth as demonstrated by aggregate groups of students can be misleading. However, the data suggest that CAS is consistently increasing the academic achievement of students from the performance level at which they enroll in our school. This is especially true in the area of mathematics. At every grade level, a significantly higher percentage of students are scoring in the meets or exceeds category on AIMS Mathematics. We expect this trend to continue, as we have implemented a number of strategies designed to make our instruction in mathematics—indeed in all basic skills areas—more effective.









Although the majority of our students do require extensive remediation in English literacy as well as basic academic skills, we do not offer this as either an excuse for below average academic achievement nor as a pretext for failing to increase the academic achievement of all of our students. We are required to enroll all students as long as programs are not full, and we do not turn students away because of their at-risk status or low academic proficiency. Consequently, the solution is to use scientific research-based strategies sufficiently to compensate for and mitigate the deficiencies of lower achievers. It is obvious from the research

that schools do not achieve high performance by doing one or two things differently; therefore, the changes must be systemic. Following are ten (10) factors that are consistently identified with school improvement. These factors have been divided into two categories—1) Correlates and 2) Procedures:

Correlates

- A culture of high expectations and caring for students
- A safe and disciplined environment conducive to learning
- A principal who is a strong instructional leader
- A strong academic focus with committed, and able teachers
- A curriculum focused on academic achievement that emphasizes basic skills in mathematics and literacy

Procedures

- Increased instructional time
- Ongoing, diagnostic assessment
- Parents as partners in learning
- Professional development to improve student achievement
- Professional learning communities with collaboration among teachers and staff

Our performance management plan will target deficiencies in the academic content areas of reading and mathematics. Additionally, we will continue to implement and improve strategies designed to increase the English proficiency skills of English Language Learners. Implementing the correlates and procedures noted above, CAS' performance management plan will incorporate a number of strategies that are designed to increase student achievement in the critical areas of reading and mathematics.

We are just beginning the process of evaluating our student achievement data utilizing the growth percentile model out of Colorado promoted by the Arizona Charter Schools Association and currently under consideration by the Arizona Department of Education as a

replacement for the current achievement profile model in AZLEARNS. Although the growth model data are supposed to be available under the ADE Common Logon, currently no data are available for any of the schools within our charter. Several of our instructional leadership staff have been trained in the proper use and analysis of student growth percentile data and we hope to be able to incorporate the use of this data analysis model very soon.