Center for Academic Success High School #2

Performance Management Plan Narrative

The Center for Academic Success High School #2 (CAS) is located in Douglas, Arizona, approximately one mile from the Mexican border crossing at Agua Prieta, Mexico. Most of our students are first generation Mexican-American and come from families where no English is spoken in the home. There is also a larger district high school in Douglas with a population averaging around 1300 students that serves students in Douglas as well as some of the smaller surrounding communities. 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 97%. Unlike the district school, 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 high school as being overcrowded and impersonal. Many students who choose CAS do so because of the intensive and individualized instruction that CAS provides, including remedial instruction and credit recovery. Accordingly, there are certain consistent characteristics that exist among its student body in any cohort class: 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

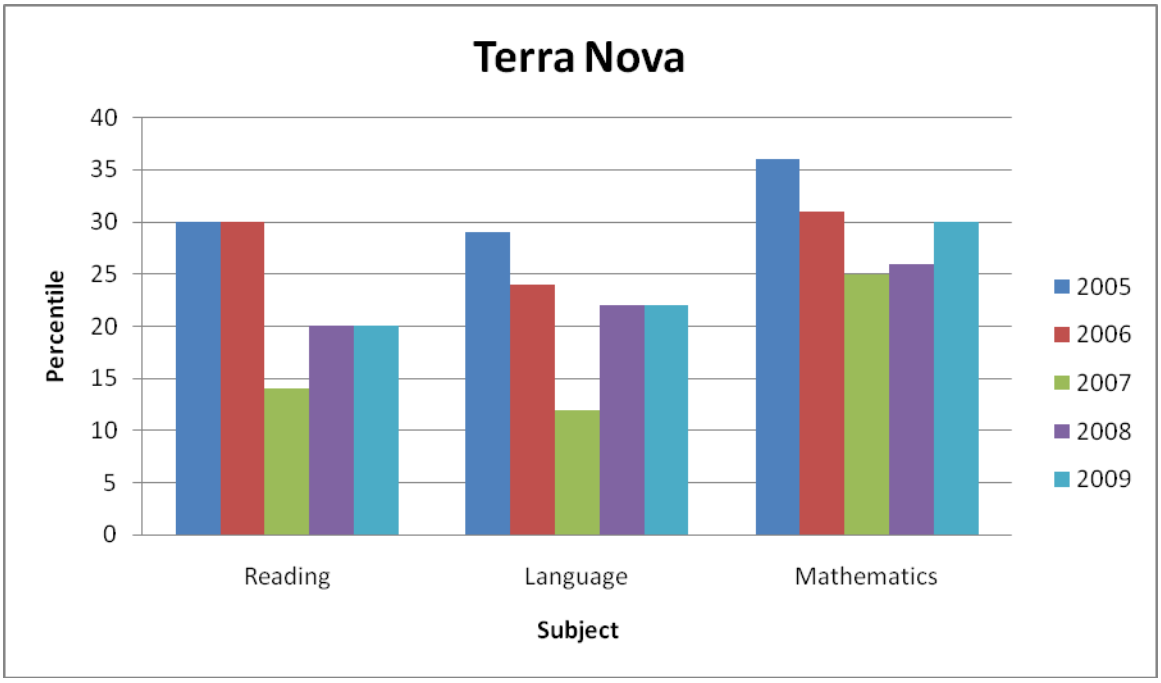
behind their peers both academically and in terms of progress toward graduation. Obviously, the proportions vary from year to year; however, students in these categories are desirous of attending CAS because of our unique approach to educating at-risk and especially English Language Learner students.

Students from the categories previously enumerated frequently exhibit common qualities, attributes, and conditions associated with poor performance in high school. Many are children who exited middle school without having 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 been designated an Alternative School by the Arizona Department of Education, because officially its primary mission is to serve at risk students and it is therefore held to slightly different standards

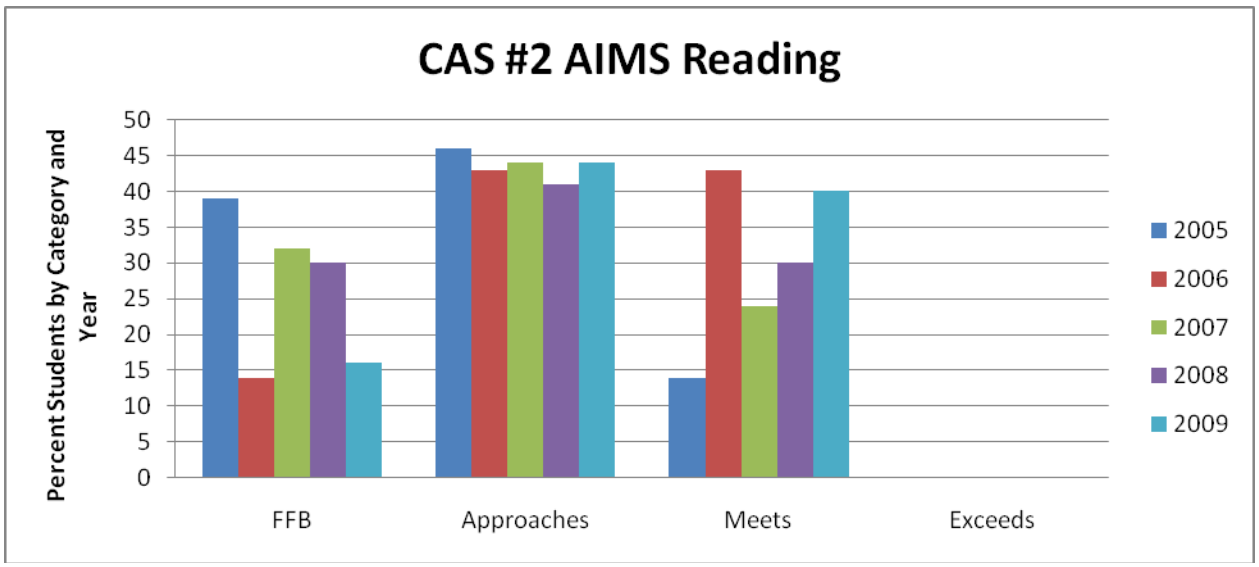
in the accountability system. As such, CAS has consistently received a label of "Performing" for the past five years.

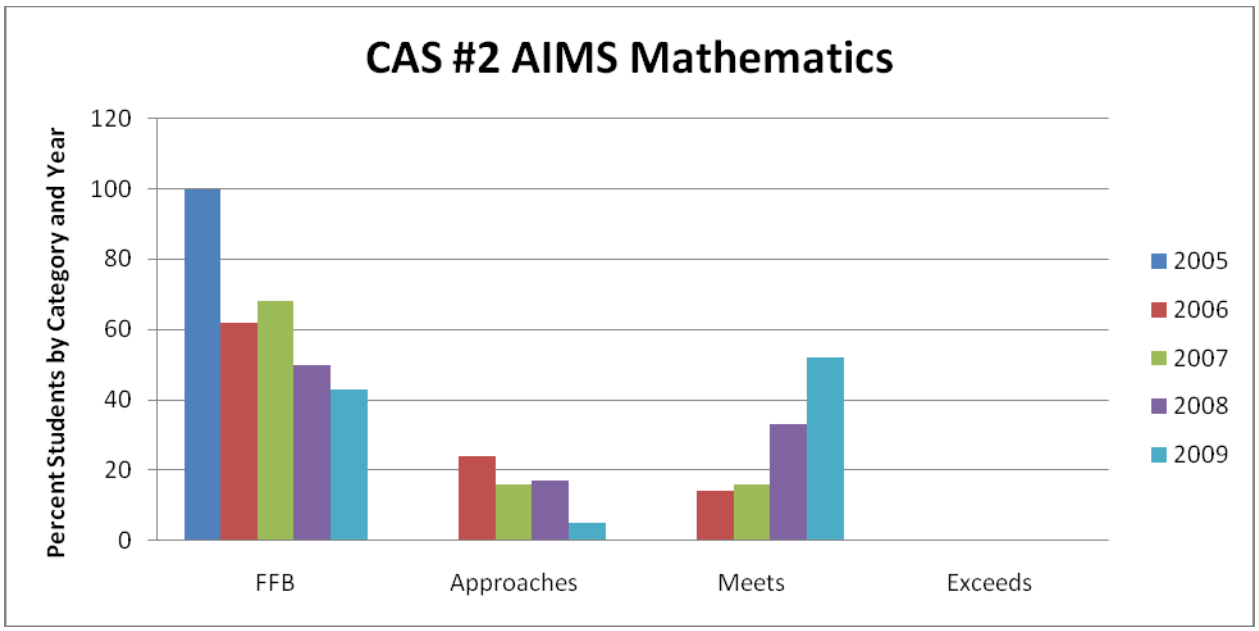
A review of the data drawn from the state-mandated norm-referenced test provides an important insight into the deficiencies in academic proficiency of first year freshmen who enter CAS. It is important to remember that many of these students come to CAS with limited or no English skills and in many cases are not literate in their native language.



As the data in the above chart indicate, the average of the scores of incoming freshmen fall far below the national average in all content areas. 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 high 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.

Our academic achievement results, as reflected by Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), indicate moderate but consistent growth for each cohort of freshmen students as shown above. 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. Moreover, it is clear that we continue to make consistent progress over time: the percentage of students falling far below the standard is decreasing and the percentage of students meeting the standing is increasing. This is especially true in the area of mathematics, where effective teaching strategies, intensive and individualized instruction, and high expectations have brought us from a low of 100% falling far below the standard in 2005 to more than 50% meeting the standard in 2009.





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.