



COLORADO
Department of Education

School and District Performance
201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

November 30, 2015

Dear Superintendent Munn,

This fall, Aurora Central High School (ACHS) entered its third year of implementing the Tiered Intervention Grant (TIG), which initiated in the summer of 2013. The TIG is a Federal grant intended to catalyze and sustain significant transformation in turnaround schools. This letter will complement the letter and report provided by CDE's Office of Federal Programs regarding the November 2015 monitoring visit. Earlier this year, the Commissioner of Education recommended that Aurora Public Schools pursue Innovation status for ACHS. Given that ACHS is currently in the process of designing and writing an Innovation plan, I would like to connect the feedback about the TIG work with what we know to be impactful in Innovation planning. Thus, this letter will articulate current concerns and recommendations that should be addressed in the TIG work and in the Innovation plan and which we would expect to see described in the school's Unified Improvement Plan.

The following sections describe key areas expected to be addressed in all TIG schools - they are articulated within the TIG Transformation model selected by ACHS.

School Culture and Parent/Community Engagement

- During the first two years of TIG implementation, ACHS focused heavily on establishing a safer, more positive school culture and on implementing a consistent system of instruction across classrooms. For the 2015-2016 year, the TIG plan is focused on sustaining the investments in school culture and professional development.
- Data presented by ACHS in fall 2015 shows an increase in student daily attendance to 93% compared to 84% at this time last year. Over the past two years of TIG, there has not been a significant decline in the percentage of chronically absent students.
- Student interviews report that classroom culture is inconsistent between classrooms and not all students believe the school has high expectations for achievement.
- Over the past two years, there has been an increase in the number of students participating in sports and activities.

Talent Management

- The district and school have not yet implemented a system of teacher recruitment that attracts highly effective teachers to the school; at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year there existed a number of vacancies in essential, core subject area teaching positions.
- The district and school have not yet implemented a system of teacher retention and incentives at ACHS that recognizes top-performing teachers based on student achievement data.
- The district and school have not implemented a compensation system that recognizes the talents and skills necessary to teach at ACHS and that rewards teachers based on commitment and performance. These actions, as well as the actions listed above, are requirements of the TIG



Transformation model. The school's original TIG plan included strategies to reward teachers and administrators for additional time and for improving the plan type of the school; however, it is not apparent that teachers received these incentives.

- The new ACHS leadership team is implementing a system of teacher feedback and professional development; this system is not yet in place for all teachers.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Instruction between classrooms varies significantly. Instruction across classrooms is not consistently rigorous nor is it consistently aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards.
- There is not a consistent system of data-driven instruction in place across all grade-levels and content areas.
- Despite a significant investment in professional development through the TIG grant, not all teachers are implementing the practices promoted through the professional development content, resulting in inconsistent implementation and effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities.

Expanded Use of Time

- Expanded use of time is a requirement of the TIG grants; despite this requirement, ACHS made minimal changes to their daily schedule and calendar that better support students' academic needs. The expanded time that has been implemented focused on remediation and summer school for students who struggle. Further changes to the use of time will be necessary to increase student achievement, particularly for underperforming students.
- Currently, ACHS does not have the autonomy to adjust their school day or school calendar to meet the academic goals of the school.

Summary

As ACHS and Aurora Public Schools continue the TIG work and to develop the school's Innovation plan, it will be essential that the plan pay specific attention to the systems and structures necessary to redesign ACHS to meet the needs of students and to reach bold academic goals. It is our recommendation that you, along with your staff, pursue the following in the TIG work and Innovation planning:

- The district and school should pursue and secure formal autonomies around talent management, including:
 - Intentional and preferential teacher recruitment and hiring processes and timelines for ACHS;
 - Systems for teacher retention and incentivizing improved student performance; and
 - Other needed flexibilities in ACHS staffing to allow for quick and actionable staffing decisions to ensure the students engage with the most-effective instructional staff at all times.
- The district and school should pursue and secure greater flexibility in use of time to allow for:
 - School leadership to adapt daily, weekly, and annual schedules to ensure expanded and better-designed time to meet student needs;
 - Teachers to have greater flexibility to engage in common planning, data analysis, and professional learning relevant to specific student needs; and
 - School leadership to direct strategic teacher planning and professional learning time at the school site.
- The district should ensure that the school principal and his staff are fully empowered to make decisions and take necessary actions needed to implement the Innovation plan and the required activities in the TIG plan.



In order for CDE to support an Innovation plan for ACHS, the plan must build on and go further than the TIG plan and address these specific structures in order to ensure that teachers and other staff are able to effectively implement the interventions necessary to improve student attendance, engagement, and achievement. Given the context of the State accountability rating and timeline, the district and school should take decisive and bold actions to ensure that ACHS rapidly and systematically improve to meet the needs of every student.

Please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or for clarification about the recommendations in this letter. We look forward to continuing to develop a coordinated effort of improvement with the school and district leaders.

Sincerely



Peter Sherman

Executive Director
School and District Performance

